

THE FEAST OF ST NICHOLAS IN HAMZAWI

Festive, celebratory and bright days for the Cathedral of the Patriarchal Vicariate of Cairo in Hamzawi. The Church of St Nicholas, illuminated and adorned with flowers, opened its doors to the Christian believers in Cairo who, under the Patriarchal guidance of His Beatitude Theodoros II patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, once again experienced the fellowship of the Christian faith.

On Sunday 5th December His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa officiated at the Patriarchal Vespers and the Artoklasia service, together with His Eminence Nicodemus Metropolitan of Memohis and Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, His Eminence Meletios Metropolitan of Kananga and many priests.

The Holy Church was filled with believers, Greeks and Arabic speakers, with the Scouts of the Christian groups of El Sakr offering their services by keeping order and paying homage.

The festive celebratory service was honoured by the presence of Mrs. Maria Kehri, Charge D' Affaires of the Greek Embassy as well as members of the Greek Diplomatic Mission to Cairo, the Representative of the Hellenic Community of Cairo Mrs. Chrysanthe Skoufaridou, the Supervisor of the offices of the H.C.C. Mrs Billy Politi – Zoue, the Chairman of the Cypriot Brotherhood of Cairo Mr. Alexandros Kazamias accompanied by members of the Executive Council of the Brotherhood.

Also present, among others, were Mr. Claude Nakas Chairman of the Arabic speaking Orthodox Christians, Mr. Salem Kasis Chairman of the Church of the Archangels in Daher, the Director of the Cultural Center in Cairo Mr. Christos Papadopoulos, the Representative of S.A.E. Mr. Basil Zoues, the Chairman of the Chios Brotherhood of Cairo Mr. Lambros Benovias, the Secretary of the Brotherhood Mrs. Theano Benovia, the Deputy Chairman of the Hellenic Center in Cairo Mr. Nikos Katsikas, the Chairlady of the "St Mary of Egypt" Hellenic Ladies Philanthropic Society of Heliopoli Mrs. Evangelia Thereou.

Before the Dismissal His Beatitude the Patriarch wholeheartedly thanked all those present who had, as he said, the kindness of soul and courtesy of heart in the midst of a pandemic to come to this historic church in Hamzawi to meet St Nicholas who, for centuries, has been present in this place. St Nicholas, the protector of the poor and defender of the weak, who was often seen by many pious people, white haired and wet in the salty sea, seen also by sailors during storms, giving them hope when their lives were in mortal danger.

His Beatitude continued his speech saying that he considers it a great blessing beyond the ecclesiastical names that he acquired during the course of his life, that in the baptismal font his parents gave him the name Nicholas and the priest anointed him with the blessing of the Saint.

Tonight however, he said that our hearts celebrate nautically because our great sailor Saint, St Nicholas celebrates. His Beatitude felt the need to publicly thank His Eminence Nicodemus, Metropolitan of Memphis and Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo because, as he said, every year together with his priests, he makes sure that the monastery shines and the fragrant icon of the Saint is decorated with flowers.

He welcomed from the bottom of his heart and introduced to those present one of his spiritual brothers as he called His Eminence Meletios Metropolitan of Katanga, about whom he spoke warmly regarding his missionary work and His love for the poor and suffering.

He also shared with a great deal of emotion a personal story as he addressed the

young people, a story that connects him with His Eminence Metropolitan Meletios, who lovingly lent him his vestments when he was ordained a Deacon in Crete because, as His Beatitude said, he had no money to obtain his own.

And the tie came, 36 years later, for their paths to cross again and for him to be able to Ordain him as a Hierarch of the Most High.

He then spoke in detail about his arduous but completely human-centred and mentally productive missionary trip to South Africa from where he returned five days ago. He illuminated with his words the drama of man being tested and the hope he gave with the word and work of Christ and then closed his speech by giving wishes and love to all.

The next day, December 6th, dawned joyfully, festively with the memory of St Nicholas being celebrated all over the world, wherever there are spiritual nests of the Christian faith in his name. A special day for the Cathedral of St Nicholas in Hamzawi, Cairo.

A sacred church, that stands out for its historical, cultural and artistic significance and is to be recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has stood proudly for centuries in the center of Islamic Cairo, reflecting the message of Christ. St Nektarios walked on its tiles, lived in its austere cell and was ordained Bishop in the Cathedral of St Nicholas. A heavy legacy and blessing for those who are lucky enough to turn to his grace.

This most festive day was honoured by the presence of the hope of the Christian faith, the young students of Achilopouleio and Abetio Schools who reverently came to church accompanied by their teachers as well as many other people who filled the church.

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa officiated at the sacramental Divine Liturgy which was concelebrated by His Eminence Nicodemus Metropolitan of Memphis and Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, His Eminence Meletios of Katanga, His Eminence Nicholas Metropolitan of Heliopolis, as well as many priests.

The Ambassador of Greece Mr. Nicholas Garilides also had his honorary day of celebration and came to church accompanied by the Greek Attache of Defense Captain George Hatzis of the Navy.

Also present was the Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus Mr. Homer Mavromatis, accompanied by the Deputy Ambassador Mr. Konstantinos Christofides.

The Hellenic Community of Cairo was represented by Mrs. Chrysanthe Skoufridou and present among others were Mr. Claude Nakas Chairman of the Arabic speaking Orthodox Christians, Mr. Salem Kasis Chairman of the Church of the Archangels in Daher, Mr. George Zoumboulides Chairman of the Patriarchal Orthodox Center in Soubra, the member of the Executive Council of the Cypriot Brotherhood of Cairo Mr. Michael Koukides and the Deputy Educational Attache Mrs. Sotiria Beta.

His Beatitude the Patriarch of Alexandria opened his heart for the Naval Saint as he defined St Nicholas, in the person of the Representative of our Navy, who honoured us with his presence.

However, His Beatitude reserved a special mention with deep emotion for the student youths, our hope, as he defined them. Addressing the young students he told them that Bishop Nicodemus and Father Stephanos decorated the church with beautiful flowers, but you, my children are the most beautiful flowers. And St Nicholas loved all children and protected them, he told them.

With his brilliant narrative ability, he brought to life images from his recent trip to South Africa and in their minds transported them to the Greek School Saheti, which is attended by 1500 children, all of whom speak Greek.

He continued his speech saying that today St Nicholas will count thousands of believers who are in countless churches on our islands, in Australia, Canada, America.

But his heart, as he said, is sure to pass through here as well. It is impossible not to pass through the "tent of God" as the great Patriarch Parthenios called this holy church, and saying this he turned the attention of all to the authentic image of St Nicholas on the Holy Iconostasis where St Nektarios used to pray with tears in his eyes.

In conclusion, addressing the Greek Ambassador Mr. Nicholas Garilides, to whom he wished many years, he gave him an icon of St Nicholas which he had consecrated on the Holy Altar, as he said, and urged him to remember his second homeland, Egypt, whenever he looked at it.

Following the Divine Liturgy on both festive days, refreshments were offered in the Throne Room, with His Beatitude exchanging wishes with all those present.

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