

# ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY MYKOLA AZAROV THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UKRAINE AT THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

15 March 2011

“Your Excellency,

Respected Members of the Delegation from Ukraine,

Mr. Ambassador,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we enter the second week of this season of Great Lent, we welcome you, Your Excellency, to the city of Jerusalem, to the Holy Land, and to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. As we do so, we welcome you not simply in your capacity as the Prime Minister of the Ukraine, but as a pilgrim. We welcome also the members of your delegation who are accompanying you. In this respect, your visit here at this time is of crucial importance for both political and religious reasons. We emphasize this because religion lies at the heart of the basis for all that will determine a lasting reconciliation between the communities of this city and region. As you are aware, the Patriarchate, representing as we do the Christian world at large and the Orthodox Church in particular, plays a fundamental role.

We are pleased at your presence also because for centuries the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been the historical, cultural

and spiritual link between the Holy Land and the people of the Ukraine. In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century our predecessors the great Patriarchs Theofanes III and Paisios contributed significantly to the cultural and religious identity of the people of Ukraine in a crucial era in the history and life of your country. This created a unique bond between us that flourishes to this day.

During more recent times of suffering, persecution, war and difficulty, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has continued to be a spiritual consolation to the Ukrainian people. In our own day we are thankful to God for opening the doors to thousands of pilgrims from the Ukraine each year to the Holy Land, where we are pleased to accommodate them in the life of the Mother Church. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the spiritual source for all Ukrainians who come here as pilgrims or to live among us, and we rejoice in the diversity in unity that their presence among us signifies.

As we welcome you, Your Excellency, and encourage you on your journey, we are pleased to take this opportunity to invest you as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. May this be a sign to all of the historical and spiritual ties between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the people of the Ukraine, as well as of the unity of all our Orthodox faithful that are dispersed in the countries of our Patriarchal jurisdiction,, that is Israel, Palestine, Jordan and even the Emirate of Qatar. This jurisdiction is recognized by the respective political authorities.

In acknowledging your efforts in establishing closer relations with the authorities of our region, we take this opportunity to bestow upon you, Your Excellency, and all the people of the Ukraine, whether dwelling in their homeland or scattered abroad, our Patriarchal blessing and our best wishes for your visit and pilgrimage to the Holy Land”.

**His Beatitude Theophilos III**

# Patriarch of Jerusalem