

**Address of the Very Rev. Grand Chancellor Theodoros at the Holy
Temple Feast Celebrations of St. George at Edirnekapi,
Centre of the Georgian-speaking Community in Istanbul**
Friday, 6 May 2022

Your Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Bursa,
Your Grace Bishop Adrianos of Halicarnassus,
Very Reverend Father Ilia,
Reverend Fathers,
Mr. Consul General of Ukraine in Istanbul,
Mr. Consul of Georgia in Istanbul,
Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

*Χριστός Ανέστη! Kriste Aghdga! Khristos Voskres! Christ is Risen! İsa
Dirildi!*

During these Resurrectional and festive days, with the blessing of His All-Holiness, our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, I have the honour to address you today as we commemorate the memory, according to the Julian Calendar, of the Holy and Great Martyr George the Trophy-bearer, the Patron Saint of your Holy Temple here at Edirnekapi. As you know well, a few years ago, His All-Holiness provided this beautiful, historical, and recently restored Temple to be the spiritual home of the Georgian-speaking Orthodox Christians in our City. It is not unintentional that this Holy Temple – now a landmark and cultural centre for the wider Georgian community – has been provided for your spiritual needs.

The Holy and Great Martyr George is a widely celebrated saint for all Orthodox Christians, regardless of ethnic origin or geographic location. We note that Georgians venerate him in a particular way, regarding him as the country's patron saint and depicting the traditional image of the saint on the state's coat of arms. Saint George's links to Georgia are also fortified in the person of another important saint, Saint Nino, the Enlightener of Georgia and Equal-to-the-Apostles. She partly encouraged the growth of Christianity by spreading the story and life of Saint George. Saint Nino, originating in Cappadocia and arriving in Iberia via Constantinople, and Saint George, also from Cappadocia, were cousins and embody the deep ties and centuries-old bonds between our Churches and peoples.

Referring to today's feast day, Saint George – one of the best-known Christian martyrs and saints – was born in the second half of the third century A.D. to affluent Christian parents. Regularly depicted in icons in his military uniform, he joined the Roman army at a young age, during the reign of Diocletian, a fierce opponent and persecutor of Christianity. The emperor, who ordered the destruction of all Christian places of worship and copies of the Holy Scriptures, condemned all Christians to death if they did not renounce their faith and Christ, yet Saint George refused.

According to legend, the martyr went through many tortures, he was tied to a wheel and boiled in lime, but during each torment he endured the saint prayed, his Saviour strengthened him, and he was

miraculously healed. Ultimately, however, during the Great Persecution, on April 23rd, 303 A.D., at the city walls of Nicomedia – the site of modern-day Izmit – Saint George was beheaded at the age of thirty. During the reign of the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great, the martyr's relics were transferred to a newly constructed temple built in his honour in the city of Lydda, now Lod, Israel, where his relics are still venerated today. For these reasons, Saint George remains a timeless example for all Christians through his invincible faith and dedication to Christ.

Celebrating this saint on this important day, your Temple's feast day, I convey to you all the Paschal greetings, prayers, and blessings of the Archbishop of Constantinople, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, under whose spiritual leadership and canonical protection we all find refuge and safety. As has been said previously, our Patriarch and our Patriarchate are entirely interested in providing moral support and ensuring the spiritual care of the believers from various Orthodox countries in Istanbul and Turkey. For this reason, the Holy and Great Church of Christ has, according to Canon Law – avoiding ethnophyletism and thus ensuring the unity of Orthodox Christians in our country – provided Holy Temples and ordained and welcomed clergymen to serve Georgian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, and Greek-speakers, celebrating the liturgical rites and sacraments according to their traditions and in their languages.

Indeed, after the countless number of natives of Asia Minor were forced to leave throughout the past decades for a myriad of reasons,

migration to this country from neighbouring Orthodox countries has provided a new pastoral purpose and *raison d'être* for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, making it genuinely ecumenical within the confines of this state. For this reason, out of his paternal concern and love, His All-Holiness actively sought to find a priest to serve the Georgian-speaking faithful under the care of our Martyric Centre and ordained Father Ilia to the priesthood almost two years ago.

It is also worth noting that our Patriarch, always concerned about the beloved and God-fearing Georgian faithful, has a special place in his heart for you. Involved in the process that led to the Patriarchal and Synodal Tomos of Autocephaly and the Patriarchal status to the Orthodox Church of Georgia in 1990, it is worth noting that Patriarch Bartholomew has a special relationship – a spiritual brotherhood – with His Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia of Georgia for many years.

His All-Holiness has visited Georgia numerous times before and after becoming Ecumenical Patriarch – for the last time in 2013 – while His Beatitude also visited the Phanar ten years ago for Patriarch Bartholomew's twentieth anniversary as Ecumenical Patriarch. These peaceful visits are a clear manifestation of their proximity and tangible signs of mutual support. It is worth noting that Patriarch Ilia – in his congratulatory letter to His All-Holiness for his 30th anniversary as Ecumenical Patriarch – acknowledging the responsibilities of the First Throne of Orthodoxy, recognized our Patriarch's continual support of the Church of Georgia and expressed his hope for the deepening of our

fraternal relations. On his part, His All-Holiness' love and respect for His Beatitude is part of the reason why he bestowed the name Ilia to your parish priest at his ordination as a way to honour Patriarch Ilia.

Father Ilia, an Archimandrite of the Ecumenical Throne, in his two years with us here, has proven to be a faithful pastor and hard worker, dedicated to the ethos and mission of the Holy and Great Church of Christ. First and foremost, serving this community here, under the supervision of His All-Holiness, His Grace Bishop Adrianos of Halicarnassus – Hierarchical Administrator for the District of the Phanar-Golden Horn – and the Grand Chancellery, always in constant coordination with them, Father Ilia administers your spiritual needs, encourages education and ministers to those ill in hospitals and those incarcerated in prisons. Furthermore, implementing the mandate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Father Ilia also regularly travels to Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, and Trabzon to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and provide pastoral care for the Georgian-speaking Orthodox Christians in those cities.

Paying attention to the ongoing current events across the Black Sea, we reiterate His All-Holiness' support for the ecclesiastical independence of the Orthodox Church in Georgia within the internationally recognized territory of Georgia. For a similar reason, our Patriarch, in coordination with the Holy and Sacred Synod, studied the requests by Ukrainian clerics, laypeople and the state, and issued the Tomos of Autocephaly to the pious people of Ukraine and its Church. Nevertheless, the current

situation brings much pain to us, and we pray unceasingly that common sense and peace will prevail as soon as possible.

Conveying to you the love and benedictions of His All-Holiness once again and recognizing the presence of the Honourable Consul General of Ukraine and the Consul of Georgia, the Venerable Athonite Hieromonks, the students of the Athoniada Ecclesiastical Academy and pilgrims from the Metropolis of Bursa, I would also like to thank His Grace Bishop Adrianos of Halicarnassus, Father Ilia and the Community Council for extending to us an invitation to celebrate your Temple Feast Day with you and to all of the parishioners of this community for your generous hospitality and your warm welcome. Also, noting that today is Father Ilia's birthday, I would like to extend my sincerest greetings for a happy birthday and that God will grant you many more blessed years!

Peace be with you all!