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Thessaloniki: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew attends the unveiling of the bust of His Predecessor, Patriarch Joachim III



Referring to the martyric and soteriological character of the Mother Church and to her enduring journey through the centuries, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew spoke during his presiding on Sunday morning, at the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy celebrated at the Church of the Holy Wisdom of God in Thessaloniki.

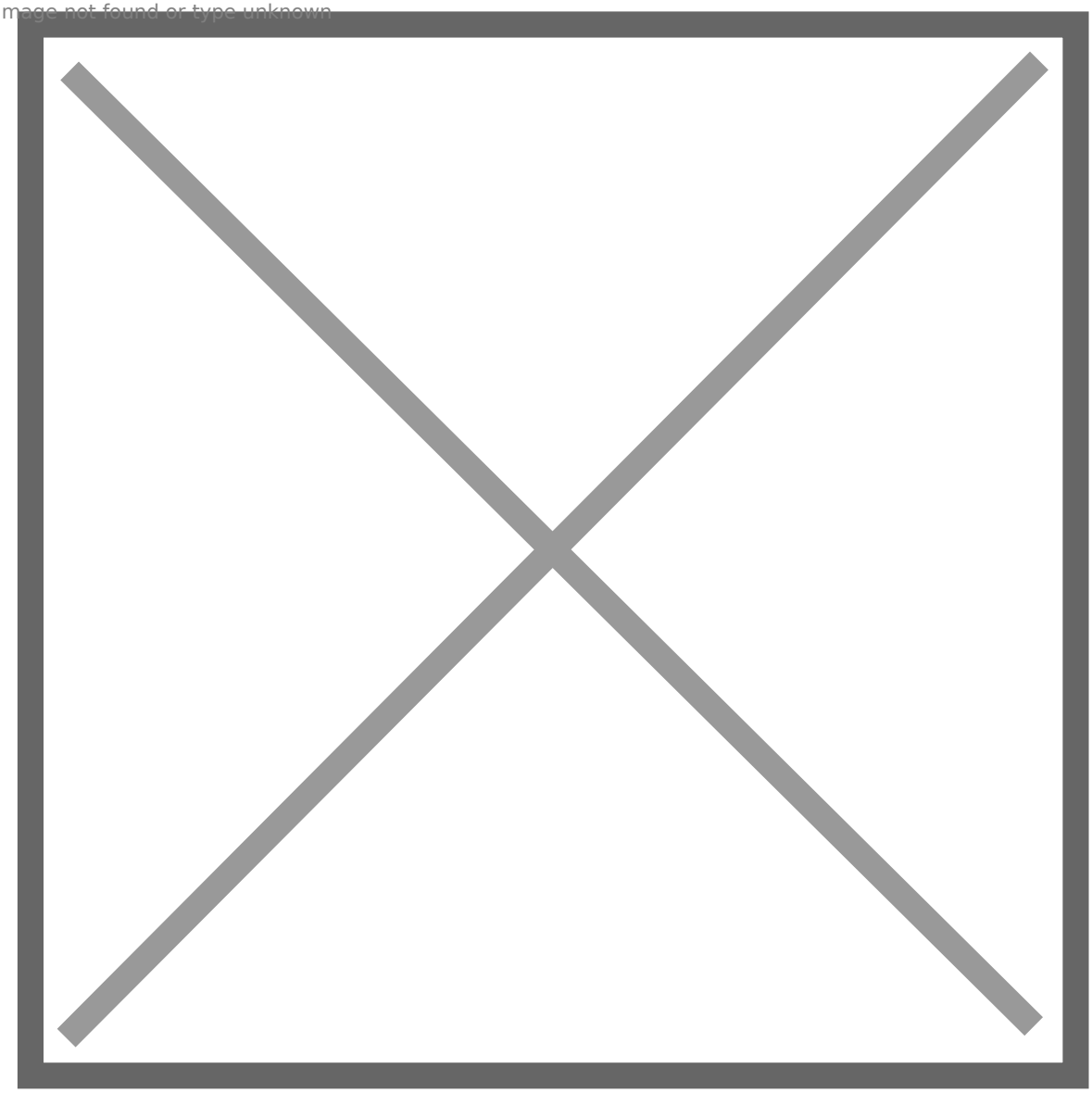
His All-Holiness highlighted the Church's great spiritual and apostolic mission, noting that she "does not merely live from the past, but is inspired by it and bears witness to the Light of Christ, a light that reveals the past, illumines the present, and the future," while also conveying messages related to the liturgical season of the Triodion and the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

