

ANNIVERSARY OF A NOTABLE DECADE OF PATRIARCHAL MINISTRY

On 9th October 2014, by the Grace of God, ten years since the Patriarchal election of His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa and the undertaking of the pastoral rudder of the ancient Church of the Apostle and Evangelist Mark, were completed.

On the occasion of this blessed anniversary, His Beatitude conducted the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St Savvas, supported by Their Eminences Metropolitans George of Guinea, His Beatitude's Representative in Athens, Nicholas of Ermopolis and Nikodimos of Memphis, Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, as well as by His Grace Niphon, Bishop of Babylonia, Hegumen of the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St George in Old Cairo, His Eminence Gabriel Metropolitan of Leontopolis, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria. Taking the address, His Eminence Gabriel Metropolitan of Leontopolis said:

"Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:8)

Your
Beatitude,

The word of God presents the truth so simply, so genuinely and so beautifully! Without philosophical schemes, and ideologies, without rigorous Gnostic rotations. Please allow me, therefore, in simple words, words from the heart, to address to you, who throughout life have associated simplicity with love, and virtue with truth, festive reverences and devout prayers for your worthy Patriarchal ministry.

Ten years have passed since the day you were elected as the 116th Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, in succession of the Apostle and Evangelist Mark. Ten years since you took upon your shoulders the heavy and precious heritage and historic responsibility, to maintain the Orthodox faith, Life and presence intact, both in the first areas of the land of the Nile and of North Africa, as well as throughout the African continent.

That hour was and is a blessing from God. It is a Divine acknowledgement of the fixed indicator of your life, which is none other than the unconditional and boundless belief in the infinite love of God for His creation, faith in that way of life in which everything passes through the agony of the Cross and go towards the assurance of the Resurrection and the witness of the ineffable Divine beauty.

You came at that time, Your Beatitude, because God's providence foresaw your humility, your discreet contribution and your modest presence, wherever you were based. So, from that day, the Throne of St Mark found its worthy Shepherd, Africa its tireless Missionary, the weary and burdened their supporter, the Clergy the first among them, the brother, everyone found that which each was expecting and what was needed, in you, and Orthodoxy under heaven the mainspring operating in unity of faith, something rare and desired in our times.

I do not wish to ramble on at this time, mentioning your virtues and merits, not only because I would come up against your known modesty, but more particularly because we know them and we have experienced them. Besides, it would need a "mighty

author's pen", for this, which I do not possess. Also, the ethos of the Church is not one of gloating, because it is adorned by God; rather it has an ethic of duty and contribution in the freedom of Jesus Christ. Everything therein is God's and belongs to Him, and we are limited to simply serving the Church. Therefore on this great day, the Church of Alexandria, reassessing the past, assessing the present and pre-assessing the future, according to the words of the contemporary eminent Hierarch, the late Meliton of Chalcedon, *in prophetic disposal as always it recognizes and realizes that above all, the Church is a mystery of God, it is a Cross, it is forbearance and incarnation, it is reconciliation and love and peace and it is a place of theosis*". With this interpretation as the criterion, we turn our gaze and with admiration we deem that through many historic experiences, in the midst of fluctuations of *"in honour and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute"* (2 Cor 6:8)), through strength and abandonment, through abundant life and the shadow of death, our Patriarchate has endured, adding to the Church of Christ, many Saints and is doing so even today, an example of its abundant life which flows through its blood.

