

ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE NEW CUSTOS OF THE HOLY LAND.

30 July 2016

Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our respective Brotherhoods,

We greet you with great joy in the name of Christ as you assume your new ministry as Custos of the Holy Land in succession to Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who has recently been appointed the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate by His Holiness Pope Francis. We enjoyed a close and mutually supportive relationship with Father Pierbattista, and we look forward to deepening the relationship between our two Brotherhoods under your spiritual leadership of the Custody.

Our Brotherhoods have been called by Divine Providence to be the guardians and servants of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all the Holy Sites, and to ensure that they remain places of worship and spiritual refreshment that are accessible to all without distinction. With respect to the City of Jerusalem, we work to ensure the integrity of her Christian character. The witness of the three Communities of the Patriarchate, the Custody, and the Armenian Patriarchate, as well as of the other Churches and Christian communities, to this spiritual mission is a sign of hope to a world in darkness, despair, and confusion. We are especially encouraged by the deepening collaboration of the three Communities in our endeavor to

restore the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre, and we hope that this is a fresh beginning of the more extensive work of the general restoration of the Church of the Anastasis.

This project to restore the holiest of sites in the Christian world is of supreme importance not simply for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself and for our Communities, but for all people of good will everywhere, and especially for our troubled region. Here, where the great mystery of our faith, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, occurred, where earth and heaven met, where death was at last trampled down, and where life is promised to all, thousands of pilgrims from every nation around the world come each year, "as the deer who longs for flowing streams" (Ps 41 [42]:1), to be renewed in hope and in faith. Here the uncreated Light shines out to every heart that is open to truth, and here people are able to drink of the deep water brooks of the soul.

Today, more than before, our pastoral mission is of primary importance. For we are called not only to guard and serve the undeniable testimony of our faith, that is, the Holy Places, but to guide and lead our flocks in a part of the world where Christians, together with other innocents, are threatened and where persecution still occurs. We who are the Christian leaders of this Holy Land continue to have a mission of promoting reconciliation and mutual respect between the different religious communities and political entities of our region.

As we congratulate you on your new responsibilities, we welcome you to this unique ministry and we assure you of our prayers for you personally and for your Fraternity. May God grant you the humble spirit and patient endurance of your patron, Saint Francis, and support you through many years of fruitful service.

Please accept this gift as a token of our appreciation and love in Christ.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem