

H.H. BEATITUDE'S REMARKS TO THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL AT THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE ON THE OCCASION OF EASTER

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

19 April 2017

Your Excellency Mr. President,

Your Excellency, Archbishop Pizzaballa,

Your Excellency, Archbishop Lazzarotto,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Respected Members of the Government and Civil Authorities,

Beloved Monastics,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for us, Mr. President, that you are here with the Christian communities for this celebration of Easter, and in our turn we would like to express our best wishes to you in this season of Passover. Your festive greetings to us are very important, for by your greetings you make clear that Jerusalem is a holy place common to the three monotheistic religions, and that this Holy City of Jerusalem embraces a multi-religious and multi-ethnic mosaic. Your presence among us also

confirms this harmony of our celebrations, especially of Passover and Easter. Jerusalem can be an example to all of harmonious co-existence and a synthesis of traditions and civilizations.

Your visit comes at a time when our region is experiencing despicable acts of violence against the human family and holy places, the latest of which was the heinous attack against our ancient Monastery of Santa Catherina in Sinai. We appreciate your compassion, and your deep respect for human life, which is the image of God, and your sensitivity to human experience.

In these days of our common celebration we see the deep relationship that unites Jews and Christians as the children of Abraham, along with our Muslim sisters and brothers. This coming together of these feasts this year in this way for us all is a wonderful providential sign of hope. This year the entire Christian world celebrates Easter on the same day, and Passover falls over the same time as Holy Week for us all.

We share the same spiritual language, and we celebrate in our feasts the same divine deliverance and salvation, from bondage to freedom. And we understand afresh our common roots in this land that is our shared home and holy to us all.

This is a profound message in a world that is captivated by pride and arrogance, the fruits of which we see in war, persecution, violence, poverty, and other ills in the human family. As we read in the Letter of St. James, "you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil" (James 4:16). We see all around us that human beings have put themselves at the centre of their own little universes, without a care for anyone or anything outside their small circle of concern. Man has, in so many ways, replaced God with himself, and with disastrous consequences both for the individual human person and the whole community.

Here in Jerusalem we have been blessed not to have had any

illusions: here we know that the ultimate criterion is God himself, God the compassionate One. The Holy Land is the embodiment of sacred history that is unfolding before our very eyes on a daily basis, whether we are Jews, Christians, or Muslims. And the Holy Land is a living testimony to the ancient traditions that we live and celebrate as Jews, Christians and Muslims, side by side in this land in which we live together.

In our world of confusion and peril, Jerusalem and the Holy Land are the only place where people can take refuge and be renewed by the light of truth and the spiritual refreshment that comes from contact with our sacred history. This has been clear in these holy days as we have welcomed thousands of pilgrims from East and West.

Jerusalem makes us alert to all this. This is the beauty and uniqueness of the privilege of serving this Holy Land, where we have inherited such a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith environment, and where diversity is part of the integrity of our shared existence. We all have a place, and we have a moral obligation to guard, sustain, and deepen this integrity for the benefit not only of our people, but for the whole of humanity that longs to drink from the deep, clear spiritual waters that well up in this Holy Land.

We would like to take the opportunity of this festive occasion to congratulate you, Mr. President, and to express our gratitude for all that you do to support these truths and values that give purpose to our lives, values that you mentioned, for example in a speech you gave last year honouring Danielle Sonnenfeld:

“Frequently we minimize the power of touch, of a smile, of a good word, and a listening ear, a compliment, or a small act of caring. But all of these have the potential to change lives.”

These words sum up so much of the meaning of this season of deliverance and salvation, and your presence among us at this holy season is a tangible sign of the peace and reconciliation that must always shine from the heart of Jerusalem. We take the opportunity of this blessed occasion to assure you, Mr. President, that we continue to be firm in our commitment to support genuine efforts and work for peace and reconciliation, and we pledge ourselves to this sacred purpose.

May God bless you, Mr. President, your family, the Government, and all the civil authorities, in this joyful season.

Thank you.