Your Beatitude, the three hundred, in the eye of those of little faith and the rationalists, perhaps seem to be few. However, those fewest of the three hundred in the holy hands of God, who is able to make sons of Abraham from stones, are uncountable. Those of little faith have lost courage, have become melancholic, and have become disappointed; the selfish and the self-seeking and the cowardly avoided and have departed. The faithful endured and remained. Few, but faithful. Once even fewer, such as those that followed Him to the Praetorium and then on up to Golgotha. You however, never feared the small flock. You deserve that which the biographer of St Gerasimos Palladas witnessed, also a Patriarch of Alexandria, Gerasimos III, Gimaris, that *"the contribution and role of Palladas to the Patriarchate was positive. It did not have a negative or critical nature in any circumstance. With what existed and with the strengths that he had, to contribute whatever and however he could"*. Negativities are always psychological complexes of our confused souls, which make things difficult for those around us, according to the words *"a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways"* (James 1:8). Where we come to a halt, due either to faint-heartedness or to thoughtless words, you go ahead and open up ways, with your experience, your wisdom, your always positive thoughts, and particularly with your love.

So, surpassing the wisdom of the wise, and the strength of the powerful and the baseness of schemers, and giving love and peace to all, we look with you to the future from God, and we declare our faith and dedication to the Throne and our love and boundless respect to You venerable person.

Therefore, with our centre of gravity being love to all and unity, according to the command *"that all may be one"* (John 17:21) we enter your second Patriarchal decade, Your Beatitude Father and Master, and pray that you will have many blessed years from God, to the glory of His holy Name and to the prestige of the Throne of the Apostle and Evangelist Mark.

Many years, Your Beatitude!"

In his address, His Beatitude said, among other things:

"With the Grace and Mercy of the Lord of Glory and the Enlightenment and Protection of the Saint Apostle and Evangelist Mark, Custodian and Founder of our Church, we complete ten years of Patriarchal ministry with a double rule. On the one hand to preserve and elevate the priceless heritage of faith and fortitude of the flock of the Second Throne Orthodox Church of the East. On the other, to promote the realization of the salvific determinism of Christian witness and love through the

evangelization of the nations of the African continent which thirsts spiritually.

Having as an indicator of the way the word of our Lord "*my Grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2Cor 12:9), we continue to place in the account of God's love our effort to bring being to the selfless humanity, philanthropic sacrifice, unshaken identity with our African brothers and sisters, as beings in God's image. And we do not lower the banner of hope in Christ to dynamically forge that *image into likeness of God*. Passing through this salvific path with courage and fortitude, we ask for the prayers of St Theodore of Tyre, our Patron, deemed worthy of the prize in the truth of Christ, and the prayers of our spiritual children in every corner of the African continent

His Beatitude thanked particularly the Hierarchs and priests present, His Excellency the Ambassador of Greece in Cairo Mr. Ch. Lazaris, the Honorable Consul General of Greece in Alexandria, Mr. Ch. Kapodistrias, the Honorable Consul General of Greece in Cairo Mrs. L. Komini, the Honorable Consul of Russia in Alexandria Mr. S Petliakov, the Defense Attaché of Greece in Cairo Mr. I. Diamantakos, the Representatives of the Greek and Arabic speaking communities of Egypt, the Chairman of the Office-Bearers Mr. Th. Panagopoulos, the attending Chairmen of Societies and Associations, the Teachers and Pupils of the Schools of the Hellenic Communities of Alexandria and the Patriarchal Academy of Alexandria and the Hellenic Scouting movements in Egypt.

Before the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy, the Patriarchate donated ornate silver appurtenances and a Holy Gospel Book to the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified, as a priceless heritage of continued remembrance and gratitude.

After the Liturgical Synaxis a small reception was held in the Guest Hall of the Holy Monastery, where His Beatitude received wishes for good health and length of days from the pious members of the community.

On the evening of the same day there was a festive anniversary function at the Alexandrian Library, in the presence of His Excellency the Governor of Alexandria, Mr. Tarek El Mahdy, Diplomatic Officials and representatives of all Faiths, where the work done by His Beatitude over the past decade was presented and a musical concert was given by the Cretan artist Basil Skoulas and his colleagues. It is worth noting that during the function His Beatitude received telephonic wishes from the Prime Minister of Egypt, his good friend, Mr. Ibrahim Mahleb.