

Durrës Celebrates Its Patron Saint, Saint Astius



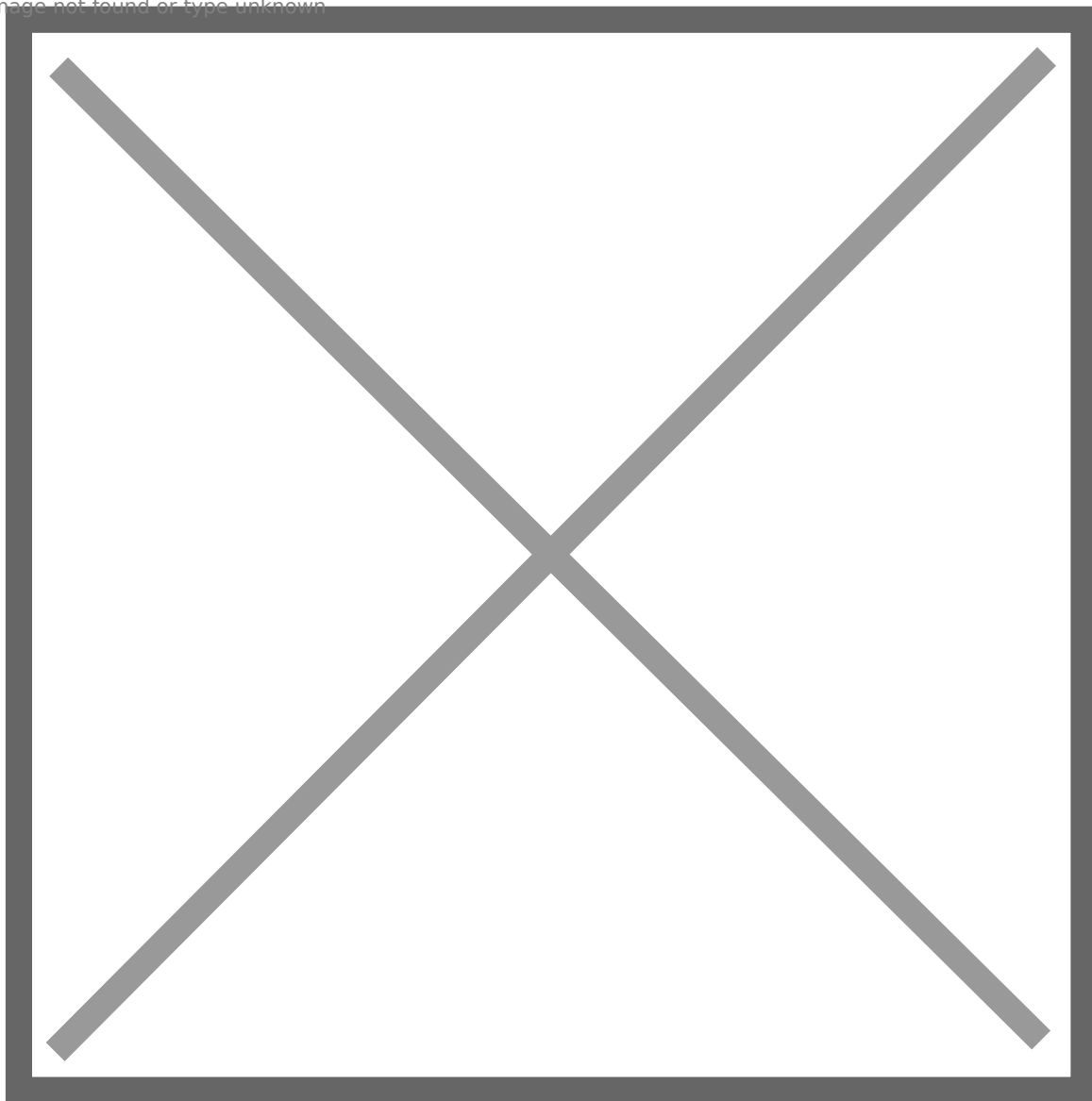
The feast of Saint Astius, the first martyr-bishop and heavenly patron of the city of Durrës, was joyfully celebrated at the city's central church, dedicated to the Holy Apostle Paul and Saint Astius.

This year's celebration was especially significant, as His Beatitude Archbishop Joani of Albania presided over the Matins and the Divine Liturgy, concelebrating with His Grace Bishop Ignatios of Amantia and clergy from Durrës and Tirana.

In his homily, Archbishop Joani reflected on the life and witness of Saint Astius, emphasising that the holy martyrs are the very foundation upon which the Church was built. He reminded the faithful that their blood became the seed through which Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and that their steadfast endurance in the face of persecution bore witness to the power of faith in Christ.

Speaking about the life of Saint Astius, Archbishop Joani recalled that, according to ecclesiastical tradition, the Bishop of Durrës played a decisive role in proclaiming the Gospel throughout the lands of Illyria.

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Although prophetically forewarned of his impending martyrdom, Saint Astius chose not to flee. Instead, he remained with his flock, bearing witness to Christ until his final breath.

The Archbishop described the Saint's inhumane sufferings. After refusing to renounce his faith and worship pagan deities, Saint Astius was crucified and left to suffer beneath the scorching July sun, his body covered with honey until he surrendered his soul to God.

His sacrifice inspired many other Christians, who subsequently suffered martyrdom in the waters of the Adriatic Sea, sealing their faith in Christ with their own blood.

Archbishop Ioan stressed that the Church honours the martyrs not merely as historical heroes, but as witnesses to the Resurrection of Christ. He explained that the joy of the martyrs' feasts springs from the victory of life over death and from

the eternal hope to which they bore witness through their sacrifice.

