

## The feast of Saint Sabas the Sanctified



On Wednesday, December 5/18, 2024, the feast of our venerable Father Sabas the Sanctified was celebrated at the Patriarchate. During this feast, the whole Church, especially that of Jerusalem, recalls that according to the Synaxarion and other sources, the venerable Sabas was born in Mutalasca, Cappadocia, and came to the Holy Land around 456 at the age of 18. He studied in obedience under the great Euthymios and his co-ascetic, Saint Theoctistos, for many years.

After years of obedience, he established his Holy Lavra on the right bank of the Brook of Cedars and founded eleven other monasteries, becoming the leader of the monastic life. He was a beacon of the monastic life, and together with his fellow-countryman Theodosios, the Cenobriarch, who he was chosen as the head of the monastic community, strove for the doctrine of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, specifically the doctrine of the one essence in the two natures, the divine and human of Christ; the human which obeys freely to the divine.

In his honour, an all-night vigil was held at his Holy Lavra, presided over by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos, with the participation of their Eminences, the Archbishops, Aristoboulos of Madaba, Aristarchos of Constantina,, and His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, along with the Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks and Arabic- and Russian-speaking priests, with the choir of the Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod, Hierodeacon Simeon, chanting in Greek on the right side and the Arabic choir on the left.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude delivered the following sermon:

“The righteous shall live for evermore, and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High. Therefore, shall they receive a kingdom of beauty and a crown of glory from the hand of the Lord, because with His right hand, He will cover them, and with His arm He will protect them” (Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-16, KJV).

Holy Fathers and brethren in Christ,

Reverent Christians and pilgrims,

The guide of the monastic way, Saint Sabbas the Sanctified, has gathered us all together in his blessed and renowned Lavra, so that we may honour and celebrate his sacred memory in this feast.

The grace granted by God to the God-fearing Sabbas has made him equal to the Angels, a companion of the Saints, a companion of the Prophets, and a joint heir with the Martyrs and the Apostles. Therefore, the sound of his achievements has gone forth to all the earth. The incorrupt and whole relic of our Holy Father Sabbas, lying before our eyes, stands as an unfailing witness to the great deeds of his sanctity.

Sabbas, who came from the land of Cappadocia, united his ascetic life from his childhood with both the Holy Land of Palestine and the renowned ascetics and

teachers of the desert—Theodosios the Cenobiarch, Gerasimos of the Jordan, Theoktistos the Blessed, and Euphthymios the Great—who initiated him into the ineffable and divine mystery of godliness, that is, the Christ-like way of life which leads to the contemplation of the glory of God, theosis (deification). As his hymnographer so clearly expresses: “Preserving intact the image of God within thee, and establishing thy mind as a ruler over the destructive passions through asceticism, thou didst attain to the likeness of God as far as possible; for in manfully compelling nature, thou wast diligent to subject the worse to the better and to subjugate the flesh to the spirit. Hence, thou didst prove to be the summit of monastics, the colonizer of the wilderness, a trainer of them that run the course well, and a most exact rule of virtue” (Vespers, Glory of Stichera).

The God-inspired Sabbas was truly revealed as the “most exact rule of virtue”, for he heard the Gospel of our God and Saviour Christ, Who calls all who believe to His Kingdom and glory. The Holy Sabbas received this word of the Gospel not as the word of men, but as it truly is, the word of God, “which also works in those who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13), according to Saint Paul. “This word of God enlightened, strengthened, and directed the steps of the God-bearing Sabbas towards the fulfilment of His commandments, that is, the commandments of God, which lead to the Kingdom of Heaven”. “For our conversation is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), as Saint Paul preaches”. And our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples, saying: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21, KJV).

According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Christ’s words, “And I will manifest myself to him,” refer to the vision of God, which is granted to those who are pure in heart. Christ shines forth through the Holy Spirit to these pure ones. “For I will manifest myself to him,” says the Lord. The pure, that is, those who are cleansed, will experience the vision of God. Christ shines in them through the Holy Spirit, manifesting Himself to them.

The most blessed Father Sabbas, through his asceticism, became a participant and sharer in this divine vision, following the pattern of Adam. As Saint Cyril says, Adam was created with the purpose of incorruption and eternal life. His life in the paradise of delight was one of holiness, and his mind was always directed toward the vision of God. His body was in peace and calm, for all impure pleasures were completely subdued. But because Adam fell into sin, human nature became afflicted with the sickness of sin, due to the disobedience of one man, that is, Adam."

From the above, it is clearly demonstrated that Christ, Who says, 'Because I live, ye shall also live' (John 14:19), achieved, after His resurrection from the dead, the restoration of our human nature to what it was from the beginning, thereby proving that man is incorruptible, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria.

In the incorruptibility of the glory of the body of Christ, that is, His Resurrection, our God-bearing Father Sabbas became conformed, for having left this temporal life, he now dwells in eternal life, living with the immortal and ever-living Lord.

Therefore, we, who honour today the sacred memory of our blessed Father Sabbas, let us call upon him, that he, together with the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, may entreat the Lord our God for the salvation of our souls, for peace in our region, and that we may be counted worthy to celebrate the great and ineffable mystery of the divine Providence, the Nativity of our God and Saviour Christ in the Grotto of Bethlehem.

Amen. Many happy returns and blessed Christmas."

After the dismissal, a procession took place three times around the tomb of Saint Sabas. Following this, a monastic meal was offered. His Beatitude blessed the Fathers, who thanked Him for His presence and the blessing of the Divine Liturgy.

As the Patriarch departed, he passed through the Holy Monastery of Abba Theodosios the Coenobiarch, where he was received by the elderly Hegoumen, Archimandrite Hierotheos.

Also, on the same day, the feast of Saint Sabas the Sanctified was celebrated with Vespers and the Blessing of Bread at the chapel of the Holy Monastery Archangels, with the Divine Liturgy led by Archimandrite Claudius, with the help of Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by the nuns of the Patriarchate, with the

prayerful participation of monks and faithful from Jerusalem, as well as those residing in the Holy Monastery of the Archangels, under the hospitality of His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of Lydia, the monastery's Hegoumen.

From the General Secretariat



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