

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR PASCHAL VISIT.

Jerusalem, 22 April 2014

Your Beatitudes, Your Eminences, Your Graces,

Dear Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Reverend Fathers,

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Shine, shine, new Jerusalem! For the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you. Rejoice and be glad, O Sion! And you, All-pure Mother of God, delight in the resurrection of the One to whom you gave birth!

(from The Resurrection Service, the 9th Ode)

With these words of joy from the Resurrection Service, we welcome you to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem as we celebrate the Feast of Feasts. For “this is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it!” (Ps 117:24).

In this year, when Christians of the East and the West celebrate Holy Week and Easter at the same time, we who are the chief shepherds and leaders of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land are given an important opportunity to be witnesses together of the Light that shines in our darkened world from the Most Holy and Life-Giving Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this Light dawned here first of

all, and so made the earthly Jerusalem fully the image of the heavenly Jerusalem. Here the first day of the new Creation dawned upon the world.

The hope that is revealed in Jerusalem on this Paschal Feast is the hope of the world, and the delight of the Mother of God is the delight of humankind. For the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is nothing less than the full restoration of our human nature to the glory which God has intended for us from the beginning. As our Lord Jesus Christ descended into Hades and broke the bonds of death for ever, so he has opened to all the promise of eternity and union with the Father. In the resurrection, the Father makes manifest the promise of the vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

We rejoice today, because our common witness to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was made this year in a spirit of fraternal co-operation between our communities, and such a common witness is of supreme importance. The eyes of all are directed to Jerusalem in this holy season, and millions of people in every country take courage and inspiration from the celebration of the events of our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection in the Holy City. Our first responsibility as the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land is so to live our life here that we may be a beacon of hope, justice, love, and reconciliation to a world in which there is so much despair, evil, hatred, and division.

Even as we celebrate the triumph of life over death in this Easter season, our region remains in a state of tremendous challenge and difficulty. Our Christian communities in the Holy Land depend on us for pastoral care, spiritual nourishment, and attentive encouragement, so that they may know the power of the resurrection in their own lives. We cannot allow any pre-occupation or trivial concern to distract us from this primary religious mission to our people. For the words that Saint Paul addressed to the elders of the Church in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles are addressed also to us:

“Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son” (Acts 20:28).

Needless to say, our pastoral concern extends beyond our own region especially to all those parts of the world where Christians are persecuted for their faith and where religious freedom is denied. The Christian faith respects the dignity of every human person, and so respects the faith of others; Christians should be respected in turn, and we are rightly concerned with those parts of the world, where this does not happen.

We also take this opportunity to pray that the Light that shines from the Tomb of Christ that has spread throughout the streets of Jerusalem and the cities and towns of all our communities in our believed Holy Land may be a light that continues to lead us on the road to peace, so that Christians, Jews, and Muslims may enjoy the fruits of peace, live joyfully together, and be an example of respectful co-existence to the world.

Let us rejoice, therefore, with the Most Holy Mother of God and all the saints today, and with the Church throughout the world, for the glory of the Lord has dawned upon us. Let us take strength from the Light that shines from the Tomb, for this is the Light that has come into the world – the Light that the darkness can never defeat (cf. John 1:4-5).

We thank you for your Paschal Greetings, and we wish you all, and the members of your communities, the abiding peace of this Feast.

O divine, O beloved, O most sweet voice! You, O Christ, have truly promised

that you would be with us to the end of all the ages:

*Therefore, O you faithful, rejoice! For we have Christ's words
as our anchor of hope.*

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem