

ADDRESS OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE CEREMONY MARKING THE COMPLETION OF THE RESTORATION PROJECT OF THE SACRED EDICULE

22 March 2017

Your All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,

Your Paternity, Father Francesco,

Your Beatitude, Patriarch Nourhan,

Your Excellency, Archbishop Pierbattista,

Your Excellency, Archbishop Lazzarotto, the Pappal Nuncio,

Beloved Fellow Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land,

Respected Members of the Civic, Governmental, and Diplomatic
Services,

Esteemed Professor Moropoulou and the Members of the
Scientific Team,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Monastics,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather here at the holiest of the Holy Places on this providential occasion, we recall the words of the Psalmist:

How great are your works, O Lord!

(Psalm 95:2)

Let us hear again the account from the Gospel of Saint Matthew:

Joseph took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

(Matthew 27:59-60)

We stand today in this same place. And we give thanks to the Triune God for having given us this opportunity to bring to completion the renovation and conservation of the Sacred Edicule of the Most Holy and Life-Giving Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the first time in over two centuries the Sacred Edicule has been restored for its veneration by the faithful.

We do not simply celebrate the renovation of a structure today. In this holy moment we give our common Christian witness – *our martyria* – to the Gospel of the Resurrection. For this sacred monument, which was hewn in the rock, contained within itself not simply the crucified body of Jesus of Nazareth; it embraced our whole human nature, which was assumed by the Incarnate Divine Logos, who is Christ, the light to the world of hope, love, reconciliation, peace and truth.

We praise the holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ for the co-operation of the three Communities of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, the Franciscan Custody, and the Armenian

Patriarchate, who share the *Diakonia* of this Holy Place. We give thanks also for the common witness that is ours here with our brotherly Christian Communities who also share in worship in this place, as well as our brothers and sisters of the great Abrahamic faiths, many of whom, faithful, come here as pilgrims.

All this is the evidence that this rededication of the Sacred Edicule has an ecumenical significance for the whole human family, for this is a place that brings together peoples of all nations, all ethnicities, and all cultures, and it is an eloquent testimony that we share a common humanity and a common destiny. This restoration of the Sacred Edicule is not only a gift to our Holy Land, but to the whole world.

The unity that is demonstrated in this restoration, must be an inspiration to the peoples of our region, especially in times when our world is experiencing unfathomable difficulties and confusion. And this unity of purpose will be a sign of hope for future generations, who will in their turn, be called upon to give spiritual leadership and guidance. Throughout the ages, the Holy Tomb has been at the heart of Jerusalem's enduring vocation, and we pray that the Sacred Edicule may always give spiritual nourishment to the identity of Jerusalem as the shared home of all humanity.

We take this blessed opportunity to express our thanks to our brothers, His Paternity the Franciscan Custos and His Beatitude the Armenian Patriarch, as well as to His Excellency the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, for the unprecedented fraternal collaboration that has resulted in today's rededication.

We are grateful for the presence among us of His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, and of His Excellency the Prime Minister of Greece, other civic and governmental representatives, and guests from here and around the world, who are with us for this celebration.

We must also thank all those whose financial donations, both large and small, have made this project possible. We would like to mention in particular His Majesty King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who was the first donor to this project, as well as His Excellency, President Mahmoud Abbas. We thank also for their generosity Ms. Mica Ertegun, Mr. Jack Shear, and the World Monuments Fund; Mr. Boris Socol, Mr. Alexander Feldman, Mr. Vadym Nowynskyi, Mr. Igor Alexeevitch Altushkin, Mr. Bashar Masri, and Mr. Issa Audeh. We are deeply grateful to Aegean Airlines for their considerable benefaction.

We also offer our profound gratitude to Professor Moropoulou and her team from the National Technical University of Athens, who undertook this delicate and complicated project, and executed it in a professionally scientific manner.

We wish to express our thanks also to the National Geographic Society for their role in documenting the various stages of the renovation.

May the uncreated Light that shines forth from this Holy Tomb enlighten us all, and may Christ our true God, who is risen from the dead, save us and bring us peace.

Amen.