

PATRIARCHAL MESSAGE FOR THE NEW ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR

Protocol No: 136/2013

«I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together ».

With these words fifty years ago he concluded his legendary speech in the American capital the man who dared to dream at difficult times, the activist who dared to fight with peaceful means the nightmare of racism, the fighter who dared to pull out the miserable white hood from an entire country. Fifty years after mankind leans its bow and pays homage and memory on Martin Luther King, the man who with his word and his action contributed as few to the elimination of racial discrimination and to the consolidation of racial equality.

What then it seemed utopia, today it is reality. Who could imagine at those times that, three decades later, Nelson Mandela would become President of South Africa, would favour reconciliation, putting aside the traumatic experiences of the past, and would help his country's transition from the past of apartheid to the future of peaceful interracial coexistence? Who would dare at those times to conceive, without running the risk of being considered insane, that, four decades later, in the exact same spot the first elected President of the USA with black skin colour would give his officiating oath before his nation?

And yet the dream became ultimately reality and today the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners sit side by side at the table of brotherhood. And yet the utopia is ultimately nothing but the matins of reality. And yet faith is ultimately indeed starting going up the first stepping stone, without seeing the entire staircase. And yet it is not ultimately the faith that originates from the miracle, but it is the miracle that originates from the faith.

This faith is being smashed today under the weight of depressive reality, because the drums of war continue to vociferously beat in the Middle East, the land where it was deposited the seed of human transformation in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ; because confrontation and conflict outweigh negotiation and mutual understanding in the international arena; because weapons, conventional or not – if we could ever accept means of human extermination as conventional – are still being preferred as ways for resolving a variety of Gordian knots; because leaders around the world do not hesitate to open the Pandora's box, oblivious to the consequences of their choices.

The descendants of the Africans, who were caught captives and transported under inhumane conditions to the New World with the ships of slavery, may today boast – and rightly so – over the rapid progress that has taken place in issues of racial segregation. Nonetheless many of their African brothers still live on a lonely island of poverty in the middle of a vast ocean of material prosperity. And many among the African youth continue to wither in the fallow land of deficient opportunities and to find themselves exiled in their own homeland.

Before these life challenges the African Orthodox Church follows in the footsteps of its Head, our Lord Jesus Christ. The word of God became man and suffered more than anyone, not out of necessity, but freely, not by commitment, but out of love. He was born under difficult circumstances, He lived with proverbial humility, He was misunderstood by many, He was joined by the outcasts, He was dogged by the power of His era, and He was executed in the most shameful way. And yet He was ultimately resurrected out of the dead, defeating death through death.

This life message of our suffering and compassionate Christ we are sending today, the first day of the new ecclesiastical year, from Alexandria to our Orthodox brothers all around Africa. We fervently pray mankind not to lose faith in the biblical truth that *«the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God»* (Rom. 8.21). We fervently hope on the one hand people's lives to be aligned, both ontologically and axiologically, to the course followed by our Lord through His Crucifixion and His Resurrection, and on the other hand His grace to nestle in the hearts of all the people, pursuant to the ultimate phrase of the Holy Scriptures *«Come, Lord Jesus»* (Rev. 22,20).

† THEODOROS II

Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa

In the Great City of Alexandria

September 1, 2013