

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOLY METROPOLIS OF KENYA

On Sunday, 7th June 2009, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Cathedral of Ss Anargyri in Nairobi , together with His Eminence Makarios Metropolitan of Kenya , His Eminence Jonah, Metropolitan of Kampala and His Eminence Seraphim, Metropolitan of Johannesburg and Pretoria . It is to be noted that apart from Metropolitan Makarios, both the other Hierarchs have served the Metropolis of Kenya. For this reason His Beatitude honoured them for their contribution to the Alexandrian Church, awarding the distinction of Supreme Commander of St Mark to Their Eminences Makarios and Jonah and the Star of St Mark to His Eminence Seraphim.

It was a most moving moment was when His Eminence Makarios of Kenya gave His Beatitude the mitre with which the late Metropolitan and subsequently Patriarch of Alexandria Nicholas VI was enthroned.

His Beatitude gave the local Metropolitan Makarios a valuable Pectoral Cross in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Holy Metropolis of Kenya. "Your Eminence Metropolitan Makarios of Kenya, you have the gratitude of the Alexandrian Church, because in Kenya you have left a part of your life", said His Beatitude. Addressing His Eminence Jonah of Kampala, he said that in his person "we honour Africa . We honour the Bishop who always gives love". He also made special mention of the contribution of His Eminence Seraphim of Johannesburg to the missionary work of the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

His Beatitude also awarded the Cross of the Apostle Mark to Protopresbyter Silouan Mwagi, giving him at the same time the office of Great Protopresbyter of the Throne.

Addressing the large congregation the Venerable Primate of the Church of Alexandria said:

"This day is dedicated, by our Church, to one of the greatest feast days of Christianity, the Feast of Pentecost. Fifty days after Pascha we Christians celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of our Holy Church as a spiritual institution in history with the actualization of Sacraments and of the Gifts of the Spirit. It is a feast of thanksgiving for the many wondrous deeds God performs in the world through His Church.

According to the book of the Acts of the Apostles that we referred to in today's apostolic reading, on the day of Pentecost, while all the disciples were gathered together in one place, they received divine revelation and "were all filled with the Holy Spirit". It is then that they began to mobilize and preach the word of God. The first fruit of the Holy Spirit and of the Gifts the disciples received was the embrace of the faith of the humble Nazarene of the 3000 people from many nations and language groups. They constituted the first Christian Community of Jerusalem . From Pentecost onwards the disciples were transformed into Apostles and Ecumenical Preachers of the Gospel.

At the same time, the feast of Pentecost reveals the activities of the Holy Spirit in the Church and, through the Church, into the whole world. The Holy Spirit opens up the work of the Church to all nations and peoples of the world. This is declared by the first Gift of the Spirit – the gift of languages given to the Apostles on that day. This embrace of all people, of all languages, constitutes a community of love and unity of all people.

Within the community the specific characteristics of nations and peoples are not abolished. It is the tragic consequences of animosity and the conflict between people – as seen in the account of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament – that is abolished.

The Holy Spirit is revealed in and works through all the languages and cultures of mankind through the ages. This Holy Spirit motivated the Holy Apostles to overcome the local boundaries of the land of Judea and to proclaim the true faith in Christ to the ends of the earth. This same Holy Spirit motivates us, those of us pledged to the service of the Church and of mankind, to transmit the Great Pearl of the Word of the Gospel to all nations. It is not possible for us to hide the Eternal Truth, the Crucified and Risen Jesus, from the nations of the world since we are all children of the God of love, of equality and of justice who sacrificed Himself for “every person coming into the world”.

My dear brethren,

It is with great joy that we celebrate the great feast of the Birthday of our Church with all of you here in Kenya . It is here especially, that the Holy Spirit’s Grace has revealed itself in the way it works among the nations of the world. Boundaries, national and ethnic differences, language and local divisions are neutralized in the Holy Chalice in which all people become brothers, are united and made equal. It is in Kenya that the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the beneficial consequences of the Mission as Charismatic gift is revealed in force. This blessing, this charism, abolishes discrimination and establishes the ecumenicity of the Church as the One Body of the Undivided Christ.

