

PATRIARCHAL DIVINE LITURGY IN LAGOS, NIGERIA – LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE NEW CATHEDRAL

On 15th February 2012 His Beatitude Theodoros II Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the Divine Liturgy at the temporary Cathedral of the Resurrection of the Lord in Lagos, Nigeria, with His Eminence Alexandros of Nigeria and His Eminence Gregory of Cameroon as concelebrants.

During the Eucharistic Synaxis which was attended by Their Excellencies Ambassador Mr. Dionysios Sourvanos of Greece, Ambassador Alexander Dimitrievsky of Russia, the High Commissioner of Cyprus Dr Anastasios Leventis, the Honourable Consul of Egypt in Lagos Mr Ahmed Baha' El Din, the Chairman of the Hellenic Community Mr Nasos Sidirofagis and many faithful, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexandros of Nigeria addressed His Beatitude, saying:

"Today's Divine Liturgy at the See, the heart, of the Orthodox Church in Nigeria and the laying of the foundation stone of the new cathedral which the love and generosity of the Leventis Family has contributed to God and His people, puts the seal on the first pastoral visit of the Primate of the Orthodox Church in Africa, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa.

It is a great honour and blessing for all of us. "We admit the grace, we do not hide the benefaction". From the depths of our hearts we thank the Most Merciful Lord who deemed us worthy to experience moments of ineffable spiritual upliftment both two days ago at the ceremony of the inauguration of the newly-built Church of St Christoforos in Eastern Nigeria, as well as today in this holy place.

Today, in the person of His Beatitude and in the common Cup of Life, our unity with the Mother Church in Alexandria, the bearer of the unchanged and unadulterated two-thousand year old faith of the Apostles, the Holy Fathers and Mothers, the martyrs, the venerable ones and the confessors of the Church, was confirmed.

In this place today, "there was no Jew, nor Greek, no slave, no free man, no male, no female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28). In other words unity and not division. Unity beyond race, colour, language and borders. Unity which does not mean flattening, but which makes the above elements a place of meeting and mutual understanding in Christ. The action and witness of the great holy Missionaries of our Church leads us still today reminding us that the main point is Christ and that there are no holy nations and holy languages.

Your Beatitude, 7 years ago the grace of God entrusted you to pilot the ancient, historic and martyred Church of Alexandria. The responsibility is great, the Cross is heavy. During the years that have passed, with wisdom and discretion, distinction, patience and perseverance, with persistence and faith, you have charted new paths of missionary witness, raising the bar high for us all, bishops, priests, deacons, monks and lay people. You show us that the true Orthodox Church is a Church of love and philanthropy. The most trifling, the persecuted, the weak, the marginalized, the sick, the victimized are the reason for your existence.

Your initiatives during recent years on an international level regarding those suffering from AIDS, women and children victims of trafficking, the fight against lack of education, access to clean drinking water, are truly significant, pioneering, innovative.

Continue, as long as God allows, this path. It is an "exit" from the old world

of slavery and bondage, oppression, refutation of humanity, slavery to demonic domination. This path you follow undoubtedly passes through the desert of history, where challenges and temptations lie in ambush. Please do not forget though that evil cannot change those people who change everything they touch into good.

People like you are beside their fellow man, for whom they have understanding and kindness, because God who is with them at all times, permeates their entire being. People like you know the true God, the God of man. People like you are worthy of the title of "philanthropist". People like you "make the earth more human".

Your Beatitude,

The orthodox Church of Nigeria, during this official and historic moment at this holy Church of the Resurrection of the Lord, asks you to accept as a remembrance of your presence here, this pectoral cross bearing the image of the Resurrection, because the Risen Lord takes on Himself all the pain of the world and on His body the wounds of the Cross are always present.

When you wear it, you will bear on yourself the pain and the grief, the suffering and the sadness of millions of the people of this earth. But at the same time you will bear on your chest, your heart and your soul the hope and courage, the vitality and willingness, the fighting spirit and the patience of the people of this earth.

And above all, you will bear in your heart the faith of all of us who live in this blessed land, that the Resurrection is not realised in heaven but in the heart of death".

Commemorative gifts were then exchanged and then His Beatitude awarded the office of the Grand Archon Aktouarios to the distinguished businessman Dr Anastasios Leventis, High Commissioner of Cyprus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and benefactor of the local Church, who has born the costs of the building of the new Cathedral of the Resurrection of the Lord in lagos.

Following the end of the Liturgy His Beatitude laid the foundation stone of the new Cathedral in the area adjacent to the Holy metropolis of Nigeria and attended an outdoor function which was organised by the local Church, in which youth participated from the Orthodox Communities of the Republic of Benin which is under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Nigeria.