The Archbishop also focused on the significance of martyrdom in the life of every Christian, noting that today the Christian witness does not necessarily require the shedding of blood, but rather a life lived according to the Gospel.

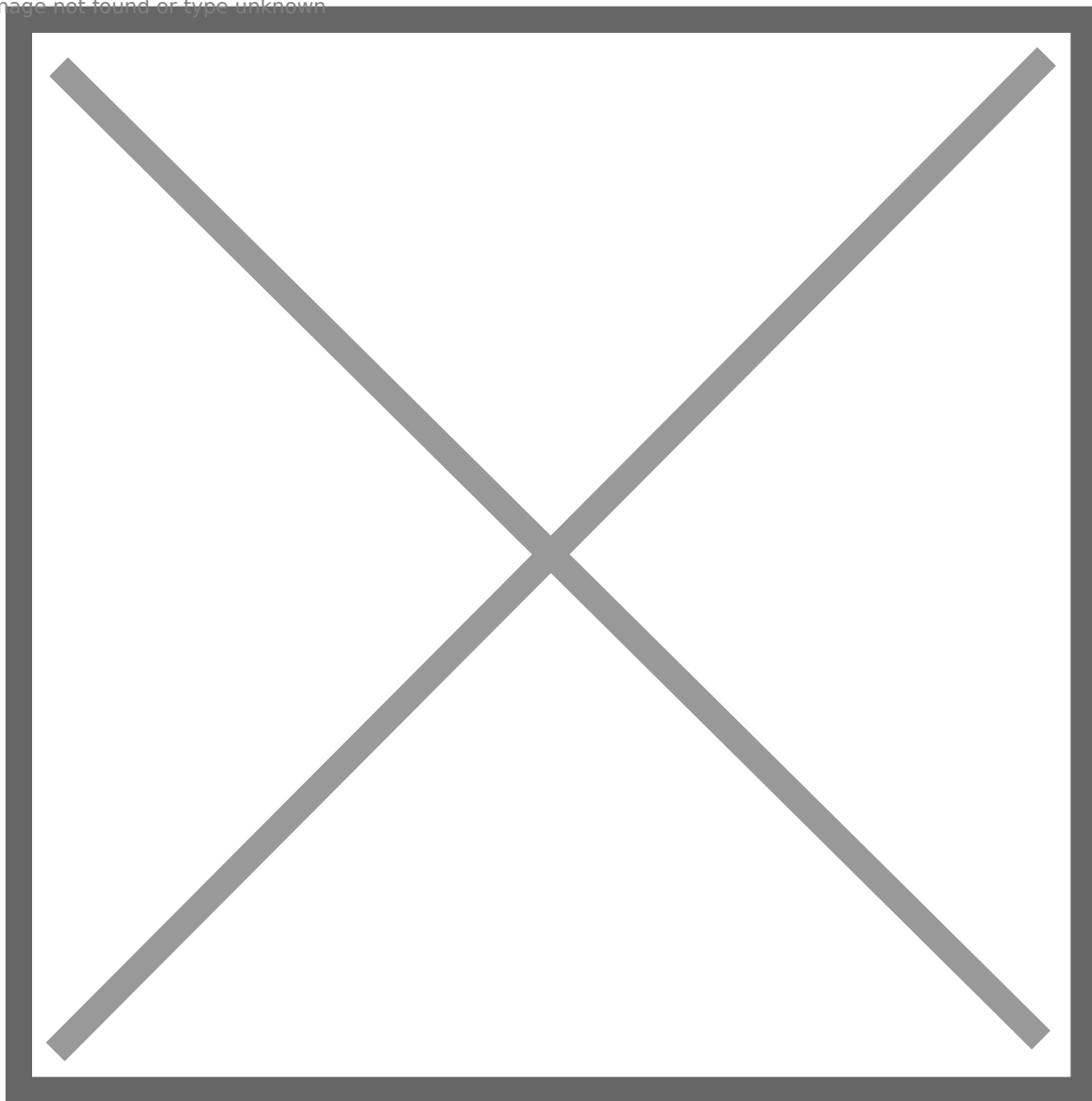
“Whenever a person crucifies the passions, falsehood, slander, envy, hatred and selfishness,” he said, “he becomes a participant in a spiritual martyrdom, putting off the old self in order to be reborn as the new person in Christ.”

He further reminded the faithful that Christians bear witness not only through their words, but above all through the example of their lives, emphasising that the most powerful sermon is one’s personal witness.

Concluding his homily, Archbishop Ioan called upon the faithful to pray to Saint Astius as an intercessor before God for peace, enlightenment and blessing upon the Church, the city of Durrës and the whole country.

Following the Divine Liturgy, a solemn procession with the icon of Saint Astius took place around the church, led by Archbishop Joani of Albania. The procession was accompanied by the Choir of the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Tirana, under the direction of Mr Theodor Peci, which chanted hymns throughout the procession.

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At the conclusion of the celebrations, Fr Gerasimos, on behalf of the clergy and faithful, expressed gratitude to Archbishop Joani for his presence, noting that his participation had brought special joy to the feast of Durrës' patron saint.

A particularly joyful moment followed for Fr Astios Besiri, priest of the Church of the Holy Apostle Paul in Rrushkull, who, on his name day, received from Archbishop Joani of Albania the ecclesiastical dignity of Sakellarios Stavrophoros in recognition of his devoted service and faithful ministry to the Church.

The Archbishop then spent time with the clergy and faithful, sharing with them the joy of this blessed feast day.

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