18/10/2024

The Feast of Saint Parascheva in Iași, Romania



Pilgrimage by His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain

His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain has returned to London following a four-day pilgrimage to Iași in Romania, at the invitation of His Eminence Theofan, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina. The pilgrimage marked the feast of the city's patron, Saint Parascheva, whose relics are enshrined in its Metropolitan Cathedral. His Eminence was joined in the delegation from Great Britain by Revd Presbyter Dr. Dimitrios Mamouchas, Revd Archdeacon Dr. George Tsourous, and Dr. Petre Breazu, who were received with great kindness and warmth at the airport by His Eminence Metropolitan Teofan and Archim. Dr Nathanael Neacșu, Abbot of Bărboi Monastery.

The pilgrimage began with an exchange of fraternal greetings between the two hierarchs, followed by a visit to the historic Galata Monastery, which served as the scene of the planning for the Greek War of Independence in 1821 and is named for the homonymous district in Constantinople. His Eminence then celebrated the Sunday Divine Liturgy on the eve of the Feast of St Parascheva at Bărboi Monastery, whose Abbot, Archim. Dr Nathanael Neacșu, has enjoyed close relationships with the United Kingdom over many years, in particular with the

Monastery of St John the Baptist in Essex. Archim. Nathanael was very gracious with his time and effort in arranging the pilgrimage and in taking care of the British delegation during their stay. In his capacity as Associate Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Dumitru Stăniloae Orthodox Theological Faculty of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, Archim. Nathanael invited His Eminence to give a lecture on Orthodoxy in the Diaspora at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Following the feast, His Eminence and the British delegation were warmly received at The Three Holy Hierarchs Monastery, the Cetățuia Monastery, and the Frumoasa Monastery, vibrant centres of the Christian life of Iași.

His Eminence was deeply moved by the kindness of Metropolitan Teofan, who honoured Archbishop Nikitas by inviting him to preside at the Divine Liturgy for the city's patronal feast, at which His Eminence also preached the sermon, and by the deep faith in Jesus Christ and love of Saint Parascheva shown by the Romanian pilgrims, fifty thousand of whom attended the Divine Liturgy in the square outside the Metropolitan Cathedral, with many more continuing to venerate the relics of the Saint throughout the day and into the night. The celebration was blessed also by the presence of relics of Saint Panteleimon, which were venerated together with the relics of Saint Parascheva throughout the feast, and of the four monks of the Monastery of Saint Paul on the Holy Mountain of Athos, who accompanied them.

The Liturgy was notable both for its Panorthodox spirit, with hierarchs from many countries and local Orthodox Churches concelebrating, and for the beauty of the worship, which manifested the rich psaltic and choral traditions of the city of Iași. The feast was a profound experience of the unity of the Church, drawing together people from many nations and languages in a shared pilgrimage. Archbishop Nikitas took this as the theme of his sermon, highlighting the place of pilgrimage in the life of Christian believers since the beginnings of the Church.

Calling on the faithful to make their physical, exterior pilgrimage to the Saint also an interior pilgrimage of the heart, His Eminence encouraged all to follow the example of the young woman Saint Parascheva, herself a pilgrim from Thrace to the Holy Land, in ascending the steps of the ladder of repentance and conversion in their daily lives. His Eminence drew on the words of St. Paul (2 Cor. 6:17, 7:1) to highlight the opportunity which pilgrimage offers to separate ourselves from all that keeps us apart from God and, as well as asking for personal blessings and miracles through the Saint's intercession, to ask for the whole world the only true peace, the peace which comes from Christ.

Sermon by His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas:

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Theofan, beloved Brother in the Lord
My fellow hierarchs, clergy and people of God.

I greet you in the unity of the faith and come, like you, as a pilgrim to this sacred site and place of prayer – to the shrine of Saint Paraskeva, the beloved Saint of the city of Iasi and so many other places.

