

PASCHAL GREETINGS TO THE CUSTOS AND THE FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY OF THE HOLY LAND

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

Your Paternity, Dear Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

As you celebrate the Feast of Feasts, we bring you the warm greetings of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and we remember these words from an Easter hymn:

*Though you descended to the grave, O Immortal One,
yet you destroyed the power of Hades,
and arose a victor, O Christ our God,
calling to the myrrh-bearing women,
Rejoice, and giving peace to your Apostles,
O you who grants resurrection to the Fallen.*

(Kontakion, Plagal of the 4th Tone)

Here we understand that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ brings a new kind of peace – peace especially to the

Apostles. But He also gives a new kind of peace to the world, the peace that comes from the hope of eternal life that is given to us in the uncreated Light that shines from the Holy Tomb.

We rejoice in the peace that comes to us the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that unites us in the common spiritual mission of the Holy Places. Our two Brotherhoods have seen a deepening peace and unity of purpose through the renovation of the Sacred Edicule and now in the face of the new and unprecedented threats against the integrity of the Christian communities of our beloved Holy Land. Once again, we wish to express our appreciation for your ready co-operation with us in all these challenges.

While deeply regrettable, our recent joint decision, along with the Armenian Patriarchate, to close the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in protest to various actions by radical elements in our society, emphasised not just to the authorities here, but to the whole world, our united front. May this new harmony between us, that has been shaped and formed by unforeseen circumstances, lead us to new paths of a deeper union in Christ and mutual trust and regard. As Saint Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Ephesians:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).

Here again we hear of the peace that is the fruit of the resurrection, and which is the gift of Almighty God to the world and especially to his Church. It is our mission so to live in this peace of the resurrection that the world may see and know the saving truth of the Gospel.

May “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,

guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). We assure you, dear Father Francesco, and your Brotherhood and the communities that you serve, of our fervent prayers, and we wish you a joyous and peaceful Paschal Feast.

Christ is risen!

Thank you.