03/04/2024

Paschal greeting visits to the Western Churches in Jerusalem



On Tuesday morning, April 2, the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre led by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, extended their Paschal greetings to the Western Churches in Jerusalem who have celebrated Christ's resurrection on Sunday.

The Jerusalem Patriarchate delegation headed first to the Franciscan brotherhood near the New Gate, where His Paternity Father Francesco Patton, Custodian of the Holy Land, received the Patriarchal delegation and exchanged celebratory speeches.

His Beatitude speech was as follows:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,
Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,
Dear Fathers,

Christ is risen!

We greet you, dear Father Francesco, and your Brotherhood, as you celebrate the Feast of Feasts, and we are mindful of the words of the Paschal Liturgy:

Come, receive the Light that is never overtaken by night,
and glorify Christ, who is risen from the dead.

We keep this holy season of light and life at a time of deep darkness for our region and our world, and yet we do not shy from proclaiming that Christ has “trampled down death by death,” and given new life to the world.

It is our spiritual mission to keep the Light of the Gospel shining even in the most difficult of circumstances and the most hopeless of situations. To this end we are steadfast in proclaiming the message of salvation that is given to us and to all humanity in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. As our Lord has said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live” (John 11:25).

We are also grateful that we remain united in our common conviction as the Churches and Christian Communities of the Holy Land in standing against all forms of violence, in calling for an immediate and sustained ceasefire, the release of the hostages, the guarantee of humanitarian aid, access for doctors and medical personnel, and a fresh commitment to a new path forward for our region that leads us away from prejudice, violence, and war to mutual respect, reconciliation, and peace.

We wish to express our appreciation to you, dear Father Francesco, for your clear commitment to these goals, and we are encouraged by our fraternal co-operation. In the face of such terrible conflict, the readiness of the Churches to join together in a common witness and a common cause is not only a sign of our strength; it is also a visible sign of hope for our peoples in the Holy Land and for all people of good will around the world.

We cannot but mention other challenges that affect our mission. Once again the Israeli municipal authorities are raising the issue of illegal and unfair municipal taxes on church property and even moved to freeze our bank accounts. This would

deprive us of essential resources that enable us to run our church, charitable, educational, and other essential services.

We call on the local authorities to respect our historic and universally-recognised rights, so that we can carry out our spiritual mission without impediment or interference.

We are beset by dangers all around. And yet we are not afraid and we do not give up hope. For we are community that believes in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Saint Paul reminds us, affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom. 5:3-5).

May this joyous feast of Easter be a hopeful time for you and your Brotherhood, and for all our peoples, as we rejoice in the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over sin and death, and may this season bring us a new and tangible path to a lasting peace in our region.

Christ is risen!

Thank you."

Later the delegation headed to the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, where the Brotherhood was received by His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the accompanying Bishops and priests.

Their Beatitudes exchanged Paschal greetings and speeches, highlighting the importance of faith and patience. His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos speech reads as follow:

"Your Beatitude, dear Cardinal Pizzaballa,
Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Dear Fathers,

Christ is risen!

We are pleased to rejoice with you, dear Cardinal Pizzaballa, as you and your

communities celebrate the great feast of Easter. As Saint John of Damascus has written:

Meet it is that the heavens should rejoice,
and that the earth should be glad,
and that the whole world, both visible and invisible,
should keep the feast;
for Christ our everlasting joy has arisen.

(From the Canon of Pascha)

Even in the face of the terrible difficulties that we are facing in our region, we must not let violence and war rob us of the everlasting joy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is precisely this hope that sustains us, our communities, and the world.

The resurrection, by which our Lord Jesus Christ destroyed sin and death, strengthens us in our resolve to be witnesses for peace and reconciliation. We shall not waver in our calls for an immediate sustained ceasefire, the release of hostages, the effective delivery of humanitarian aid, safe access for medical personnel and supplies, and a new resolution to chart a pathway to peace that promises a future for all those who call the Holy Land our home.

These are not vain desires: they are the necessary actions that will restore life and well-being, and they accord with the Scriptures. As we read in the Book of Proverbs, It is honorable to resolve a dispute (Prov. 20:3), and in the First Letter of Saint Peter, we understand that since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, [we must] arm ourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of our time in the flesh no longer by human desires but by the will of God (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

In addition to our united commitment to peace, justice, and reconciliation in the current war, we remain determined to resist the broadening of areas of conflict in our life. As was the case in 2018, so today in the strongest possible terms we are encouraging the authorities not to over-reach their jurisdiction in attempts to impose illegal and unjust municipal taxation on the Churches that contravene our historical and internationally recognized position and rights. To press this matter in the present circumstances would add an unacceptable level of pressure on the Churches at a time when all people of good will in our region must be focused on the rebuilding of our society, its structures, and communities. We also call on the

authorities to refrain from the freezing of all Church assets immediately, so that the Churches can fulfil their mission to serve, to educate, to heal, and to care for those who come to us.

We continue to be grateful to you, Your Beatitude, for your steadfastness in the pastoral care of our communities and for your dedication to our shared efforts within our council of the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches. At no time has our mutual support and alliance been more crucial for the well-bring and future of the Christian presence in the Holy Land. Our co-operation is one of the few signs of hope in our increasingly fractured and disrupted society.

May God strengthen you in your pastoral ministry, and may God sustain us all as we seek to be faithful to our spiritual mission of proclaiming the joy and the hope of the resurrection.

Christ is risen!

Thank you."

Lastly, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem, together with His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina headed to the Mount of Olives to greet Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Holy See.

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