THIRD DAY OF PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS' OFFICIAL VISIT TO HUNGARY

On the morning of Wednesday, the 12th/25th of May 2016, Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem visited the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma.

The Patriarch was warmly welcomed by the Abbot, Asztrik Varszegi, and his monastic Brotherhood, bearing the name of St Martin who had lived in the 4^{th} AD.

An interesting discussion then took place on the contribution of monasticism to the Church and on how the people of God is helped by the virtuous example of clerics and monks.

His Beatitude was also informed on the origins of the Monastery, founded in the 11th century in the name of St Martin. The Monastery, which today numbers twenty monks, maintains a High School and Lyceum with three hundred and fifty students on scholarship. It is linked to Jerusalem by the fact that St Stephen the Hungarian had established a guesthouse within it. Also, a monk from the Monastery visited Jerusalem in 1217 whilst its main entrance is dedicated to the Holy Land. During the 16th century, for a period of fifty years, the Monastery closed because of the Turkish conquerors. Today, it maintains relations with the Benedictine Monastery of the Dormition of Theotokos on the hill of St Zion. Both the Ecumenical Patriarch and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow visited the Monastery, the latter whilst being a Metropolitan.

At the meeting, His Beatitude Theophilos expressed joy over visiting Hungary for the second time, whilst praising the country's attitude on the freedom of religion, its support of

Palestinian Christian students, its financial aid for the restoration of the roof of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and its interest in and contribution to the restoration of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre. The Patriarch also spoke of the Patriarchate's work in welcoming thousands of pilgrims independent of nationality, of the missionary interest of the ever-memorable Patriarchs of Jerusalem in Russia and Ukraine, of the Dependency of the Holy Sepulchre in Moscow, the initiative to demine the Jordan river area, and the encouragement of pilgrimage tours to the Holy Land, contributing to the spiritual aid of the pilgrims and to the prosperity of Christians in the Middle East, but also of adherents to all religions.

The discussion was followed by a guided tour to the Monastery, and exchange of gifts and wishes for meeting again in Jerusalem.

On the evening of the same day, Patriarch Theophilos met with His Eminence, Cardinal Peter Erdo Esztergom, whom the Patriarch had recently met in the Holy Land. At the meeting, a discussion took place on the refugee problem and the political changes in the Middle East, particularly on how Churches collaborate towards its resolution. It was mutually agreed that it is difficult for Christians to remain in an explosive situation, i.e. in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, and that without the Christian presence in the Middle East the situation in the Holy Land will deteriorate. The Christians' protection is provided by the Holy Shrines. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is another cause of tension, just as the Gaza conflict where the Patriarchate maintains the Tomb of St Porphyrios and a Community.

The Churches of the Middle East engage in action through the Middle East Council of Churches —MECC. Reference was also made on the fact that young people emigrate from Hungary and that the country is faced with problems because of the refugees' transition through its territory.

At the end of the meeting, Patriarch Theophilos offered the Cardinal a mother-of-pearl cross, whilst the Cardinal offered a Hungarian gondola of porcelain. The Patriarch also spoke of the initiative of the Hungarian Parliament to contribute to the restoration project of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre.

This completed the third day of Patriarch Theophilos' visit to Hungary.

From the Secretariat-General

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