

Heraklion: Celebration of the Anniversary of the Return of the Sacred Skull of the Holy Apostle Titus



With particular splendour, ecclesiastical magnificence, and deep spiritual emotion, the anniversary of the return of the Sacred Skull of the Holy Apostle Titus was celebrated in Heraklion, Crete, during this year's commemorative observance marking sixty years since the historic return of the holy treasure to Crete on 15 May 1966.

The Church of Crete, the Church of the Apostle Titus, offered thanksgiving and glorification to the Triune God for this great ecclesiastical event, which remains indelibly inscribed in the spiritual history of the island and alive within the collective memory of the Cretan people.

At the festal Vespers on Saturday, 16 May, His Eminence Metropolitan Titos of Kydonia and Apokoronas presided, and following the address of His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete, delivered the homily.

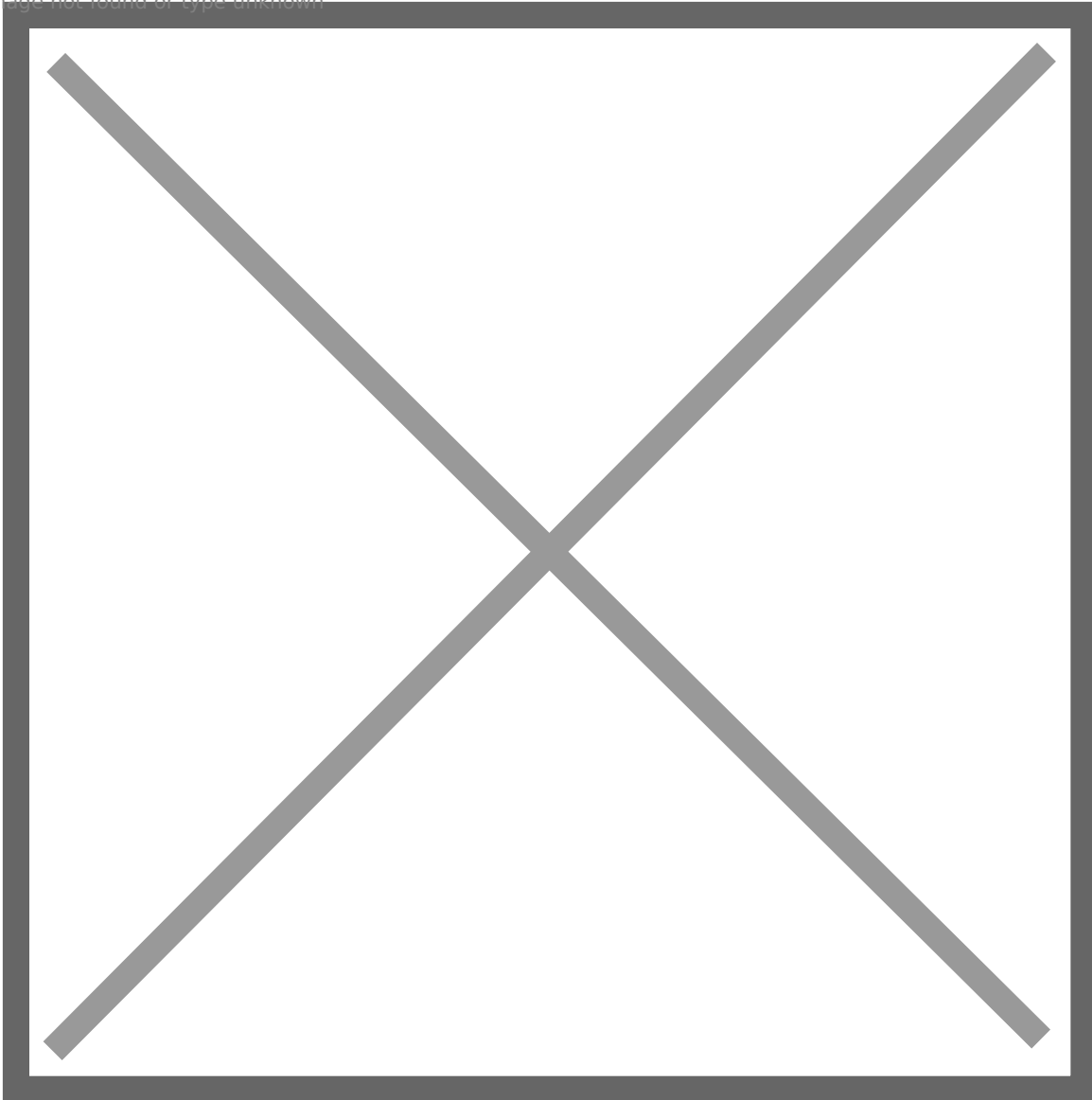
On Sunday, 17 May, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of Petra and Cherronesos presided over Matins, while the concelebrated Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was led by His Eminence Archbishop Evgenios of Crete.

