

PRESENTATION OF THE HONORARY VOLUME FOR THE TEN-YEAR PATRIARCHAL TENURE OF THEODOROS II OF ALEXANDRIA TO THE HIGHER ECCLESIASTICAL ACADEMY OF CRETE

The presentation of the Volume for the Ten-Year Patriarchal Tenure of His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa took place with mass participation in the Conference Hall of the Patriarchal Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete, in Heraklion on the afternoon of Saturday 27th June 2015.

At the function, which was presented by the Very Reverend Archimandrite Methodios Vernidakis, Chancellor of the Holy Archdiocese of Crete, the address was given by His Eminence Andreas, Metropolitan of Arkalohori, Kastelli and Viannou, Professor of the University of Thessalonika and President of the Administrative Council of the Patriarchal Academy, on the topic: "Theodoros: patriarch of prayer and of love". His Eminence spoke about His Beatitude's personality, highlighting especially his characteristics of continuous prayer and his sincere love towards everyone, summarizing the experiences and witness of His Beatitude to the present time, from the Monastery of Agarathos, where they were fellow monks, to the Apostolic Throne of St Mark.

Following the address by His Eminence, the Very Reverend Archimandrite Prodomos Xnakis, Hierarchical Vicar General of the Holy Archdiocese of Crete spoke eloquently and with vivid words and presented to the distinguished audience the Anniversary Volume of the ten year Patriarchal Tenure of His Beatitude, referring to the carefully presented edition, the texts of the speeches, the photographic material, which make up and summarize the Patriarchal steps of the first Decade of Patriarchal Ministry in the Apostolic Throne of St Mark.

Byzantine Hymns were presented at the function by the "Cretan Maistores" Choir, as were songs from Asia Minor sung by the Cultural Association of Nea Alikarnassos, "Artemisia". Acknowledging the contribution to the missionary effort by the Chairlady of the said Association, Mrs. Eleni Aspetaki, His Beatitude awarded her the gold Lion of the Alexandrian Throne.

The function was attended by His Eminence Irenaios Archbishop of Crete, Their Eminences the Metropolitans of Ierapytni and Sytia Evgenios, Arkalohoriou, Kastelliou and Viannou Andreas, Rethymnon and Avlopotamos Evgenios, Guinea George, Kydonias and Apokoronou Damaskinos, and Their Graces Bishops Meletios of Naucratis and Makarios of Christopolis,

Also present were the Regional Administrator of Crete Mr. Stavros Arnaoutakis, the Deputy Mayor of Heraklion Mr. Petros Iniotakis, Archons of the Ecumenical and Alexandrian Thrones, University Professors, Representatives of organizations and associations, clergy and monastics, the mother of His Beatitude Mrs. Cleopatra Horeftakis and family members, and many people from the whole island of Crete.

The function ended with the closing homily by His Beatitude who expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all and his love for the place where he was born and nurtured, his gratitude also to the Patriarchal Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Crete for hosting the function, asking for constant prayer and support of all for the success of the Missionary effort of the Ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa.

Specifically, in his greeting His Beatitude stated:

"The beginning of every Patriarchal tenure in the Church of Alexandria, whose wings

spiritually cover the entire African continent, resembles an unwritten page. The responsibility is huge both when faced with the legacy inherited, as well as when faced with the expectation discerned on the faces of our African brothers and sisters. The anxiety is similar to that of the torchbearer, as it is part of the unbroken succession of persons and a faith which defines our Church as Apostolic. And you hope that you can cover your own range of love and humanity with the power of the Holy Spirit which dwells in the Church.

Covering your own range, you have a duty to ease the wounds of a reality which is difficult, many times even inhumane. You have a duty to look directly with the eyes of your soul at those who passed and kept alive the flame of Orthodoxy, even though the winds of history often blew vehemently. You have a duty to look with the eyes of your body at those who, in a background of erroneous choices or disappointing personal plans, seek the consolation of hope in Christ. They seek a future, which still has no substance, but has as its destination the Kingdom of God.

What has begun to be written on the page of my Patriarchal tenure, is the work of others to trace and evaluate. However, what I can assure you of regarding the ten years that have passed is that I did, with God's help, whatever was in my power to remain true to myself, charitable with others and determined to pour into the soul of our African brothers and sisters the seed of the Gospel. I took my basket just as I did as a young monk at the Agarathos Monastery going out to the plains, and poured myself into the spiritual fields which the Throne of St Mark ministers to.

I was not dispirited in the face of difficulties, neither was I resentful when faced with adversity. I forged ahead with serenity and determination. I found companions; a few but they were consistent and available to follow me into the sowing. The seed was offered to all without distinction, not even as far as the quantity goes. I was lavish to all, with the same specifications to all, with the same expectations to all. God took care in this struggle, he protected and transformed faults into new opportunities. He consented to find a balance between the desire and the circumstances, and above all He made provision, with His infinite love, in order that the flame in the lamp of contribution to others to not be extinguished even for a moment.

Returning ten years later to the place from where I made my first journey as Patriarch of Alexandria, I keep in my luggage a book which tries to ensnare in its pages, the moments, anxieties, hopes, joys and sorrow of a journey that continues. A journey that continues with the measure that whatever we do for ourselves, dies with us; but whatever we do for others and for the world, remains immortal. A journey of faith and works of love, as "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17). A journey of faith in life, as it "works through love" (Galatians 5:6). A journey that attempts to transform the Gospel extract "let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18), into concrete work.

A journey which is designed to redirect human existence in Christ, producing "fruit that will abide" (John 15:16).

Indicators of this journey are the Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics and Saints Patriarchs of Alexandria, who kept intact the ark of the Greek Orthodox Christian tradition, despite the intense undulation of the centuries. Indicators of this journey are the eyes of our African brothers and sisters struggling to keep alive their faith in the resurrection, as a right and a possibility. Indicators of this journey are the honour and word, faith and pride, sincerity and heart, with which I was endowed by the land of Crete. Indicators of this journey are my mother's blessing, as the boat that was taking me from Crete was lost in the colours of the

sunset, and my life was opening up in the uncharted waters of Odessa to start with and later in Africa. An unfailing indicator of this journey is the unshakeable faith that God, whom we know through Jesus Christ, meets us every day in our peaceful and loving contact with our fellow human beings.

The promise which my earthly being can give, the being that was deemed worthy to be transformed into an instrument of Divine Providence, into a humble quill in the book of His militant Church, is one and is unique. To fulfill the task which Gabriel Garcia Marques described in one of his interviews: "The sole duty of a write, his most revolutionary act, is to write as best as he can". Amen!.