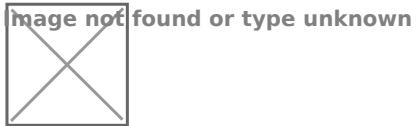


The Icon of Panagia “Axion Esti” from Mt Athos in Athens



Accompanied by members of the holy community of the Monastic State, the official reception of the holy icon of the Panagia “Axion Esti” took place, in the square of the Metropolis of Athens, in the presence of His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and all Greece and representatives of the political and state leadership.

The reception of the icon was attended by all the Hierarchical Commissioners and Secretaries of the Archdiocesan Districts. Afterwards, a Doxology and Holy Supplication Service was held at the Cathedral of Athens, while, according to the program, every morning Matins and the Divine Liturgy and every afternoon Supplication Paraklesis Service will be held. In addition, on Sunday, May 7, Wednesday, May 10 - the day of Mid-Pentecost - and Sunday, May 14, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy will be held.

The transfer of the holy icon, which leaves Mount Athos only on special occasions, was an earlier request of the Archbishop of Athens, to brighten with her presence the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821. However, due to the pandemic, it was not then possible for the Icon to leave the Athonian State.

It is worth mentioning that the Virgin Mary “Axion Esti” is considered the most important relic of Mount Athos and is kept in the holy Church of Protaton, in Karyes, from where she has come out seven times for lay veneration of the faithful and the current one is the eighth.

“The Virgin Mary is present with everyone personally, with our People and all humanity, even when we don’t understand it”

“Today, on the occasion of the arrival of the holy icon of ‘Axion Esti’, we re-submit our hopes, our joys, our pains and our woes to Her, the Panagia. Not to become inactive, indifferent and irresponsible, but, on the contrary, to draw courage and strength. To become more active and decisive, in terms of our concern and care for our fellow man, the world and creation”, emphasised His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos upon the arrival of the holy icon of “Axion Esti” at the Metropolitan

Cathedral of Athens.

He pointed out, in fact, that “the person of the Virgin Mary reminds us all that there is not only the humanity of wars and violence, abuse and criminality, depreciation and exploitation, but also that humanity which, as another precious dough, mysteriously strikes the completion of the world in the Eschaton (End Times) in Christ”.

In more detail, His Beatitude emphasised:

“What would Ancient Greece be without the Parthenon and Democracy?”

What would we understand of the Queen of cities, Constantinople, if Hagia Sophia had not been saved? What would we be today if we had not inherited, from the Roman (Byzantine) Empire, solidarity as the basis of State and church community relations?

Correspondingly, what would we know about Mount Athos if it was not fully identified, inextricably linked, with the honour in the person of the Virgin Mary? An honour, which has been imprinted on the multitude of icons of Mount Athos”, said the Primate of the Church of Greece and added: “However, it is excellently reflected in the well-known sacred image of ‘Axion Esti’, which we humbly stand in front of at this moment. It is a symbolic image. An image that refers us directly to the person of the Virgin Mary.

Because, as Orthodox, we do not identify the person of the Virgin Mary with the wood, with the representation of her form. But the icon, the representation of her sanctified form, reduces our veneration to the very venerable person of the Virgin Mary. A person who is an inexplicable mystery, which surpasses human reason. And it is a great mystery, because in her person the laws of nature were defeated, since the uncontrollable God entered her womb. And all this, thanks to the “Yes” of the Virgin Mary to the Archangel Gabriel. Think, what would be the fate of humanity, if the Virgin Mary had not “lent” her flesh, so that the second person of the Holy Trinity, Christ, could take on the flesh of humanity?

Furthermore, His Beatitude pointed out that “the Virgin Mary is the one who makes the substantial, stable, qualitative difference. She revealed to us what mother and motherhood mean. Human motherhood is identified with exclusivity. Instead, the Virgin Mary offers her only Son, so that the world can be saved. In this way she became the mother of us all. That is why, my brothers, the person of the Virgin Mary is not only identified with the Greek nation exclusively, but is literally identified with the whole human race. Thanks to the “Yes” of the Virgin Mary, the

establishment and foundation of another new humanity begins, as opposed to the intruding humanity that came from the ancient Eve, as she turned towards her own self.

Of a humanity that since then nullifies itself, self-disappears, destroys itself. Who attacks, who insults, who clashes, who subjugates, who exploits, who belittles, who suffers and much more! In the person of the Virgin Mary, however, a new humanity blossomed and arose. A humanity that freely obeys God, that freely sacrifices individual will, that freely acts, that freely loves. Finally, the Virgin Mary revealed to us, from our side, what the mystery of freedom and love will mean."

His Beatitude also emphasised: "We think that freedom is to do what we want. And when we do what we want, we think we are free. But The Panagia did not do what she wanted. He said "Let God's will be done" (Luke 1: 38). Well, the freedom that the Virgin Mary reveals to us lies in humility, in trusting in the will of God.

We live in an age that promotes individuality as an ideal. This results in everyone being able to declare that they are whatever they want. Everything should be fluid! Furthermore, in our time scientific and technological progress is presented as an end in itself. However, it does not provide an answer to the great existential questions of humankind.

Despite the convenience it offers in everyday life, it is of no essential value, as creation is threatened by ecological destruction, by nuclear havoc. The dream of progress and development, however hopeful and attractive it may seem, can never by itself give meaning, perspective to the human being. As long as human freedom and love are understood inwardly, the world will suffer without hope. However, the Virgin Mary, as another beacon, shows us that there is hope. That's why Panagia is "the hope of all".

That is why in every difficult moment, whether as people or as peoples, we place "all our hope" in her. Because She knows what unnecessary pain means. She knows what injustice means unfounded and without an accusation nor support. That is why it is the sweetest name on the lips of the believers. And we, today, on the occasion of the arrival of the holy icon of "Axion Esti", we submit our hopes, our joys, our pains and our woes to her again. Not to become inactive, indifferent and irresponsible, but, on the contrary, to draw courage and strength. To become more active and decisive, in terms of our interest and care for our fellow man, the world and creation".

In conclusion, Archbishop Ieronymos noted:

"Holy Chief Superintendent, (The head of the Mount Athos Supervisory Committee)

For this opportunity of replenishment, feedback, reflection, and vigilance, which you have given to all of us, clergy and laity, we thank you personally, the members of the Holy Supervisory Council of Mount Athos and through you all the Abbots of the Holy Monasteries of Mount Athos.

On Mount Athos, where the person of the Virgin dominates, as a symbol of another way of life. "A life that does not lead to death but to true life, to eternal life". The person of the Virgin Mary reminds us all that there is not only the humanity of wars and violence, abuse and criminality, underestimation and exploitation, but also that humanity which, as another precious leaven, mysteriously works the completion of the world in the eschaton in Christ.

With these few thoughts, I hinted at some aspects of the mystery of the Virgin Mary. In closing, I want to thank all those who contributed, institutions and persons, to the arrival of the icon of the Virgin Mary of "Axion Esti". I am sure that the Virgin Mary is present with everyone personally, with our people and with all humanity, even when we don't understand it".

Then, the Chief Superintendent Geronda Christophoros of the Lavra Monastery responded to His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos.

