

CONCELEBRATION FOR THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY IN NICOSIA

The Sunday of Orthodoxy, the commemoration of the restoration of the Icons, was celebrated at the Holy Church of the All Holy Virgin of Palouriotissa in Nicosia with particular majesty and grandeur. Particular prestige was given to the celebratory air by the presence of His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa to whom the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus awarded its highest honour.

“It is a sign of honour and love to you personally as well as to the great and historic Church of Alexandria”, said the Archbishop of Cyprus. “Please accept his distinction and remember that the tomb of the Apostle Barnabas whose face appears on the medal, is in occupied territory. It is inaccessible to those who freely wish to worship there. It is surrounded and guarded. Your Beatitude please pray to God that the hour of liberation is not long in coming, so that at a future visit from you, we can take you to the Apostle Barnabas and to the Apostle Andrew and to Keryneia, Ammohostos, Morfou and to every part that is today occupied”, said Archbishop Chrysostomos on bestowing the gold medal of the Apostle Barnabas on the Patriarch of Alexandria during the hierarchal concelebration.

“Our enormous responsibilities, as Primates of two ancient Churches, for the entire Church, do not excuse us from the problems of our Churches. We realize that the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria is facing problems today, especially due to the diminishing numbers of Greeks on the African continent. However, we here in Cyprus are facing greater difficulties. We are at the most difficult phase of our history..... for the past 34 years $\frac{1}{3}$ of our people are living

far from their homes, banished by the force of guns. Against all interpretation of justice our people do not have the right to own their properties, the right to move around freely and to live in the occupied part of our country. More than 500 of our churches, and many more chapels have been vandalized, desecrated, made into stables, Muslim mosques, and others left to the ravages of time. The Monastery of the Apostle Andrew on the most eastern point of Cyprus, which became a symbol of the occupied territories, is collapsing. There are people who were forced, in one way or another, to leave their homes, their property and fortune. There are very few people living there today, about equal to those who protected the ancient Thermopylae , to remind others of the duty to protect national and spiritual battlements”.

The Archbishop emphasized though, that “our people, despite the many years of hardship, does not lose heart. They will not surrender and they will not accept the violence and the occupation. They rejected four years previously a false solution which aimed at destroying our nation and they rejected outright our yielding to the condition less magnanimity of the occupiers. Today we are resolute, united, as one, to arm our Government, so that having the support of all it may from a position of strength deal with our national problem. And we have the wholehearted belief that God, who ‘loves righteousness’ will come to our assistance”.

In his reply, His Beatitude Theodoros II, said: “We are certain that the voices, the please, the prayers and the struggles of all do not escape the notice of the throne of Christ’s majesty and that through His chosen ones will cut the days of division and conflict for all the Cypriot people.....At this time we appeal to all the powers to assist in the achievement of the aim of unity within the framework of justice. May the Lord of the Church deem us worthy to see the return of justice and that the souls of our unjustly lost brothers and sisters from the many Cypriot struggles find

peace and mercy and that the tears of those who have been unjustly treated become joy and gladness".

His Beatitude gave the Archbishop of Cyprus two dikirotrikira (candelabra) saying: "Please put pure candles in them and then raise your voice so that the Lord will look down from heaven on the Church of Cyprus and I will wear the medal of the Apostle Barnabas at official celebrations and will humbly ask Christ that you will go, as another Moses, to the Promised Land. Take up your staff and the candelabra that you might reach the Church and the Monastery of St Barnabas and may God deem you worthy to conduct a liturgy there".

Following the concelebration His Beatitude the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Archbishop of Cyprus together with the members of the Holy Synod went to the old cemetery of St Spyridon , where they conducted a trisagion at the tomb of the late Archbishop Chrysostomos I and laid a wreath.

At noon the Archbishop and the Members of the Holy Synod hosted an official lunch in honour of His Beatitude at the Archbishopric, which was attended by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Cyprus Mr. Dimitris Christofias, the Minister of Education and Culture, the Ambassador of Greece in Cyprus, state, military and religious officials.

Speaking at the lunch, the Archbishop once again expressed his joy at the presence of the Alexandrian Patriarch in Cyprus and assured him that the Church of Cyprus would continue its support of the Alexandrian Patriarchate.

In his reply, His Beatitude stated: We are especially happy that love and acceptance of all have become a way of life on Cyprus . These dimension of Orthodox ethos we believe are the best companions on the long and uphill road to the finding of a solution to the difficult problems of this country.....When we maintain our faith piously we are assured of the joy of the Resurrection. We are certain that the blessed

Cypriot people know that the Mother Church is concerned and is working towards the maintaining of the truth in all its forms and trusts it and looks to it. In ending, I raise my glass to the glory of the Triune God and a long life for you all, with the fervent wish for a quick unity of Cyprus ”.

That evening, His Beatitude officiated at the Great Vespers at the only Parish in Cyprus whose church is dedicated to the Holy Glorious Apostle and Evangelist Mark, in Strovolos in Nicosia .