

“The physical church exists for the sake of the spiritual person: to transform us also into living temples of the All-Holy Spirit”



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew celebrated the Service of Blessing for the opening of the doors (Thyranoixia) of the Church of Saint Haralambos in Bebek, Constantinople, on Sunday, 27 September.

The magnificent historic church was extensively renovated at the initiative of the Parish Committee and through a donation by businessman Byron Nikolaidis, a member of the Greek community originally from Chalcedon.

Attending the service were Their Eminences Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Myra and Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonies, Patriarchal Supervisor of the Bosphorus District; Archons of the Great Church of Christ; Ambassador Konstantinos Koutras, Consul General of Greece in Constantinople; former Minister Georgios Petalotis; and a large number of faithful from Constantinople and abroad. The Deputy Mayor of Beşiktaş, Mr Ömer Rasim Şişman, was also present.

In his address, His All-Holiness referred to the words of the Apostle Paul read on this Sunday, the First Sunday of Luke, that God dwells and walks among His people and that we ourselves are His living temple.

“On this day, on the one hand, we open the doors of this stone-built church of the Holy and Glorious Hieromartyr Haralambos, which since the 19th century has been the centre of the life of the Greek Orthodox Community of Bebek and continues to adorn the European shore of the Bosphorus to this day. On the other hand, we are called to open the doors of our inner temple, our heart, so that the King of Glory may enter: ‘Lift up your gates, O rulers; and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall enter’ (Psalm 23:7).

“The physical church exists for the sake of the spiritual one. The stones and colours, the holy icons and vigil lamps, all the beauty of the house of God, exist to lead us to our encounter with the Mystery, with the living God, and to transform us also into living temples of the All-Holy Spirit.



“For this reason, the Apostle Paul concludes: ‘Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ (2 Cor. 7:1). The church has been renewed; let us also be renewed. The walls have been cleansed, that which was damaged has been restored, and the icons shine once again; let our souls also be cleansed through repentance, let the divine image within us be restored, and let the ‘image’ shine anew so that it may advance towards the ‘likeness’. This is precisely what our Church chants on the feast of a church’s consecration: ‘Be renewed, brethren, and having put off the old man, walk in newness of life.’

“Today’s Gospel reading, with which the reading of the Gospel according to Luke begins in the new ecclesiastical year, also takes us to the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret. Weary fishermen are washing their nets after a fruitless night. The Lord enters Simon’s boat and, ‘sitting down, He taught the multitudes from the boat’ (Luke 5:3). This boat, from which Christ teaches, has always been understood by the Patristic tradition as an image of the Church. And behold, here in the picturesque bay of Bebek, upon the waters of the Bosphorus, this Church of Saint Haralambos is such a boat of Peter, from which the Lord continues to teach, sanctify and gather His people.

“You heard Simon’s response: ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net’ (Luke 5:5). How many nights of

toil and trial, brothers, sisters and children, has the Greek community of Constantinople experienced! How many times has it seemed that our labour remained fruitless, that the nets returned empty, that our people were diminishing and our churches becoming deserted! And yet, at the word of the Lord, we have once again 'let down' the nets. And the Lord, who does not abandon those who place their hope in Him, grants us today a rich catch: the renovation and Thyranoxia of this beautiful church. The number of parishioners in Bebek may be small, indeed very small, but we Orthodox Romioi, particularly in this City, have never evaluated or based our affairs upon numbers, for our history teaches us that 'goodness is not found in quantity, but abundance is found in goodness'."

His All-Holiness then spoke of what Christ expects today from the people of God, while addressing the benefactor of the church and bestowing upon him the praise and approbation of the Mother Church.

"The Lord asks something more of Peter: 'Launch out into the deep' (Luke 5:4). This is also His invitation to us today. A faith that remains on the surface, confined to forms and customs, is not enough. Christ calls us to go into the depths: into the depths of prayer, into the depths of sacramental life, into the depths of love and sacrifice. There, in the depths, the nets are filled.

"And the Evangelist Luke tells us something else that is particularly instructive. When the nets became so full that 'they were breaking', the fishermen 'signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them' (Luke 5:6-7). No one can draw in the blessed catch alone. 'Partners' are needed—co-workers who will hasten to assist. This is precisely what happened here. The work we admire today is the fruit of harmonious cooperation and a common love for the Church of Saint Haralambos and for the Community.

"The Lord sanctifies those who love the beauty of His house; people praise them, thank them and call them blessed; and the Church blesses them and invokes upon them recompense from the Lord, from whom comes every good gift and every perfect gift. The first and principal 'partner' in today's blessed catch is the Honourable and beloved Mr Byron Nikolaidis, a son of Chalcedon and bearer of the nobility and tradition of Romiosyni, through whose generosity this Holy Church was renovated.

"Approximately three years ago, we were together in the Balino Community, where his unstinting generosity renovated the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos more splendidly than ever before. Today, following the Panagia of Balino, it is Saint Haralambos of Bebek. This God-loving and patriotic act is not simply a generous

donation; it is a confession of faith, an act of confidence in the future of our Greek community in the City.



“Without wishing to offend your modesty, beloved Mr Nikolaidis, today we once again bestow upon you the praise and approbation of the Mother Church for your contribution to our affairs, not only in community matters but also in education, through your exemplary programmes for learning the Greek and English languages. We pray that the Lord may richly recompense you and your family, granting you incorruptible things in place of the corruptible, and heavenly things in place of the earthly.”

His All-Holiness subsequently expressed his Patriarchal satisfaction to His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonies, “the beauty-loving Patriarchal Supervisor of the Bosphorus District, for his loving care and vigilant oversight of the renovation works,” as well as to the Parish Committee, under the presidency of Mr Andreas Romvopoulos.

He also thanked “all those who contributed morally and materially, the engineers, craftsmen and workers who laboured with diligence and reverence so that the church might be restored to its former glory. Certainly, in such sacred and God-pleasing works, it is not only the great material contribution that has value, but also the widow’s two mites, provided they are offered with a good disposition.”

Earlier, His All-Holiness was addressed by Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonies,

the President of the Parish Committee, and the benefactor of the church, Mr Nikolaidis.

In commemoration of this festive day for the Community, His All-Holiness symbolically planted an olive tree in the small courtyard of the church and unveiled works.























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