

PATRIARCHAL DIVINE LITURGY IN ALEXANDRIA

25th November 2023, feast of the Great Martyr St Catherine, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the Divine liturgy at the Holy Patriarchal Church of St Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria, where the marble column on which the Saint was beheaded is kept, concelebrated by Their Eminences George of Guinea, His Beatitude's Representative in Athens, Nicholas of Ermopolis, Nicodemus of Memphis, Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, Panteleimon of Naucratis, Chief secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod, Narcissus of Pelusium, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria, Germanos of Tamiathus, Head of the Holy Monastery of St Savvas, as well as Their Graces the Bishops Chrysostomos of Bukoba and Western Tanzania and Nicodemus of Nitria, Patriarchal Exarch in Cyprus.

At the Eucharistic Gathering the divine homily was preached by the Very Reverend Archimandrite Joachim Moukanos, Preacher of the Holy Metropolis of Xanthe and Peritheorio, as follows: *"The glorious and divine city of the Alexandrenes, celebrates on your commemoration, O modest one" (Kathisma of the feast 25 November).*

My beloved brothers and sisters gathered in this most venerable church, the illuminated memory of our fellow citizen Saint Catherine the Great Martyr, the Omniscient and Patron Saint of Sinai, led the steps of all of us to the sacred palladium of the centuries-old church of Saint Savvas, where it has hosted for centuries, as a most precious relic the column on which the saint offered her pure and virgin blood for the love of Christ!

Today is a great day for the Church of St Mark and the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria and all of Africa, the blessed offspring of which was the theosophist, "who gave your body to manifold sufferings, for the love of your Creator, and was not overcome, as an invincible anvil" .

The holy Synaxaristis notes with emphasis: "Aikaterina, both wise and virgin, of sword and Martyr; oh great three!"

Tonight's celebration places before us a multitude of important questions for our spiritual path, such as how we utilize the gifts and talents entrusted to us by the love of God, what soulful desires do we cultivate in the depths of our being, what is our true relationship with the God of "our Fathers" and many others that stem from the excellent example of the indeed Omniscient and beautiful virgin bride of Christ Catherine, who through her short life and her long-suffering end, turned out to be an unblemished reflection of the Divine light.

With the blessing of Your Beatitude, we will limit ourselves with a minimum of speech to refer to the great and burning issue of holiness that concerns all of us, since "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess, 4:3). Our teacher is our saint who passed through the land we tread on as a stranger and a sojourner.

Nothing earthly captured her soul, but her every thought rose to God, living as an earthly angel and a heavenly person. Thus, by the grace of God, she managed to preserve the divine image within her unscathed. She accepted God as the permanent tenant of her pure soul, attracting His mercy and thus manifested the life of Christ with her life. It would be possible for her to repeat Paul's saying "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Only a Saint, becomes the voice of God to people, in their environment, in their era. Every Saint radiates the Light of God, and his words come directly to our soul "like the dew of Hermon, descending on the mountains of Zion" (PSALM 132), changing our mood in a peaceful, imperceptible, peaceful way!

The Saints voluntarily renounced the comforts, the riches, the vain glory of this "impostor" world, dominated their passions and demonstrated in the most sincere way how high man can reach, what inconceivable heights of virtue he can attain, cooperating with divine grace. Powerful empires were humiliated before them, the armored ones proved to be powerless and the wise men of the world proved to be foolish. They lifted the Lord's Cross on their shoulders with patience and determination, enduring temptations, trials, injustices, ridicule, unheard of tortures and often an ignominious death. The sorrows of life were the necessary accompaniment of their labours for the conquest of divine mercy!

Today we honor and turn to the abundant grace of the saint, as our invincible ally, healer of our various ailments, our protector in the injustices and sufferings of life, helper in our humble struggle. We feel her generous love for all of us who call upon her with faith, as a good guide who pours into our lives the Grace of God.

