

EASTER VISITS OF THE WESTERN CHURCHES AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Tuesday morning of the Bright Week, 21 April/ 4 May 2021, the Western Churches of Jerusalem paid their visit to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem on the occasion of our Pascha.

The first visit we received was that of the Monastic Brotherhood of the Franciscans, under the leadership of their Abbot, the Custos Reverend Francesco Patton.

His Beatitude replied to their address with the following:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Beloved members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

Christ is Risen!

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate, dear Father Francesco, and we thank you for your Easter greetings. In this joyful season we recall the words of the hymnographer:

Your resurrection, O Christ our Saviour,

The angels praise with song in heaven.

Grant that we too here on earth

may glorify you with a pure heart.

(The Easter Liturgy)

We give thanks that our communities have been able to celebrate Holy Week and Easter with more openness and fewer restrictions due to the pandemic, and we are especially pleased that so many from our local Christian communities have

been able to participate in services this year. After over a year from the tremendous hardship of the pandemic, this has been so important.

The message of the resurrection has universal significance for all humanity, and this universal significance is embodied in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. No other place of worship in the world bears such meaning and importance for humanity. It is for this reason that we are always very clear about the autonomous status and independence of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Far from being a mere set of rules and expectations, the Status Quo functions precisely to guarantee this independence and identity for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and all the Holy Places. For the Holy Places are not our possessions; we are their stewards, and our stewardship and *Diakonia* are for the sake of the life of the world.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre above all testifies to the special character of Jerusalem, and it is a pledge of Jerusalem as the spiritual home of all people without distinction. One should bear in mind that the celebrations which take place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are unique celebrations that foster the spirit of unity of all the religious communities here.

The important and ongoing cooperation between our Brotherhoods is a most encouraging sign to all those who look to Jerusalem for hope and spiritual refreshment at this Paschal season, and we are grateful to you personally, dear Father Francesco, for your unwavering leadership in maintaining and deepening the cordial relationships between us. In this way, we can accomplish so much for the well-being of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and as we emerge into a new post-pandemic world, our ongoing cooperation will be all the more crucial for the life of our communities.

May God bless you, the members of your Brotherhood, and all those committed to your pastoral care, and may the light of

the Resurrection be your inspiration and encouragement.

Christ is Risen!

Thank you.”

The next visit was from the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, under the Latin Patriarch His Beatitude Pierre Battista Pizzaballa and the Heads of the other Churches.

His Beatitude replied to the Latin Patriarch’s address as per below:

“Your Beatitudes,

Your Excellencies,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate, and we thank you for your Paschal greetings. As we recall the words of an ancient hymn of the early Church:

Lift up your eyes, O Jerusalem, look about you:

see, they come to you,

your children,

like God-kindled stars,

from the west and north,

from sea to east,

praising in you

Christ forever.

(The Easter Canon, Eighth Ode)

Easter is the universal feast, and it is, of course, the feast of feasts for Christianity. And Easter is the feast of the Church of Jerusalem. Easter has cosmic and eternal meaning for all humankind. For the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ gathers up the whole creation in a new life, and none is left in the empty tomb. It is this universal message that we proclaim at Easter, for Christ's death has trampled underfoot the death of corruption. As Saint Paul says, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5).

After more than a year of the pandemic and its economic, social, and moral consequences for our communities in the Holy Land as well as for everyone, it is this message of universal hope and salvation that the world needs to hear from the Holy Land. Just as the Uncreated Light shines forth from the Holy Tomb, so are we all called to shine as lights in the world – a world that is unaware of the invisible powers of darkness that are besting it.

At this holy season in which the peoples of the Holy Land celebrate our most important religious festivals, we look to the new day of a post-pandemic life in which our communities can resume a normal existence and pilgrims may return to the Holy Places for spiritual refreshment.

Our Churches and their leaders have been working tirelessly to secure the vaccine for those who are still awaiting inoculation. In this regard, our mission has become both life-saving and demanding. In the spirit of the words of Saint Paul to Timothy, we are reminded "to fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which we are called and for which we are making a good confession in the presence of many witnesses". Like Timothy, we are charged "to keep the commandments without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:12, 14).

We take this opportunity to express our sympathy and our condolences to all those communities locally and around the world where tragedies have occurred because of the pandemic or because of human accidents and have claimed many lives and left many bereaved.

Even as we look to emerge from this terrible pandemic and its consequences, we must remain firm in our common purpose to do all in our power, both in our respective communities and our shared mission, to ensure the protection of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious landscape of Jerusalem in general and its Christian character in particular. This is why we are called to be vigilant, especially in the face of the rise of radicalism, no matter its source, that is targeting places of worship, including churches, church properties, and places of worship in general. Our presence here is a living witness to the sacred history of this land, a history that is shared by the three Abrahamic faiths, and our mission is to guarantee the freedom of accessibility to the Holy Places, which are signs of hope and sources of spiritual refreshment not just for ourselves, but for all people of goodwill who long to come to this region on pilgrimage.

We take this blessed opportunity to wish you all, and the communities that you serve, the abiding joy of this Paschal feast.

Christ is Risen!

Thank you."

From Secretariat-General