

# AN ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE “ARCHONS” OF THE ECUMENICAL THRONE ON THE OCCASION OF THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

Holy City of Jerusalem, 22 May 2012

Dear Father Alex,

Beloved Brothers who serve the Great Church as Archons,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Christ is risen!

With the joyful greeting of Pascha we welcome you to the Holy Land and to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the mother of all the Churches. The Brotherhood of the Holy Tomb is indeed glad to have you among us during your pilgrimage to the Holy Places.

We know of the important work that the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle does in support of the life of the church in general, and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in particular. The Hellenic community of the United States plays a singular and noteworthy role in sustaining the life of the Church of Constantinople, and also in helping to maintain a strong Christian presence in the Middle East. The Rum Orthodox Church is the longest continuous religious institution in this region, and we are united in faith, in heritage, and in witness.

We commend the special relationship that you have with the Ecumenical Throne, and we wish to send through you our love

and fraternal greetings to our beloved brother and concelebrant in the Lord. His All Holiness Bartholomew I. In his patriarchal ministry he bears many burdens, but he does not bear them alone. He bears them with the support and devotion of Orthodox Christians everywhere.

We also wish to acknowledge the ministry of Father Alex. We know of his assiduous and energetic labours, and we are conscious of the help that he is to the Archons in your own mission to ensure religious freedom and the well-being of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

It is precisely in this spirit of ensuring religious freedom for all in every place that we welcome you here. More and more the United States and its citizens, as well as the government, other non-governmental agencies, religious organizations, and informal groups of people, are taking a crucial role in protecting the Christian presence in this region, and promoting peace. At the heart of religious freedom is true symbiosis that is the heart of the Orthodox experience of the peoples of the Middle East over centuries. We welcome the Order of Saint Andrew especially, as well as the American Orthodox community as a whole, to a renewed and vigorous relationship with the Church in the Holy Land. Together there is much that we can accomplish for the common good.

The Holy Places remain at the centre of the living witness of the Church, a witness that is nothing less than the redeeming blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. As you know, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem holds a special place and exercises a unique leadership throughout this region. Christians here look to their fellow Christians in the United States in hope; they have great expectations of their American brothers and sisters, who have given moral and material support in the past, and who continue to do so into the present. We hope that as Archons who understand the precious gift of religious freedom and who know the power of resources to transform lives of individuals and communities you will be a light to your

fellow Christians in the ongoing mission of the Church.

on the occasion of their Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

**His Beatitude**

**THEOPHILOS III**

**Patriarch of Jerusalem**