In the Christian faith and, especially for the Orthodox Christians, the idea of pilgrimage has always been a part of our tradition. Since the earliest days, believers would travel to Jerusalem and other sacred places and shrines to honor the Lord, His Mother, and the Saints. The historical documents and texts verify this, just as your own presence and prayers affirm that this tradition has not been lost in the pages of time. Pilgrimage is a part of our lives as Christians and this must not be lost.

Saint Paraskeva, herself, was a pilgrim, as we know from the writings about her. She traveled and lived in Jerusalem and the Holy Lands, until she was directed to return to her homeland. Her life was a continuous journey on the path to the heavenly kingdom. In fact, all of Christian life is a sacred pilgrimage for each of us and we travel and struggle to come closer to Christ and His Truth. It is He who invites you and me to leave the daily routines of life and walk the path of holiness. The great preacher and enlightener of the nations, Saint Paul, instructs us with the following words:

“Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters.”
Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and holiness perfect in the fear of God.” (2 Cor. 6:17 – 7:1)

As Saint John of the Ladder also writes: “Ascend, brethren, ascend eagerly, and be resolved in your hearts to ascend – Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of our God.”

We are invited, beloved people, to come out from the ways of the world and to walk a new and different path. We are invited to ascend and find and walk the path that leads to Christ – to be like the Saints of the Church who became imitators of Christ and kept the tradition that was delivered to them (1 Cor. 11:1). You and I have come here to the Shrine of Saint Paraskeva and we bow our heads and our hearts in prayer, as we ask the Father of Light not to forsake us but to look lovingly

upon the world and also to give us the strength, courage and hope that this young saintly woman had those centuries ago.

As we walk the steps of our pilgrimage, we reflect on the sacred words of the Scriptures. Listen carefully to the following words of the great Prophet Isaiah, who wrote and also invites on the mystical journey of Christian life: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob”.

We, too, my sisters and brothers have come to ascend and go up to the House of the Lord and receive the grace and blessings that He pours out into our world through His Saints and holy ones. Many have travelled countless miles and kilometers to visit this shrine and ask Saint Paraskeva to join them in praying to God. Some come here asking for personal blessings and miracles, while others come simply to ask for peace upon the face of the world. Perhaps, this is the greatest need at the present time – for peace to abide and fill the hearts and minds of all people. But, it must be the peace that comes from above – the peace of Christ, just as we ask and pray in the Liturgy, and nothing less than this.

I invite you, then, to come and join me not only on the pilgrimage to the relics and shrine of the Saint but also on a sacred pilgrimage of the heart, for God says in the Book of Proverbs – “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26). For God does “not delight in sacrifice – the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 50). Saint Paraskeva gave her heart which was filled with contrition, her total being to Christ and we are invited to do the same. Tradition says that when she was in Church she heard the words of the Saviour, Who said – “whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). The saintly young woman freely chose to deny herself, the wealth of the world, and gave away everything; she chose a new path for herself and her life, even going as far as to leave her home and her family. The saint became a vessel of grace, as she was also a fulfilment of the words found in the Proverbs – for the Lord said “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me” (Proverbs 8:17).

Christ, though, does not ask for many and great sacrifices from us. He only asks that we stand firm in our commitment to Him and the message of the Gospel, to take seriously those things we proclaim at the time of Baptism. As you may agree, the most difficult thing in life these days is for one to be a Christian. It is for this reason that He gives us the Saints, those who are witnesses to the Truth and examples for us, as we struggle to live the message of the Gospel. As you come forward to honor the Saint and venerate her sacred relics, remember her life, her calling, her pilgrimage and find meaning in them, so we may live and respond

accordingly, so we may be found worthy to receive grace from God above.

Allow me, please, to express my gratitude to His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel for giving his blessing for me to be with you – and, also to His Eminence, Metropolitan Theophanes, your shepherd and chief pastor. May Christ strengthen them and all the clergy and noble Romanian people and may His name be blessed here and in all places to the end of the ages.

As we bow our hearts in prayer, let us thank God for such humble and Christ-blessings,













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