On the afternoon of the same day, the liturgical celebrations reached their culmination with the Festal Vespers, presided over by His Eminence Metropolitan Theodoros of Seleucia. This was followed by the solemn procession of the Sacred Skull of the Holy Apostle Titus, accompanied by the Philharmonic Band of the Municipality of Heraklion and a military honour guard, within an atmosphere of profound reverence and emotion.

Also participating in the sacred services were Their Eminences Metropolitans Arsenios of Austria, Emmanuel of Diospolis, Kyrillos of Ierapytna and Siteia, Prodromos of Rethymnon and Avlopotamos, Ioakeim of Lampi, Syvritos and Sfakia, as well as Their Graces Bishops Paisios of Apameia and Methodios of Knossos. Present also were Protosyncelli of various Holy Metropolises, Abbots of Holy

Monasteries, clergy of the Holy Archdiocese of Crete, and a multitude of faithful.

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Particularly profound spiritual resonance was created by the festal address of Archbishop Evgenios of Crete, who spoke with theological depth and historical awareness about the enduring presence of Saint Titus in the life of the Church and the people of Crete.

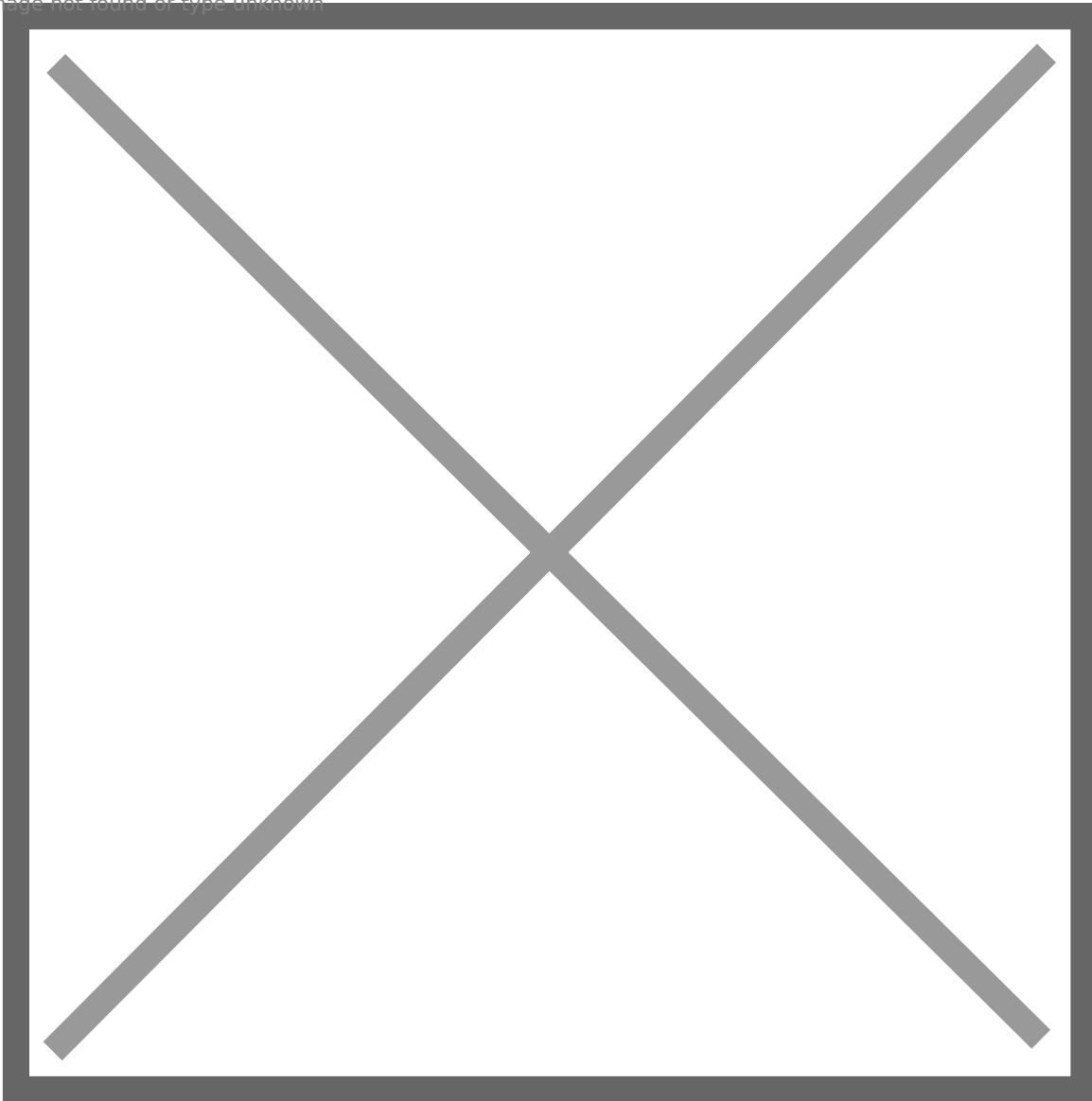
His Eminence described the feast of Saint Titus as a celebration of the whole of Crete, characteristically stating: “When Saint Titus is celebrated, Crete celebrates. The Saint-bearing Crete of the Fathers, the Saints, the Martyrs, the Confessors, and the New Martyrs celebrates.”

