

HIS BEATITUDE SPEECH OF WELCOME TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

Holy Sepulcher, 2 February 2012

Your Grace, Dear Archbishop Rowan,

Your Eminences,

Dear Bishops,

Beloved Members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre,

Reverend Fathers

"You who were lifted upon the Cross of your own will, O Christ our God, bestow your compassion upon all who are called by your Name".

With these words from the *Kontakion* of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross, we greet you, dear Archbishop Rowan. In this most sacred place, where "for us and for our salvation" Our Lord Jesus Christ gave up his life on the Cross, we welcome you on the occasion of this pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We greet you not as a stranger, but as a member of the Jerusalem Church family. For Jerusalem is our common spiritual home.

As we gather here before the King of Kings to pray for the Christian communities of the Holy Land, on behalf of all, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the concern that you have always shown for the Christians of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Your tremendous endeavors in support of all who call the Holy Land their home are well known by all, and we acknowledge your considerable contribution to peace in this region, and to dialogue among the Abrahamic faiths.

We are pleased that your visit is being carried out as a pilgrimage, and we appreciate your concern to listen and to understand. The posture of discernment is a great spiritual practice about which the hermit fathers have so much to say, and it is grounded in the virtue of humility. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov, whom you revere, once said, "let us love humility and we shall see the glory of God."

Someone once asked a Desert Father, "How can I find God," to which the holy monk replied, "In fasting, in watching, in labours, in devotion, and, above all, in discernment," Discernment and humility remind us that we are intimately related to each other, and that our common humanity is gathered up in our common human destiny. All this is known to you, for you are inspired by Saint Anthony, whom you have quoted, and who said, "Our life and our death are with our neighbour".

We, the Heads of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land, commit ourselves to join with you in our commitment together on behalf of the Christian communities of this region, for we know that the well-being of the Holy Land depends in no small measure on the well-being of the historic Christian presence here.

We Christians here welcome the brotherly support of fellow Christians around the world, for this is a support not only for Christians alone, but for our sisters and brothers who make up the Abrahamic landscape of Jerusalem. We have a moral obligation from God to be the messengers of the incarnate Love of God and to be the light of reconciliation and peace. As Our Lord said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God", Matt 5:16.

Needless to say, the world looks to Jerusalem in hope, for Jerusalem is a reminder to us of the eschaton. This is why Jerusalem is considered the beacon of hope and peace, of justice and genuine co-existence.

In our turn, we take this blessed opportunity to assure you of our love and prayers for your own ministry, especially in these challenging and complex times.

May God richly bless your pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and may God hear the prayers we offer here for the well-being of all in our beloved Middle East.

No longer does the angel's fiery sword guard the gate of Paradise, for the Tree of the Cross has extinguished it wonderfully. The power of death has been broken, the victory of Hades wiped out, and you, my Saviour, have arisen and called out to those bound in Hades, "Come now and enter into heaven." (Kontakion for the Sunday of the Holy Cross).

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.