

THE VISIT OF THE CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM ON THE OCCASION OF OUR PASCHA

On Wednesday, 14/27 April 2022, Wednesday of the Bright Week, the Churches of Jerusalem visited the Patriarchate on the occasion of our Pascha.

The first to visit the Patriarchate was the Franciscan monks, the custody of the Holy Land, under their Abbot, Fr Francesco Patton, whom His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed as follows:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Beloved members of our respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate and we thank you for your thoughtful and heartfelt Paschal greetings.

We are living at a time when the contrast between the darkness of Good Friday and the light of Easter have never been more apparent to us. On Good Friday we sang these words:

The whole creation was charged in fear,

When it saw you, O Christ,

Hanging on the Cross.

(Good Friday Vespers)

And now we can sing:

Your resurrection, O Christ our Saviour,

Has enlightened the whole world;

And you have restored your own creature.

(Paschal Vespers)

This experience of darkness and light in our liturgy mirrors the experience of darkness and light in our lives and in our world.

The common purpose and efforts in which our Brotherhoods have been engaged in recent years have borne real fruit. In the care of the Holy Places and in the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity, we have accomplished much of importance together. Our united voice and witness have brought to the attention of the world the increasing challenges and threats that we face, and we take the opportunity of this blessed feast to thank you once again for your steadfast commitment to this.

We are fully aware of the realities we are experiencing in this Holy City and our beloved Holy Land. These realities include the increased activity of well-known Israeli radical groups against Christian properties at Jaffa Gate and New Gate. They also include the authorities and many police obstacles that our worshippers have faced in coming to the Holy Fire ceremony. It is incumbent upon us, who have built such an effective partnership, to continue to do our best to encourage the other members of the Christian family here to be drawn into our cooperation. For our best future depends on our deepening cooperation and our clear united witness.

Day by day we must keep our presence in the Holy Land visible, locally, regionally, and internationally. At this time of the year the eyes of the world are on the Holy Land, and what they see when they look at us is crucial. They must understand our common mission as a Christian family here. Therefore, it is time to lay aside matters of pride and triviality for the sake of the greater good and for the sake of protecting the Christian presence in this region.

Pilgrims come here precisely to escape the darkness and difficulty of so much of life around the world. They come here to find comfort in times of fear, peace in times of unrest and violence; spiritual safety in times of worldly danger. They come here from the Good Friday of their daily lives even just for a brief glimpse of the light of the resurrection and the hope that this brings to them. In the Christian family here they must see this same comfort, this same peace, this same spiritual safety, this same light and hope.

As we keep this joyful Eastertide, let us recommit ourselves to this spiritual mission to which the Divine Providence has called us. Let us encourage our brothers and sisters in the Christian family and beyond to join us in this collective witness to the light of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us, as the Liturgy reminds us, lay aside every earthly care, that we may receive the King of all who is risen from the dead, and who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

May God bless you, dear Father Francesco, and your Brotherhood during this glorious season of the Light that shines from the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb, and May God bless all those entrusted in your care.

Christ is risen!

Thank you.”

Then the other local churches visited the Patriarchate, the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem under the Latin Patriarch Pierre Battista Pizzaballa, the Coptic church, the Syriac, Ethiopian, Lutheran and others.

The Latin Patriarch and the other Heads of churches were addressed by His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos as per below:

“Your Beatitude, dear Archbishop Pizzaballa,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you gladly to our Patriarchate, and we thank you for your greetings as we celebrate this Easter feast. Our journey over these last few days has taken us from the darkness and fear of Good Friday to the triumph and joy of Easter Day.

With the Most Holy Mother of God on Good Friday we lamented:

Where, O my Son and God,

are the good tidings of the Annunciation

that Gabriel brought me?

He called you King and God and Son of the Most High;

And now, O my sweet Light,

I behold you naked, wounded, lifeless.

(Good Friday Vespers)

And yet, now we can sing with equal fervour:

Your resurrection, O Christ Saviour,

has enlightened the whole world.

(Paschal Vespers)

We celebrate this Paschal Feast, confident that light has overcome the darkness, and hope has banished fear. This is the heart of the message that the world longs to hear in these times of war and conflict, confusion and distress, instability and dread.

In this Holy City in our beloved Holy Land, we are celebrating this blessed season confronted by certain realities that we must face. These realities include the increased activity of well-known Israeli radical groups against Christian properties at Jaffa Gate and New Gate. They also include the authorities and many police obstacles that our worshippers have faced in coming to the Holy Fire ceremony. Therefore, this is a reminder that we must be ever vigilant in remaining united in our common purpose, if we are to present ourselves, and be seen by others locally, regionally, and internationally, to be a Christian family here. As Saint Paul says, who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:35).

We rejoice in the strength and commitment of the mutual respect and understanding that exist between us, and we take this blessed opportunity, Your Beatitude, to express our gratitude for, and our recognition of, all that you have done and continue to do to ensure the best possible cooperation between our two communities.

We must continue to do all in our power to bring along the other members of our Christian family here into a closer fellowship of purpose and resolve. We must build on the foundation that we share, so that we may be stronger to meet the challenges and difficulties that we are all facing in the current climate. As we read in the First Epistle of Saint Peter, Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves, must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God MAY be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:11).

A world wrapped in fear looks to Jerusalem in hope, especially this season. MAY we, in all that we do, embrace without reserve our common vocation to be a living witness to this hope. MAY we be those who live the light of the resurrection, so that all those who are bound by terror and despair MAY find

here joy, renewal and encouragement.

MAY God bless you, Your Beatitude, your colleagues, and the communities that you serve, and MAY the light that shines from the All-holy Tomb and Life-giving Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ banish all fear and darkness from our minds and hearts.

Christ is risen!

Thank you.”

The Patriarchate returned this visit to the churches celebrating the Feast of Easter on the same date, the Syriacs, and Ethiopians, through His Eminence Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia.

During the Bright Week also, the Communities of the Rum-Orthodox Arab-speaking flock of the Patriarchate visited His Beatitude, for the Feast of Easter.

From Secretariat-General