

HIS BEATITUDE MEETS THE POPE OF ROME

On Monday 30 September 2013, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, accompanied by His Eminence Seraphim, Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola and His Eminence George, Metropolitan of Guinea, Representative of His Beatitude in Athens, met the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis I at the Vatican.

Addressing the Roman Catholic Primate, His Beatitude said amongst other things:

The two Churches, that of Alexandria and that of Rome, both belong historically and traditionally to the ancient Churches. We belong to the Churches, which immediately following Pentecost, comprised the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We belong to the Churches which were formed through their word, their ministry and their agonizing end by the Saint Apostle and Evangelist Mark and Saints Peter and Paul.

United during the first ten plus centuries, we experienced not only the common beginning, but also the common historic journey and we met in spirit, loving one another and confessing our Lord. In the eternal City, Saint Athanasios the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria, received great love from his brother Julius I, Pope of Rome and Patriarch Petros II from Pope Damasias. At critical times for the unity of the Church they remained near you and in their struggle to defend Truth they found brother protectors and supporters of Faith and Love.

From these points of convergence of the history of our Churches, we gain strength, life and hope today, so that through the ministry of all that unites us and through dialogue, we can continue on the path to restoration of unity of all Christians, for whom our Lord prayed on the eve of His Passion. The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans: "Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). This is exactly what we are experiencing at this moment, as a divine duty "having been hindered from coming to you" (Romans 15:22) as a brother "so that I may come to you with joy.....by God's will" (Romans 15:32).

Consider present society as a symbol of life in the journey to stability of the holy Churches and the unity of all. As a symbol of faith in the necessity of preserving the flock and guiding it to "the laws of salvation.....with much patience" (2 Corinthians 6:1-10). As a symbol of the common struggle of defending the rights of every person to freely define and give understanding to his life, fed by prayer and experiencing love, beginning with his reference to God, especially today when ideological hardening of mankind creates in the Middle East and Africa a mighty enclave of dispute of this right and a poisoning of the peaceful co-existence of mankind.

As pastoral deacons of love and truth, let us pray fervently that our suffering brothers and sisters in these flammable areas of our planet, will be strengthened by God so that "Rejoicing in hope, being patient in tribulation, being constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12) they can bring peace with all people. Amen!

At the centre of the discussions between the two Primates was the necessity to protect the rights of free religious expression, which is disputed in areas of the Middle East and in Africa due to intolerance and fanaticism. His Beatitude had the opportunity of placing on the table of dialogue his personal experience from his many years of ministry in the spiritual fields of the African continent, but also to share his concern regarding the use of religion by extremist groups as a pretext for committing heinous acts of violence.

Both leaders agreed on the necessity of undertaking initiatives which

will promote not only peaceful coexistence, but also creative interaction between people of different religious faiths. Within this framework they agreed to the necessity of the continuation and the intensity through diversity, as a foreshadowing of the unity of mankind on the basis of a common value system. Following the end of the discussions commemorative gifts were exchanged.