

PASCHAL GREETINGS TO THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND IN CELEBRATION OF EASTER.

14 April 2015

Your Beatitude,

Your Excellency, Father Pierbattista,

Your Eminences,

Dear Fathers,

Beloved Members of our respective Brotherhoods.

We greet you, dear brothers, in this Easter Week, as you celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection with your communities in the Holy Land, with the stirring words of the great hymn by Saint John Damascene:

The day of resurrection! Earth tell it out abroad

The Passover of gladness, the Passover of God.

From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky,

Our Christ hath brought us over, with hymns of victory.

The victory of God destroying death by raising our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is made plain in that uncreated Light, that shines even now from the Holy Tomb. This Light enlightens all in that faith that "is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen", (Heb. 11:1).

As we greet you for your celebration of Easter, we rejoice in the excellent co-operation that continues to characterize our common mission to guard and serve the Holy Places. In our Easter faith, we derive the strength and conviction to deepen our mutual relationship of good will that we must maintain not just for ourselves, but for the sake of the well-being of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East and all those who come to us every year on pilgrimage from around the world.

We continue to face many challenges together, not the least of which remains the on-going concern that we all have about access to the Holy Places, especially at the time of the great feasts. There is also the matter of the inappropriate intervention in the life of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher by external authorities that can only but raise serious questions for us.

While we value the support and assistance of others in our mission, we recognize that in the end it is our collective responsibility as the guardians and servants of the Holy Places to ensure that the ancient rights and privileges of the Christian community are safe – guarded. There can be no intrusion into responsibilities that are properly ours and that are guaranteed by the Status Quo. It is only by the grace of God that we can do this work together and we commend your commitment, dear brothers of the Franciscan Custody to ensuring that nothing subverts the genuine and proper collaboration between us.

So we rejoice with you today, and we congratulate you as we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. May God

bless you in your common life as a brotherhood and may God
bless all the peoples of our this Holy City of Jerusalem and
our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem