

# PASCHAL GREETINGS TO THE HEADS OF CHURCHES ON THEIR CELEBRATION OF EASTER

10 April 2018

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

Your Beatitudes,

Your Excellences,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

We thank you, dear Friends, for your greetings to us in this joyful Paschal season, and we recall the words of a beautiful Paschal hymn:

*A Pascha of delight...has dawned for us,*

*a Pascha whereon let us embrace one another with joy.*

(From the stichera of Pascha)

We can never forget that joy is at the heart of our Paschal proclamation, a joy that overcomes fear, a joy that mends disunity, a joy that triumphs over death, a joy that brings forth freedom and hope. We must never lose this aspect of our faith, for such joy, the joy that bursts forth from the Empty Tomb, is a sure safeguard against the changes and chances of an uncertain and confused world.

The moral meaning of the freedom we celebrate in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be described in human terms. This divine gift of freedom can only be understood in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is our freedom from the death of corruption, for in this great Pascha we have passed over not just from death to life, but also from slavery to freedom. The Resurrection is the ultimate declaration of the dignity of the human person.

Therefore we hold fast to the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of all joy and of hope, for as Saint Paul reminds us in the First Letter to the Corinthians;

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.*

(1 Cor. 15:17,20)

The Resurrection is at the very heart of our spiritual message of hope. And Jerusalem is the "home of hope" for everyone, precisely because it is here that our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only righteous one, shed his blood, and was raised. As we said in our joint Easter message to the world;

*This is the time where the Christian Family worldwide remembers God's redeeming work in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jerusalem, the City of Hope and the Resurrection, remains a sacred symbol of God's salvation and a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem that is yet to come. In fact, this sacred, communal, and spiritual character of Jerusalem continues to be a beacon for hope, peace, and life for the people of this region and the entire world.*

The Empty Tomb is the undisputed testimony for this.

We who live and minister here, who have the pastoral care of our local Christian communities as well as of countless pilgrims, can never forget this. Nor can we forget the power

of Jerusalem to give hope and spiritual refreshment, particularly in this time, when our region is torn by violence and is experiencing such darkness. For as Saint Paul says, *our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh... but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Eph. 6:12). It is precisely in this spirit of Saint Paul that we have a moral obligation to maintain and sustain the Christian faith of love here in Jerusalem. As our Lord Himself says; *I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!* (John 16:33).

This we do in spite of our weaknesses and failures, for the vocation of Jerusalem comes from God and not from man. Even as we witness renewed violence and unrest in our region, we cannot lose sight of the power of Jerusalem to be a beacon of hope.

So our celebration of the Resurrection is both for our strengthening as well as for the life of the world. This is affirmed by the great influx of pilgrims, both Christians and non-Christians, whom we see in the Holy Land. We can never waiver from this duty and this joy, and we remember the words with which Saint Paul encouraged the Christians at Corinth:

*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

(1 Cor. 15:58)

Let us thank our Lord for giving us this festal opportunity to demonstrate once again our unity in His love and His Resurrection. May God bless our communities, and all the peoples of our beloved Holy City and Holy Land, and may we have the blessed peace of the Paschal Feast.

Christ is risen!

Thank you.