"Behold the first lesson of the Holy Triodion: not fasting alone, not achievements alone, but humility. Fasting without repentance degenerates into Pharisaicism… Humility is grace; it is wisdom; it is strength; it is peace."

The Ecumenical Patriarch also referred to historical moments in which the Church upheld the faithful during fluid and perilous times.

“The dissemination of the faith of the Great Church was accomplished as preservation and transformation, not as conquest and subjugation of the Slavic peoples who were brought to Christ. When the Empire falls, the Great Church remains as the ethnarchic force of the Orthodox peoples. Imperial splendour is lost, but the blessing of trial is gained. A mystery it is, how much she wept, how she sang her pain, how she built her homes and her churches, how she organised education, how she struggled…”

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His All-Holiness then offered a heartfelt tribute to his predecessor, Joachim III, whose bust was unveiled later that day at the premises of the Metropolis of Thessaloniki by the Ecumenical Patriarch himself. He emphasised that in difficult

times for the Church, Patriarch Joachim III served the flock in the best possible manner, uniting “theology with practical wisdom, asceticism with pastoral care,” while strengthening education and learning.

“He knew that the Church does not exist in order to dominate, but to serve, as her Lord serves. She does not exist to erect walls, but to open paths of salvation. She does not exist merely to preserve institutions, but to save human persons,” the Ecumenical Patriarch stated, adding:

“The Church does not erect busts in order to glorify individuals. She reminds generations of living examples. In times of confusion, when many seek certainty without truth and peace without God, the figure of Joachim reminds us that only the Wisdom of God builds a house that stands firm.”

His Eminence Metropolitan Philotheos of Thessaloniki, also representing His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece, addressed His All-Holiness, underlining that the Mother Church is characterised by an “ethos of humility and cruciform patience,” which “does not seek human vindication,” but “places unshakable trust in the mercy of God.” He added that even when certain individuals, “with a spirit of Pharisaic self-justification and religious fanaticism”, irrationally attack the Church of Constantinople and its visible expression in the venerable person of Patriarch Bartholomew, the Mother Church remains steadfast.