Today our joy is even greater due to another reason. The Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of Saint Mark rejoices because its glorious spiritual off-shoot, the Holy Metropolis of Kenya, completes 50 years since its establishment – 50 years of life, dynamic presence, sacrificial service and Orthodox Witness in the heart of the African land.

Of course, it may be unnecessary to add that the life of the Church is interwoven with the life and sojourn of her flock. All events, great or small, whatever is experienced by any one Orthodox person or the Orthodox Community as a whole, become conscious situations for the Church.

Our long suffering but glorious Patriarchal Throne of the Great City of Alexandria, as the depository and guardian of faith and values, as Church, journeys along with its flock on its historic voyage through the ages. She shares and identifies with the life of her flock, with her crew. No other institution has ever been closer to the efforts and progress of the Orthodox faithful of Africa . Our Patriarchate remains faithful to the words of Lord, “Come to me all who are tired and heavily laden and I will give you rest”. (Mt. 1:28). The Church of St. Mark remains faithful to the example of her founder and patron and never ceases to agonize over the needs of her faithful, to suffer along with the pain of every one of her faithful – whether old or new, whether Greek, Arab or African, to comfort and strengthen, to enlighten and to guide.

It was with this spirit of pastoral responsibility that the Holy Metropolis of Irenopolis was founded; the Metropolis that had pastoral and spiritual jurisdiction over the local Church of Kenya . The ever-memorable Metropolitan Nikolaos was elected as her first Bishop. His worthy successors included the Metropolitans Nicodemos, Frumenticos and Eirenaios – genuine labourers of the Evangelical preaching and ministers of sacrificial love.

“Our clergy originating from Kenya , headed by the ever-memorable

Bishop Georgios Kaduna, achieved wonderful results with their God-pleasing pastoral service. May their memory be eternal. Our thoughts and prayers are with our lay-catechists, the lay-members of the Episcopal Councils, the members of the local Church Councils of all our parishes, the Councils of Mothers and Youth. We, altogether, create the grandeur of the Orthodox Church with our living presence and our witness in this beautiful land of Kenya ”.

Our memory turns, once more, towards those Hierarchs, who laboured for many years in this vineyard as its guardians – the present Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania, Anastasios and the Elder Metropolitan of Axum, Petros. Allow us to make special mention of the Metropolitan of blessed memory and later on Patriarch of Alexandria, Petros VII who was taken from among us so quickly and tragically. His blessed soul rejoices along with us at this moment while he prays before the Heavenly Altar for the good direction and progress of the faithful of Kenya .

We also owe thanks to the present Metropolitan of Johannesburg and Pretoria , Seraphim who also laboured the “good labour” for our brethren here in the years 1997-2001 as the Metropolitan of Kenya and Irenoupolis.

We especially express our thanks and gratitude to the present Arch-pastor of the Holy Metropolis, Makario. From 1977 onward he associated his life with this land and her noble inhabitants. He offered his service, his youth, his rich theological training and his missionary zeal. In February of 2001 he was appointed Metropolitan of Kenya and has since laboured for the correct shepherding and progress in God of the Orthodox flock here.

“The contribution of today’s worthy local clergy, the lay-catechists and wives of our clergymen in the service of the faithful members of the Orthodox Church in Kenya is also great. My beloved brethren, I pray night and day to the Almighty God for your protection and guidance to the glory of God in the salvation in Christ of the people of Kenya . We are aware of the manifold difficulties that you encounter in your daily struggle for survival and that of your families. Be assured that we share your agony and concerns and we try, in any way possible, within the realms of our abilities, to respond to these challenges.

