

VISITS OF THE PATRIARCHATE FOR THE EASTER OF THE WESTERN CHURCHES

On Thursday, 26 March/ 8 April 2021, the Patriarchate visited the Western Churches on the occasion of Easter. The Hagiotaphite Brotherhood visited the Franciscan Fraternity in their Monastery the Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

In the first visit, the Hegoumen of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed the Custos of the Holy Land Father Francesco Patton as follows:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

We greet you warmly, Your Paternity, and the members of your Brotherhood and all the communities that you serve as you keep the joyful feast of Easter. As we sing in our Orthodox tradition:

*Come, all who believe in Him, adore Christ's holy
resurrection.*

For, see through the Cross joy has come into the whole world.

Always blessing the Lord, we praise his resurrection.

For He suffered crucifixion and by death has killed death.

(Easter Canon, eighth Ode)

We are keeping the holiest season of the year this year, as

those who have known the particular suffering of the pandemic that has so damaged the economic, social, and religious life of our communities, and that has robbed pilgrims from all over the world of the spiritual refreshment of the Holy Places. For us, this has been a season of trial and difficulty.

We have also experienced worsening attacks by radicals against the Christian presence in the Holy City of Jerusalem and in the region in general.

And so we greet the celebration of Easter this year with special joy, for we can see the possibility more clearly of a post-pandemic world.

As we congratulate you on your celebration of Easter, we look forward to our own celebration. Despite the fact that our Easter celebration does not coincide, for Jerusalem, it is important to maintain the festive spirit of Easter. For Jerusalem, where the very Tomb of Jesus Christ is located, is the true witness and has seen with her own eyes and heard with her own ears our sacred history.

We here in the Holy Land live a unique ecumenical spirit, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a particular example of this, embracing as it does all our communities. In this regard, we wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank you for all that you do to continue and to deepen the path set by your predecessor to ensure the best possible cooperation between our communities and between all the Churches and Christian communities in the Holy Land.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is of universal significance. As an important example, recently we had hoped to welcome His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who desired to make a personal pilgrimage, and we hope that this visit may be re-scheduled soon and take place without hindrance. Here we see the universal mission of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the duty that lies on the

shoulders of all of us to do all in our power to work for “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). In our common mission in the administration of the Holy Places, and especially of the Holy Sepulchre, our excellent and close relationships are of paramount importance; but we must never let go of the ultimate vocation of full and sacramental unity.

We wish you, dear Father Francesco, your Brotherhood, and the communities that you serve, the joy of this Easter Feast. MAY the light of the resurrection enlighten our hearts and minds so that Jerusalem may be a bright beacon of hope for all its inhabitants and all those who love it.

Christ is risen!

Thank you.”

In the second visit, His Beatitude addressed the Latin Patriarch Pierre Battista Pizzaballa as follows:

“Your Beatitude, Dear Archbishop Pizzaballa,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

We greet you, with the Paschal greetings, dear Archbishop Pizzaballa, as you and your communities celebrate Easter. As the hymnographer says:

Come, all peoples, sing praise to Christ and worship Him:

Glorify His resurrection from the dead.

For He is our God, who has freed the universe from the enemy's deceit.

This is the second year in which our communities are keeping the holiest season in a pandemic, and while the situation is

greatly improved for many in our region, the burden of the past year on our people has been great. Our local congregations have suffered terribly, both from the pestilential itself – that is to say, the virus – and from its economic and social consequences. As we all know, there have been no pilgrims for so much of this time, and restrictions on entry to the country are still strict. Many of our communities are still waiting to be vaccinated, and we are still a long way from a return to normal life. All of this is a terrible affliction for our people and a challenge to us.

In addition to the pandemic and its consequences, we have faced ongoing and increasingly worrying attacks by radicals against the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

But even in the face of all these challenges and difficulties, we have hope.

The relationships that we have built and developed over the years are so needed in order to help and protect our communities, the Holy Places, and of course, the special religious Character of Jerusalem. We firmly believe that this achievement is a positive step in furthering our cooperation to attain the full unity of the Churches, which is the will of our Lord Jesus Christ in his prayer to His Father, *that they may all be one* (John 17:21).

We cannot underestimate the crucial importance of this united effort, and we wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank you, Your Beatitude, for your sacrificial leadership and for your tireless work for the sake of Jerusalem. For we are aware of the pastoral challenges that you are facing. We pray to our risen Lord to strengthen you and enlighten you with the light of the resurrection so that you will be able to bear your pastoral mission here in the Holy Land.

Christ is risen!

Thank you.”

From Secretariat-General