

Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

Easter Message 2008

"In the evening of the first day of the week, Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, "Peace be with you" and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord and again he said to them "Peace be with you."

St. John ch.20 vv 19-21

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Christ is risen!

Many people limit their thoughts on Easter to the empty tomb. How important then, for us to concentrate on the first manifestation which our Lord made to his disciples. There is considerable encouragement to be gained from the fact that the living Christ is greeting his living Church. We do not underestimate the burden of so many of our faithful today from the continuing violence and acts of terrorism that surround them, and of which we all are victims, in the West Bank, in Gaza and in the Israeli society. Nevertheless, the Risen Lord reminds us and tells us that we have a role and we have to change the present situation, through the power and strength which He gives us.

On that first Easter evening it seems obvious that the disciples were full of fear mingled no doubt with doubt and perplexity. So much had happened to make them uncertain of the future and consequently they were afraid. However, in their moment of greatest need Jesus came and stood amongst them. At least they believed that he suddenly appeared to them. Because, since they saw him die on the Cross, they believed that everything had ended and the Master has abandoned them. But, fear, weakness and locked doors could not keep Jesus from his disciples... then or now ! He appeared to them glorious and renewed their faith.

In giving the disciples the conventional greeting "Peace be with you" Jesus is seeking to quieten the hearts of his anxious and troubled disciples. He shows them his hands and his side to convince them of his identity as the one recently crucified. So their fear and doubt are replaced by joy. Today we too, we live in fear and perplexity. We too need to see the Risen Lord, in order to take away perplexity and fear because of all that is happening around us and in us, so to replace our fear and anxiety with peace and joy.

However the message of Easter does not end there. The new joy is a mission which the apostles have to bring to the world. Jesus sent them to the troubled world as a whole in order to bring to every one its joy and peace. So Jesus says: **"As my Father has sent me, even so send I you."** In this way Jesus reveals that his Church is to be the instrument through which his saving power is to be made known to the world as the lives of men and women are challenged to submit to the claims of his Kingdom.

More is revealed as Jesus tells the disciples of the spiritual power which will be given them to

enable them to fulfill their task which he has given them **"He breathed on them and said Receive the Holy Spirit."** In that instance he is preparing them for the forthcoming Pentecost. He also shows them the intimate relationship between himself and the Holy Spirit, sometimes described in the Early Church as "the Spirit of Christ".

Having told the disciples of the spiritual power He is giving them Jesus then makes it clear that the Church has a specific function in the world to explain and convince people that men and women have a responsibility to confess their sins. If they truly repent and believe then their sins are forgiven.

It is very normal that we bring the same message to our Land. Similarly we have to take away the many burdens on people's lives caused by Occupation, bloodshed, violence and killings and mutual hatred, as well as the wrong ways followed so far to reach security. In all these situations of death we demonstrate that we are the apostles of the resurrection, with its joy and hope. We have to tell the people that the present situation in which we are living is part of the world's sin, but it must also be part of the new power given to us by the Risen Lord. Hence we invite them to make penitence, to admit their involvement in the sin of the world, to be forgiven and to become able to see the right ways that lead to security and peace. We say this to our Leaders in Palestine and Israel. The ways used until today to reach security must be changed. If not, we will remain in the same positions in a permanent cycle of violence. For you, Leaders of this Land, we ask that God give you light and strength to take away from it death and fear so as to restore in it peace with security.

So, as we greet all of you this Eastertide we urge all concerned to demonstrate their faith in more positive terms not least showing their personal belief in a Risen and Glorified Jesus. Moreover, our Jesus is no figure of history but rather the One to teach us and guide us along the path of peace and new life.

To our friends across the world we wish the peace and joy of the Risen Lord. Thank you for your prayerful support but please we would ask that you recall that your faith in Christ has its origin in this Holy Land. You have to assume your responsibilities here. You too are responsible with us for restoring in it the joy of the Resurrection so as to lift the burdens of death, hatred, Occupation, Security Walls and the fear of taking the risk of peace. Do whatever you can and please involve your Governments too to assume their responsibilities for the peace of this Land.

Pray for us as well as for a just and comprehensive peace in this Land ; pray that fear, the main obstacle for peace, will disappear. Pray that people recognize and accept each other, so that the right ways be open before the glory of the Resurrection so that this Land of the resurrection may enjoy the new life to which God has called it.

Christ is risen!
Happy and Holy Easter.

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Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox
Patriarch Michel Sabbah, R.C. Latin
Patriarch Torkom I Manoogian, Armenian Orthodox
Fr Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land
Archbishop Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox
Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian-Orthodox
Archbishop Abouna Matthias, Ethiopian Orthodox
Archbishop Paul Sayyah, Maronite
Bishop Suhail Dawani, Anglican
Bishop Mounib Younan, Lutheran
Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian-Catholic
Archimandrite Joseph Saghbini, Greek Catholic
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