My beloved children,

“Go and teach all nations” is the instruction given by the Risen Lord to His disciples before His Ascension. This commandment of the Lord remains the foundation stone of the pastoral and Patriarchal Concern. Our African brethren are invited freely and without force, to come to know the eternal and life-bearing Gospel truth. In whatever situation they are, they are invited to enlighten their souls with the light that is shed by the unwaning torch of Orthodoxy. The Church is laboring to heal all adverse conditions of life.

In this laborious task of transmitting the Eternal Light in the souls of our fellow humans in this land, the Holy Metropolis of Kenya has taken an active first place during the past 50 years. It has placed a “light in the stand” guiding everyone, who wishes to draw from the waters of the faith of the Saints and Fathers, to Christ.

It is in this context that we place the Service of the Orthodox Patriarchal Seminary of “Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus ” over the past 20 years or so. It is the largest “Nursery” of our African clergy and was founded by the great Primate of the Church of Cyprus that supported the missionary labours of our Alexandrian Throne in many ways.

In celebrating the 50 years of this Holy Metropolis, let us feel, deep

in our souls, the fluttering of the Grace of the All Holy Spirit. May this anniversary become an opportunity of spiritual renewal for the continuation of our upward journey in the future. May it be the beginning of new missionary visions, higher aims and movements forward.

Within the passing of time and the ever changing world, our Church remains a long suffering and serene institution that gives courage that offers comfort and spiritual security. She remains an eternal institution, unshaken and beyond doubt.

My beloved children,

Orthodoxy in Africa has an Apostolic Tradition and origin. It was preached two thousand years ago by the first bishop and our Holy predecessor, the Apostle and Evangelist Mark. It is the inheritance and trust that all of you –clergy and laity – are called to protect and guard and to teach it and live it for the salvation of souls. The focus of the unity of our faith is our common prayer – as evident today that we celebrate the 50 years of the Holy Metropolis, especially with this Divine Liturgy and the Common Cup of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Orthodoxy in Africa has a decisive role to play in the protection of human rights. Our Patriarchate with our pastoral role, our bearing witness of Christ's life, reminds contemporary man of his social responsibilities towards our fellow man in need, the sick and the persecuted. Just as our Lord Jesus Christ never refused to help the poor, the suffering and the sick, so too we, if we want to be diligent in our Christian ministry, cannot refuse to do the same. We should daily follow the example of the Leader of our Faith, the work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Finally, allow us to thank the dignitaries present here today at our Eucharistic Gathering – His Excellence the Deputy President, Mr Steven Musioka who is a dear friend of our Church and a Leading Political figure of the African Continent, and their Excellencies the Ambassadors whose presence constitutes a living expression of their good predisposition to be close to the work of the Orthodox Mission Work of our Patriarchate and the Local Church.

Remaining faithful to the Church of Christ, the Church of the Apostles, the Saints and Martyrs, let us strengthen our Spirit and call out with the voice of our souls and entreating the intercession of Saint Mark, the ancient prayer, "May the Holy Spirit come upon us too. Amen"

Present at the liturgical gathering were Their Excellencies the Ambassadors of Greece , Cyprus and Russia in Kenya , His Eminence the Nuncio of the Roman Catholic Church, the Chairman of the Hellenic Community and other dignitaries.

MEMORIAL PRAYERS AT THE GRAVE OF THE AFRICAN BISHOP GEORGE GANDOUNA

The memory of the first Kenyan Bishop, the late ever-remembered George Gandouna, was commemorated on 8th June 2009, by His Beatitude Theodoros, in a Trisagion celebrated at his grave, which is in the Holy Church of ST Nicholas, a short way outside of Nairobi .

Many people were present together with His Eminence Makarios for the moving ceremony.

The Primate of the Second Throne Patriarchate spoke of the late Bishop, saying he was one of the Pioneers of Orthodoxy in Africa and prayed "that his blessing and prayers be with the people of Kenya always".

