

HIS BEATITUDE SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE CHRISTMAS VISIT TO THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY

27 December 2014

Dear Father Pizzaballa.

Your Eminences.

Your Graces.

Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities,

With the joy of the angels, we greet you after your celebration of the Feast of the Nativity with the words of one of the great hymns of the Orthodox Church:

*Your birth, O Christ our God,
Has shed the light of knowledge upon the earth.
For by your birth those who adored stars,
Were taught by a star, to worship you,
The Sun of Justice, and to know you,
The Dawn from on high.
O Lord, glory to you,
(Apolytikion of the Nativity)*

The Light that breaks into our darkened world at Christmas is the one, true, uncreated Light, the incarnate Logos, whose birth at Bethlehem signifies the great reconciliation of heaven and earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is at once fully human and fully divine, has bridged the great chasm between

God and humanity for ever.

We have been entrusted with the common mission of serving and guarding the Holy Places, which are both the witness of the Incarnation and the guarantee of our presence in the Holy Land. At this season the eyes of the world are turned to the Holy Land and to the Christian communities here in eagerness and hope. Our joy and responsibility is to keep alive the Gospel of God's love, reconciliation, and peace, and our mission is to keep the Light of Christmas burning brightly both for our local Christian faithful as well as for the whole world. For the One who is the "Sun of Justice and the Dawn from on high" must reach to all humanity, particularly at a time when our region and our world are plunged into terrible difficulty and darkness. And those who bear the name of Christ are persecuted together with their innocent fellow-men.

One of the good signs of hope to the world is the mutual co-operation and mutual understanding that exists between our Fraternities. Those who are entrusted with the care of the Holy Places must exemplify the highest ideals and disciplines of dialogue and an ability to work together for the benefit of all, especially the many thousands of pilgrims who come to us every year for spiritual refreshment.

We know that dialogue and mutual co-operation bear genuine fruits, for we see it here. And we know that such dialogue and mutual co-operation are essential for the benefit of the Holy Places, the maintenance of the Christian character of Jerusalem, and the strengthening of the Christian presence in our region. All of us who have been called to this responsibility of leadership in the Christian communities of the Holy Land must place this work at the forefront of our attention at all times, so that together we may ensure the well-being of all.

The co-operation between our Fraternities bears fruit every

day for the sake of the faithful, and contributed significantly to the great event of reconciliation that occurred last May at the meeting here in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre between His Holiness Pope Francis and His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew.

We pray especially at this Christmas season that this cooperation will grow and deepen. Dialogue has been proven to be the most effective means not just of resolving disputes but of reaching a deeper appreciation of the gifts of our respective communities, establishing agreements, and furthering the work of our common mission in ensuring that Jerusalem and the Holy Land continue to be a beacon of hope for the world.

We wish you, dear Father Pizzaballa, the Franciscan Fraternity, and all your people, a very happy and holy Christmas and a peaceful New Year, May Cod bless you.

Thank you.

His Beatitude
THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem