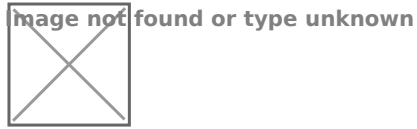


Vatopedi Abbot highlights knowledge of God as Church's greatest gift during Saint Demetrius summer feast in Bucharest



“The greatest gift the Church offers believers is the knowledge of God,” emphasised Archimandrite Ephraim of Vatopedi in his sermon on Sunday at the outdoor altar of Bucharest’s Patriarchal Cathedral.

Abbot Ephraim referenced the words of Jesus Christ on eternal life: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

“When the Saviour and the Holy Fathers speak of knowing God, it does not mean intellectual knowledge or human reasoning, but the true and perfect tasting of His grace,” said Archimandrite Ephraim, abbot of Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos.

A Persecuted Saint

The Vatopedi Abbot reflected on the life of Saint John Chrysostom, whose relic was brought for veneration in Bucharest, recalling that he was persecuted both by Byzantine imperial authorities and, by God’s allowance, by church leadership as well.

“When we read his life, it deeply moves us to see how much he cared about the unity of the Church,” Fr. Ephraim noted.

When Empress Eudoxia exiled Saint John Chrysostom, the bishops who supported him wished to leave the synod. But Saint John advised them:

“If you consider me your spiritual father and truly love me, do not separate from the Holy Synod. I do not want division in the Synod because of me. I only ask that you humbly express your disagreement.”

How the Relic Came to Vatopedi

Archimandrite Ephraim recounted how the revered head of Saint John Chrysostom arrived at Vatopedi Monastery, calling it a blessing alongside the monastery’s other

treasures, such as wonder-working icons and the Belt of the Theotokos.

He shared that Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos had a spiritual connection with Saint Sava of Vatopedi, which led him to develop a deep affection for the monastery. As a gift, the emperor donated 45 Gospel manuscripts, which are still preserved today, along with the skulls of Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Gregory the Theologian.

Archimandrite Ephraim also noted that the revered head of Saint Basil the Great is kept at Great Lavra Monastery, the first in Mount Athos's hierarchy.

Joint Service in Bucharest

Archimandrite Ephraim celebrated alongside Auxiliary Bishops Varlaam of Ploiești, Paisie of Sinaia, and Timotei of Prahova for the Feast of the Translation of Saint Demetrius the New's relics to Bucharest.

This year's pilgrims were able to venerate both the relics of Saint Demetrius and the honourable skull of Saint John Chrysostom, brought from Vatopedi.

Gifts and Thanks

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, Bishop Paisie of Sinaia thanked Archimandrite Ephraim for bringing the relic of Saint John Chrysostom and, on behalf of Patriarch Daniel, presented him with an icon of Saint Demetrius the New.

"This icon symbolises the fraternal bond between the Patriarchal Cathedral and Vatopedi Monastery," Bishop Paisie said, "a sign of shared prayer for peace and for strengthening the faith of the Orthodox people."

Assistant Bishop Timotei of Prahova extended thanks to all those who helped organise this year's pilgrimage.

In turn, Archimandrite Ephraim presented an icon of Saint John Chrysostom to the Patriarchal Cathedral as a token of gratitude, stressing that the Romanian people are beloved by God, referencing the recent canonisations of Romanian saints.

Photo: Basilica.ro / Mircea Florescu

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