She invites us to accompany her, she gives us her hand to keep up with her on the path of deification. We have in her person the application of the word of the Holy Gospel, which clearly proves that the experience of the Gospel is not utopia. It proves in the most clear and categorical way that in every era, in every place, in all conditions, the Gospel of Christ is possible and applicable. The people-loving Saint Paisios of the Holy Mountain advises in this regard "We will be greatly helped in the work of acquiring virtues if we have the Saints as our model. By comparing ourselves with the saints, we see our passions, control ourselves, humble ourselves and strive with reverend and divine zeal to imitate them". Christ did not come into the world so that we could become "good and moral people". He came into the world so that we could become holy like Him. "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter, 1:16). The Holy Spirit who "constitutes the entire institution of the Church", despite the modern apostasy, unceasingly continues the Divine work, the sanctification of the people who desire it, the attendance at church of the world!

Holiness has no end. It comes from the inexhaustible source of the Holy Spirit, wherever it "breathes". This is the lasting miracle. In difficult, inconsistent, in favorable times for the commission of sin, in conditions lacking spirit, the Holy Spirit processes the sanctification of believers, who voluntarily choose to be crucified and to be resurrected with the Lord.

However, today's great day is a joyous day for us Alexandrians also for the additional reason of the venerable 69th birthday of His Most Blessed Beatitude, the Primate of the Alexandrian Church. The Alexandrian vessel of Christ is exalted and radiant because, by God's mercy you are the Patriarch of the vast and multi-populated Africa. If Christianity is declining and shrinking in the Western world, on our continent it is experiencing rapid dissemination and a geometric increase. You worthily preside over the missionary Orthodox Church par excellence, which conveys the message of salvation in Christ to the variously afflicted and inasmuch maligned souls of our African brothers and sisters, the least of our brothers as our Lord calls them.

Your pastoral initiatives are many and important, your paternal concern for the spiritual and material needs of your flock is tireless, your missionary tours throughout Africa are long and very laborious, so that you have direct knowledge and experience of the emerging problems. You devote yourself daily, without complaint and sacrificially in the ministry of the Apostolic Church of St Mark and of people without discrimination of color, race, religion, nationality. With the many gifts that God bestowed upon You, especially the calm, the humble, the gentle, the affable, the loving qualities of your personality, you respond with a sense of responsibility to the call of God who calls you, to the Patriarchal value and

honor.

As a minimum recompense for what the capacity of your paternal heart offers to all of us and each one of us individually, we offer you essence of our filial love and our wholehearted humble wishes.

May God who rests in the saints, through the intercessions of the Lady Theotokos who celebrates with us the great feast of the leavetaking of the Entrance, of the ever-memorable Bride of Christ Catherine, and of the Great Fathers who sanctified the Throne of the Holy Apostle Mark as Your predecessors, grant you a long, painless and productive Patriarchal tenure, so that you may continue until your last breath to bear the saving testimony of our Orthodoxy, which heralds the hope and experience of the Resurrection. Many and God-honoured years, Your Beatitude Father and Master!"

A festive gathering followed in the Throne Room of the Patriarchal Monastery, where His Beatitude, celebrating His birthday on this day, received the wishes, respect and expression of filial love of the clergy and people of the Alexandrian Church towards the Venerable Primate of the Throne of Saint Mark.

He also awarded the Senior Commander of the Lion of Saint Mark to the Honourable Mrs. Aliko Antoniou, President of the Branch of the Lyceum of Greek Ladies of Alexandria and the Senior Commander of the Order of Saint Savva to his sister-in the flesh, Mrs. Argyro Mahla.

A lunch was then hosted for all the members of the Hellenic community at the club of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria.

Present at the Liturgical and spiritual functions were His Excellency Mr. Nicholas Papageorgiou, Ambassador of Greece to Cairo, Her Excellency Mrs. Polly Ioannou, Ambassador of Cyprus to Cairo, the Honourable Mr. Ioannis Pyrgakis, Consul General of Greece in Alexandria, the Honourable Mrs. Despina Haritzoglou, Consul General of Greece in Cairo, the Honourable Chairmen of the Hellenic Communities of Alexandria and Cairo, the Chairman of the Arabic-speaking Community of the Great City, Chairmen of Hellenic Societies and Associations, the teachers and pupils of the Hellenic Schools, Greeks and others.