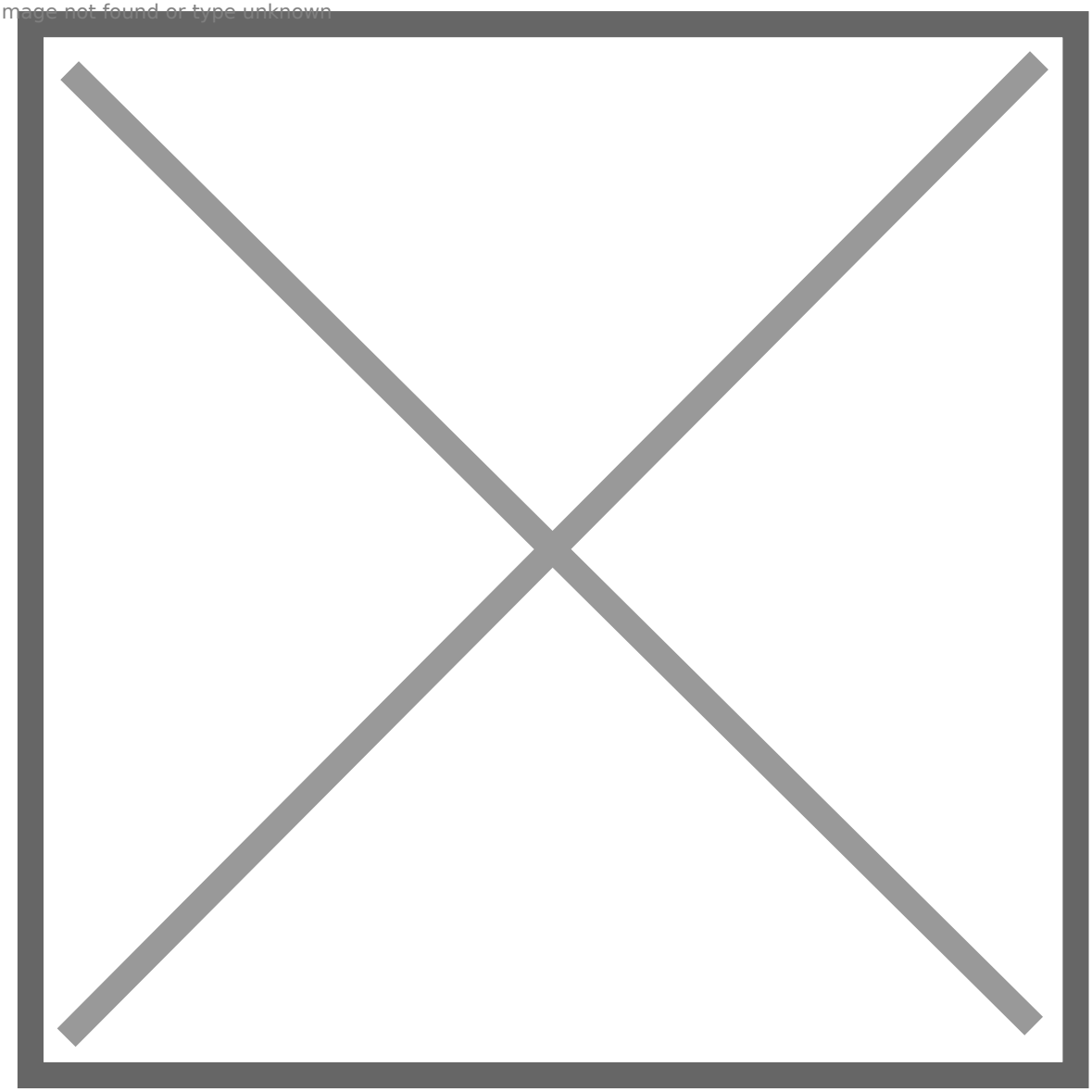
Following the conclusion of the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy, His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew conferred Archonship of the Ecumenical Patriarchate upon the Mayor of Thessaloniki, Stelios Angeloudis, who now joins the ranks of the Brotherhood of Archons of the Ecumenical Throne.

“This is an office I am prepared to serve with all my strength, but above all with respect, humility, devotion, esteem, and love for Your All-Holiness, for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for its national mission, and for the historic legacy it bears,” Mr. Angeloudis stated. He continued:

“Especially at a time when the Throne of Constantinople is once again becoming a target of attacks and the dissemination of false news, we respond with one voice, unity and determination, guided, as the Apostle Andrew teaches, by love, concord, and reconciliation, and firmly condemning the doctrine of ethnophyletism. Above and beyond any slanders, the words of the late Metropolitan John of Pergamon, remain our point of reference and guide: that any weakening of the Ecumenical

Patriarchate, in whatever form it is attempted, constitutes a weakening of the Nation itself.”

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Among those attending the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy were the Leader of the Official Opposition and President of PASOK, Nikos Androulakis; representing the government, the Deputy Minister of the Interior (Macedonia–Thrace) Kostas Gioulekas, the Deputy Minister of Development Stavros Kalafatis, and the Deputy Minister of Education Nikolaos Papaiannis; as well as former Deputy Prime Minister Evangelos Venizelos, Members of Parliament, hierarchs, Athonite fathers, clergy, and a large congregation of faithful.

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