

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East calls for renewed prayers to establish peace in Syria



The Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, His Beatitude John X, this week issued his New Year's message on the occasion of the advent of 2020, calling on the Church's fathers and faithful to continue to pray incessantly for peace in Syria.

The Church of Antioch and All the East, which is based in Syria, has been sorely tested since the civil war broke out in the Mideast country in 2011, especially in the face of attacks by Islamist terrorists and insurgents.

Churches and chapels have been destroyed, while Christian communities and faithful are among the prime targets of Islamist groups' violence and persecution.

The fate of Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo and Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo Yohanna Ibrahim remains unknown, after the two Church

hierarchs were abducted by armed gunmen near the border with Turkey in April 2013.

Read the full message below:

1/1/2020

Homily of His Beatitude John X for the New Year AD

St Mary's Cathedral- Damascus, January 1, 2020

Beloved ones,

At the beginning of the year, our eyes turn to the Lord of the time, Jesus Christ, who was born in the cave of Bethlehem. Our eyes turn to the Virgin Mary, to that girl who kept all these things in her heart, as the Evangelist says. The eyes of the soul and the body turn to the event of Nativity, to the simplicity of this East that saw its the Savior, the Savior of the world, born in a poor manger, in the darkness of the cave. The eyes of the soul turn towards Joseph the Betrothed, astonished by what was happening. The eyes of the soul go to the group of the earthly shepherds, that hears from the mouths of the angels: Glory be to God on the highest, peace on earth, among men goodwill.

This Savior is born for the salvation of men. The Word of God, who is pre-Eternal, satisfies us for a time start and gives birth to a virgin Mary. And his Nativity brings joy to the entire earth. Jesus Christ the divine fire attracts from the fire of Persia of the hearts of the Magi to worship the Sun of truth and righteousness. His glory overflows to illumine the star, so that it shines and enlighten their journey to the surroundings of the Holy City. The Divine Child preferred to condescend from the heights of his glory, to find warmth in the womb of the pure Virgin, and to lay down in the manger of love. As we celebrate his Nativity every year, we renew the covenant with Him and for Him, to live for his sake and give the entity of our lives the character of his teachings. Hence, we start our new year not by merely remembering his Nativity, two thousand years ago, but by leaving the door of our heart open, so that He may be born in it and breathe His Holy Spirit into our souls.

Christianity in this East and in the world is called to be a lamp of light, at the example of its Master. Christianity has endowed our ancestors with the light of Christ, two thousand years ago. It passed unto us to us and sailed through history, going across two thousand years with the warmth

of the Word and the simplicity of the Spirit. The Bible was written by people who saw the truth and poured their testimony about it on the pages of hearts before writing it on paper. They poured it into the ink of hearts and in their very being before writing with ink on paper in books. As Christians, we are called to preach the good news of salvation through good deeds, through our unity and love for one another. This is what characterized the first Christian community. The Apostles, who were Fishermen, won over the preachers with one saying which is love; this love, this apostolic kindness, and this evangelistic simplicity. This mutual love that emanated from their community was their passport into the hearts of many who did not know Jesus Christ personally. As we say this, we reflect on how his original and pure gospel came down to us two thousand years later. We drank His love and took his character, by being baptized in His name. Baptism is first and foremost a character, a scarf of life and being. It is not just a verbal identity.

Beloved ones,

Today, we pray for the peace of Syria, which we conceive and desire as one united country from its far north to its occupied Golan and from the east to the west. Syria longed for the peace of Bethlehem. She is determined with the efforts of her children to restore peace to every inch of her lands. The desire for life in this country did not and will not die. Syrians have endured displacement, killing, violence, terrorism and other consequences of a war that still has not been extinguished since more than eight years. As Christians, we have also been paid the price with the blood of our children, to keep the lamp of our presence shining in this Levant, and to remain here steadfast in our land. We gave our souls and lifetimes to remain steadfast in this land where God has planted us. We have been planted here from the dawn of Christianity, and we will remain here by God's strength until we reach the dawn of our resurrection to meet His divine glory. The best thing the world should do instead of boasting about the logic of minorities and majorities is to lift the choking economic blockade that targets our country and people from all walks of life, including Syria and Lebanon, and not to take revenge by issuing laws that inconsiderate to the dignities of peoples, as the last "Caesar" law.

We also look, on this blessed day, at the wounded Lebanon, carrying its people, all the Lebanese, in our prayers for the Lord to soothe their suffering and remove from their shoulders the burden of the suffocating economic, financial, political and social crises. Indeed, these crises threaten the unity of its children, its sovereignty and its right to invest in

its national wealth, to inspire its officials to respond to the aspirations its youth, who long for a happy and inclusive country, liberated from the narrow personal political interests, and from the sectarian and confessional restrictions. These have long been an obstacle to Lebanon's progress; they foster major tensions and crises. As we celebrate the feast of St. Basil the Great, the servant of the poor and the needy, we remind ourselves, both the pastors and children of the Church, of the importance of solidarity, synergy and communion, in order to alleviate the pain of the poor and the needy. We also reaffirm the necessity of all collaboration so that Lebanon crosses to the haven of safety and fulfills the aspirations of the Lebanese people for the most basic elements of rule in a country, for relief from economic hardship, for ensuring the necessities of a decent life, condemning corruption and squandering. We also seize the occasion to recall the necessity of condoning controversies and personal interests, in order to accelerate the formation of an exceptional rescue government that would fit in the Lebanese aspirations and the desire of the President of the Republic to fight corruption. It would eventually draw out the country and its children from the current difficulty and develop a plan for progress, a vision for its future and its role in the world.

We pray for everyone in distress. We pray for the displaced, the orphaned and the homeless, for those who were struck by hardships, who yearn for the peace of Nativity. We pray for the kidnapped, all of them, including our two brothers the Bishops of Aleppo, Youhanna Ibrahim, and Paul Yaziji, who are the bleeding wound of the Church of Antioch, kidnapped for nearly seven years now.

Our prayers are lifted from Damascus for the occupied Golan. We pray for our people who remain steadfast in every occupied land. We pray for Palestine and the Palestinian people. We lift our prayers for Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Jerusalem was and will remain the capital of Palestine, the pilgrimage of our hearts as Christians and Muslims to seek the mercies of God, the Father of Lights, Lord of heaven and earth.

We pray for Iraq, for every part of this Levant, and for peace in the whole world.

To our children in the Antioch See at home and abroad, we send the myrrh of love from the manger of love. We send them our apostolic blessing from the Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the founders of the Apostolic See. May God bless you all, and grant you His heavenly blessings.

At the beginning of the new year, we approach the Child of the cave and

contemplate His smiling face amid the joys and sorrows of the world. We look at the One who stays calm in the storms of life. We look at the might of His silence, against which the world is reeling. We look at Him in peace with the heart, and contemplate His Nativity as one choir, and sow the seed of His gospel in our being so that He be born in us. Then, we sing to him with the lips of hearts and mouths:

Give to the Almighty God in the highest eternal praise

Amon men goodwill, and on earth peace

Happy New Year.
