

GREETINGS TO THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES ON THEIR VISIT TO THE PATRIARCHATE ON THE OCCASION OF PASHA

3rd May 2016

Your Beatitudes,

Your Excellencies,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respected Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

Christ is risen!

We welcome you to our Patriarchate with great joy in celebration of the Great Feast of Pascha with words from the Easter liturgy:

Christ is risen from the dead.

Now all things are filled with light;

heaven and earth,

and the nethermost parts of the earth;

let all creation, therefore, celebrate the rising of Christ,

whereby it is strengthened.

The whole world rejoices in the light of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is in this light that we are gathered today. We are pleased that our celebration of Easter falls within the Western season of Eastertide, even though you celebrated the feast some weeks ago.

Our celebration of Easter has followed the recent conference on the situation of the Christian community in the Holy Land that was held in Atlanta in the middle of last month. This conference was a crucial vehicle for enabling the Heads of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land to be united in our mission and moral obligation to keep before the conscience of the world the plight of Christians in the Middle East. Our collective voice on that occasion had a huge impact on the many who were present, in a nation that has a great deal of influence on our region.

As the leaders of the Christian communities in the Holy Land, it is our obligation and our joy to be the guardians and servants of the Holy Places, and especially of this Holy City of Jerusalem. We are all witnesses of the sacred history, and we are aware that we are here not for ourselves alone. We are here to give our witness to the power of the cross of the risen Christ, and the hope that this brings.

As we sing in the Midnight Office before the proclamation of the Resurrection, *you have stretched out your arms and united all that of old was separated, O Saviour... there is none holy beside you.* Here we understand that the cross is the cross not of death and despair, but of hope and new life, for our Lord Jesus Christ has restored the union of heaven and earth, and given eternal life to all. It is for this reason that we can say, *O come, all ye faithful, let us worship Christ's holy Resurrection, for behold, through the Cross joy has come to all the world.* We know this to be true, because especially on Great and Holy Saturday, in the ceremony of the Holy Fire,

Jerusalem celebrates her unique identity as the spiritual home for all humankind, for it gathers everyone.

For this reason we must not lose hope, and must not be afraid. This is our proclamation to a world that is locked in confusion, uncertainty, fear, and violence, in which so many people are displaced from their homes. What world political leaders cannot offer, even with the best of intentions, we dare to say that the Church of Jerusalem does offer. It is therefore not surprising that once again this year we have seen such a large number of pilgrims, from East and West, from near and far, all coming to Jerusalem for the spiritual refreshment that they receive from the holiness of this City and from the sanctified Light that bursts forth from the Tomb.

Let us remain firm in our common spiritual mission, and let us rejoice in the hope that is ours in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, a hope that we proclaim to those near and far.

We take this opportunity to congratulate Archbishop Antonios, the new Archbishop of the Coptic community in Jerusalem, as you celebrate your first Easter in Jerusalem. We hope and pray that the consensus for the restoration of the Sacred Edicule that has taken place between the three communities of the Rum Orthodox, the Franciscans, and the Armenians might be an inspiration for the restoration of the remaining parts of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, especially those that are related to our brethren of the Coptic and Ethiopian communities.

We thank you again for your greetings, and may God bless you and all those who are in your pastoral care throughout our beloved Holy Land.

Christ is risen!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem