

ADDRESS AT THE FESTIVE SEASON CELEBRATION OF THE JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 30 January 2012

Mr. Mayor

Esteemed Members of the City Council,

Fellow Leaders of our Religious Communities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this holiday season, our hearts and minds are turned to that great promise that forms the origin of the Abrahamic traditions. This is the promise of peace. Peace is the foundation of the name of Jerusalem itself and the promise of our very destiny as a city.

Peace, we remember, is not simply the absence of conflict. Peace is a dynamic activity on the part of the human community and genuine peace rests on our shared values of mutual respect, justice and sincere co-existence. Without these characteristics, there may be an absence of conflict, but there will be no real peace in the sense that our religious traditions understand that God-given existence for which we were created.

We must not simply pray for peace – the peace of Jerusalem and the peace of our region and our world. We must turn our prayers into action and inhabit peace, a peace that is robust enough to embrace the rich diversity of the human family, a diversity that finds its destiny in our Creator.

Recently we were in London to visit the Hill House International Junior School, where we saw a multi-cultural and

multi-faith community in action. The pupils of the school are taught the values of mutual respect and co-existence from an early age. They learn about each other's faiths, cultures and histories. They form friendships for a lifetime across racial, ethnic and religious lines. They learn what they share a common humanity and a common human destiny that unite them at a deeper level than any differences of gender, religion, national origin or intellectual interest and ability.

It is the vocation of the unique spiritual character of Jerusalem to be the model for all of just this sort of informed, respectful multi-cultural and multi-religious co-existence. In the Greek language there is this splendid word symphonia – a concept of human community in which all our diverse voices are brought together not in cacophony but in harmony for the well-being of all.

In our Christmas and Epiphany feasts we experienced this harmony of diverse voices when we celebrated the epiphany in Jordan river. There were both pilgrims of all nationalities and local faithful as well as members of other faiths from nearby communities. There was a great spirit of joy.

Yet we must re-double our efforts. Of course there will be challenges but these challenges must not discourage us or be an excuse for giving up. Rather they must urge us on to the work before us. This festive season of peace and light is a living reminder also of our responsibility in working to bring genuine peace and symphonia to birth even in Jerusalem, the City of Peace and co-existence.

As the followers of our Abrahamic traditions and as civic and religious leaders, our mission together is to maintain this city as the city for all the spiritual descendants of Abraham. As we do this, we allow the divine light and justice that shine from Jerusalem to be a beacon of living hope to an anguished and hurting world.

As Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly while we wait for adoptions the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:22-23).

May the blessings of this festive season fill our hearts and minds and may God, the Lord of Peace, Light and Justice, give us the courage and wisdom to build a genuine and lasting peace for the sake of our beloved Holy Land and for our whole region of the Middle East.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem