

## **Interruption of the Christmas Divine Liturgy in the occupied Rizokarpaso,**

### **Cyprus the 25<sup>th</sup> of December**

In December 2010 the Turkish occupying regime violated the Religious Rights of the Greek-Cypriots and specifically of the enclaved ones. Until December 2010 the status for celebrating services for the priest of the enclaved Greek Cypriots was the one of celebrating any kind of service without permission from the illegal Turkish regime. For the rest of the priests that had the will to celebrate the Holy Liturgy or another kind of Christian Service, they should firstly take permission from the illegal authorities, while being aware that nothing ensured them that the service would take place, as happened with the Bishop of Karpasia Christoforos on November 2010 at the Holy Monastery of Apostle Andreas.

As mentioned above in December 2010 and specifically during the Divine Liturgy of Christmas the occupying army interrupted and cancelled the celebration. The priest of the enclaved Greek-Cypriots f. Zacharias Georgiou was forced to take of his liturgical vestments while at the same time the faithful were forced to abound the Church which afterwards was closed and sealed. They claimed that f. Zacharias Georgiou did not obtain permission from the so called "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" which procedure, since mentioned, is time consuming on the one and on the other f. Zacharias Georgiou never needed permission for celebrating the Divine Liturgy or any kind of service.

After the above facts the occupying forces exhorted a norm under which every kind of Christian service such as Vespers Baptisms were totally prohibited. Those that were interested in celebrating any kind of religious services should obtain permission from the "Eparch" at the village of Trikomo 30 days in advance. As for f. Zacharias Georgiou who is the priest of the enclaved Greek-Cypriots his previous status is no longer ensured and is indeed fragile.

In addition to the above mentioned the Turkish occupying military regime is still forbidding to the Bishop of Karpasia Christoforos to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at any part of the peninsula of Karpasia and despite the presence of f. Zacharias Georgiou who was holding any kind of services until Christmas without permission.

After the above facts took place in December the Turkish occupying regime was denounced by the Republic of Cyprus and the Orthodox Church of Cyprus to the European Forums. In the 2011/2521 (RSP) through a session for "The situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion" the European parliament condemn the tragic events that took place in December in the northern part of Cyprus. The European Parliament stressed that many of its previous resolutions were violated and of course articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union were also violated. Among others the committee stressed that the new restrictions on religious freedom worsen the climate of terror caused by the violated interruption of the service at Saint Synesius Church in Rizokarpaso.

In addition to the European condemn the U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton stressed that "The protection and promotion of religious freedom worldwide, is a priority of the current government of the United States and (therefore) we consider very serious incidents, such as those made at Saint Synesius. This incident is particularly unfortunate given the need that exists for all sites to create a positive and conciliatory communal atmosphere in Cyprus, as part of the ongoing talks to reunify the island."

Alike to the U.S. Secretary of State was the announcement made by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of France through its spokesman who stressed that "France is deeply concerned for the interventions of the military forces which prevented the celebration of the holy mass in the peninsula of Karpasia in the northern part of Cyprus. France urges for respect under any circumstanced of the freedom of religion and belief which includes the freedom to worship as it is defined in Article 18 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights.

After the above statements were made, and especially those of the European Union, the illegal regime exhorted through the so called "Minister of Foreign Affairs" a statement in which is mentioned that the two priests that already serve in the occupied area (f. Zacharias Georgiou and f. Constantinos Papacostas) have the right to preserve their initial status. Regarding the rest of the priest that have the will to hold a service in the occupied area a 10 day in advance permission is needed. The applications are to be made through the UNFICYP to the above mentioned "Ministry".

10/03/2011



The Church of Saint Synesius in Rizokarpaso, Cyprus