

Sermon of Patriarch John X Sunday Liturgy, Church of the Holy Cross



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Beloved,

" Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong, Let all that you do be done with love" (1 Cor. 16:13-14). With these words, I begin, and with these words, I address our dear children in this cherished homeland. I extend my hand to yours during these delicate times, so that together, we may place our hope in the Almighty Creator, the Father of Lights and God of all consolation, to wipe away every disturbance from our hearts, crown them with His holy hope, and strengthen us to seek a better tomorrow.

We stand on the threshold of a new phase, perceiving the dawn of a homeland we all love and cherish. We are on the brink of renewal, which we desire to be radiant with hope and crowned with light. Here in Damascus, from the Straight Street, from Al-Mariamiyya, the neighbor of the Umayyad Mosque, we declare to the world: as Christians, we are from the soil of Syria and from the Cedars of Lebanon, from the majesty of Qasioun Mountain, the expansiveness of Homs, the legacy of Aleppo, the waterwheels of Hama, and the gushing springs of Idlib, from the sea of Lattakia

and the Euphrates of Deir ez-Zor. We are not guests in this land, nor did we come to this land today or yesterday. We are from the ancient roots of Syria and as old as the jasmine of Damascus. We are from Apostolic Antioch, from this land that has adorned the world with the name of Jesus Christ. We proclaim this and engrave it as a covenant, saying it to our children, to our brothers, to our partners in the homeland, and before our Creator, Who willed that we exist on this earth alongside others, alongside our Muslim brethren, with whom we seek the pleasure of the Lord of the worlds, the Master of heavens and earth. I have said it before, and I repeat it now: “My Muslim brothers, between the ‘we’ and the ‘you,’ the ‘and’ (in Arabic, ‘waw’) falls away, leaving only ‘we you’ and ‘you we.’” Together, we are the bearers of a shared history with all its ups and downs, and our destiny is one.

In Syria, we are in a homeland of national partnership, a partnership that has always been, and will remain, with God’s will, unified—unified by its soil and, above all, by the unity of the hearts of its people, from all spectrums. As Christians, we have extended our hand since the very beginning, and today, we extend it to all components of this nation. We are the sons of Syria—the dream every Syrian aspires to. And the Syria we envision is:

- Syria: A Civil State: A state where all are equal in rights and duties, including the preservation of personal status laws for each of its components.
- Syria: A State of Citizenship: We do not seek our citizenship as a favor from anyone. We are an integral part of this national fabric, a fabric that transcends the logic of majority and minority, adopting instead the logic of role and mission. Just meters away from us stands a church or the home of John of Damascus, who once served at the Umayyad Court. We come from the Church of the Patriarch of Mercy, Gregory Haddad, whose funeral procession was attended by all of Damascus—Muslims and Christians alike.
- Syria: A State of Coexistence and Civil Peace: We extend our hand to everyone, as we have always done, and we call on both the near and the far to safeguard civil peace and national partnership. We urge everyone to look towards a bright future, one that we build together with aspiration, consideration, and hope. We say this not to commend the past but to hope for a promising future. We say this as we embrace the freedom from hearing our church bells, which have always, and will always, resonate alongside the minarets, calling together upon the Most High, seeking and striving to be one heart.
- Syria: A State of Law and Respect for Religions: For how can it be otherwise when all its components are on the same boat, a boat that rejects the logic of protectionism and subjugation. We say this with our eyes fixed on a homeland that enshrines the rule of law, respects religions, and upholds human dignity—the

foundation upon which its honor is built.

- Syria: A State of Respect for Collective and Individual Freedoms: Responsible freedom based on a state of civil institutions that ensures equality for all and calls for the involvement of women and youth in rebuilding Syria. In addition, it ensures that all Syrians are equal in front of the law, and that all of them have the right to participate in political life and hold public posts on the basis of competence without any discrimination.
- Syria: A State of Democracy: A state where sovereignty belongs to the people, the law is the arbiter, and power transitions peacefully.
- Syria: A State of Respect for Human Rights: Ensuring the independence of the judiciary and equal opportunities for all its citizens, emphasizing adherence to international human rights law and rejecting all forms of violence, hate speech, and discrimination.

The ultimate guarantor for achieving all these aspirations is the Constitution. Therefore, the process of drafting the Constitution must be a holistic and inclusive national endeavor.

We must also emphasize that Christians are not to be used as material for media exploitation. It is essential to be mindful of how to handle media and social media platforms, especially regarding the many rumors they spread irresponsibly.

Furthermore, we stress the importance of distinguishing between caution and prudence on one hand and fear on the other. We do not interact with our fellow Syrians in fear, for love is the bond that unites us all. As the Evangelist John says, “perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

As we approach Christmas, the season of the hope brought by the Newborn in a Manger, I ask God to protect Syria and inspire those responsible for its leadership during this phase, for the good of this country and its kind-hearted people who deserve life and see hope reflected in the eyes of their children. From this hope, we look forward today, affirming and keeping in mind that “God is in her midst; she shall not be moved.” Blessed be His name forever. Amen.

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