At the same time, he underlined that Saint Titus constitutes: “the first golden link in the chain of apostolic succession of the Church of Crete,” while emphasizing that the Saint’s presence remains living and beneficent: “The Saint, enthroned in his

Church, continually blesses our steps and grants peace to our souls.”

With particular emphasis, he referred to the spiritual mission of the Church within the contemporary world, stressing that Saint Titus teaches the ethos of sacrificial love, ministry, faith, and humility: “The person who surpasses the thought of what he will receive from another and reaches the point of how he may give himself to another becomes an image of Christ-like meekness [...] Faith without love is false, and love without faith is transient and fleeting.”

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And further: “Faith is not a painless confession, but a practical expression of the imitation of Christ and His philanthropy.” He also noted that Saint Titus calls humanity to personal transformation and holiness:

“The feast of Saint Titus once again proclaims the new message awaited by our world: our personal calling to holiness.” With paternal concern, he referred to the

challenges of the modern age, underlining: "Today, when the universal problems of wars, hunger, violence, terrorism, ecological destruction, the irrational use of technology, and fanaticism torment humanity, Saint Titus teaches us that we are all jointly responsible and have a duty to cooperate for their healing."

And he added: "Saint Titus teaches us not to fear any danger and never to lose our hope." Particular emotion was caused by his reference to the blessing of the presence of the Sacred Skull of the Saint in Heraklion, and he called upon the faithful to approach the Apostle Titus not merely with honours but above all with the desire to imitate his life: "To honour a Saint means to imitate him; it means striving to become like him."

Concluding his address, he stated: "Saint Titus is among the greatest ambassadors of Crete in heaven. Through his intercessions, may the Lord grant us personal sanctification and the joy of His Kingdom."

Archbishop Evgenios gratefully commemorated the great ecclesiastical and historical figures associated with the return of the Sacred Skull in 1966: Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of blessed memory, the late Archbishop Evgenios I of Crete, Pope Paul VI of Rome, and the Patriarch of Venice Cardinal Urbani, together with all those who contributed decisively to the return of the sacred relic to Crete during a period of historic ecclesiastical rapprochement and reconciliation.

Finally, he expressed warm thanks to all the Hierarchs who honoured the celebrations with their presence and participation, to the clergy of the Holy Archdiocese, to the representative of the Roman Catholic Church, to the Regional Governor of Crete Mr Stavros Arnaoutakis, the Mayor of Heraklion Mr Alexios Kalokairinos, the Philharmonic Band of the Municipality of Heraklion, the military honour guard accompanying the procession, and the Hnaris family for their generous contribution through the participation of students from their school dressed in traditional Cretan costumes, who accompanied the sacred procession. He also thanked the Deputy Regional Governors of Crete and all the faithful people who, through their massive and reverent presence, once again demonstrated their love and respect for the First Bishop and Protector of the Church of Crete.

Within the framework of the sixtieth anniversary celebrations of the return of the Sacred Skull of Saint Titus, he also announced the organisation of events, conferences, and activities to continue until the end of the year.

This year's sixtieth anniversary of the return of the Sacred Skull of Saint Titus once again demonstrated that the Apostle of Crete remains a living spiritual presence in

the life of the island, a beacon of faith, unity, and hope for the younger generations.

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