

THE PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA AT THE 11th MEETING OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AMMAN, JORDAN

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, travelled to Amman in Jordan to participate in the deliberations of the 11th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches convened from 6th to 8th September 2016 in the Jordanian capital, under the organization and hosting of the Jerusalem Patriarchate.

Present at this Assembly together with the Alexandrian Primate, are Patriarchate Jon of Antioch, Patriarch Theofilos of Jerusalem, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus, Coptic Patriarch Twandros II as well as the other primates of the other Christian Churches (Catholic, Armenian, Syro-Jacobites and Evangelical) from the Middle East, while the Ecumenical Patriarch was represented by His Eminence Benedict of Philadelphia.

His Beatitude Theodoros II of Alexandria was accompanied by Their Eminences Nicholas of Hermopolis, Narcissos of Accra and the Reverend Protopresbyter Fr. Athenodoros Papaevripiades, Exarch of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Cyprus.

The issues with which the Assembly will be concerned during the three days are:

1. The Challenges facing the Churches in the Middle East.
2. The Mission of Christians in the Middle East and their role at national and international level.
3. Co-operation with the Western Churches and the Diaspora.
4. Relations between Christians and Muslims in the region.

During the opening session of the General Assembly His Beatitude spoke, saying:

“Dear Brothers in Christ, Members of the Middle East Council of Churches, As we approach the Sunday before the elevation of the Precious Cross, let us reflect on some historical events. History is full of sites connected with events, which could be described as facts embarrassing to humanity. One such even for example, could be the bombing of the naval base at Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941. Referring to that day, Franklin Roosevelt said, “It is a day that all of us will remember with shame”. To this day the bombing of Pearl harbour is an event we remember as it indescribable evil occurred.

On the other hand there are places connected with events in history which could be defined as events beneficial to mankind. One such event could, for example, be the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989. The remains of the Wall will always bring to mind memories of that day which marked the beginning of the end of communist oppression and persecution of Christians in communist Eastern Europe.

However, there is also a place connected with an historical fact that we remember because on the same day unspeakable evil took place, followed by such a blessing for humanity! This place is Golgotha. Golgotha experienced the infamous day when our Lord was put to death on the cross. Yet, Golgotha also experienced the landmark day on which our Lord trampled down death, offering humanity the gift of the immortality of the soul.

Two millennia later, Golgotha could be seen as a microcosm of the Middle East. AS

Golgotha was filled with the skulls of those sentenced and executed, so the Middle East today is littered with the corpses of people who were victims of bloody conflicts, insane terrorism or the deadlock of the inability of people with different identities to coexist.

Just as Golgotha at that time was a prominent historical and prophetic place, so the Middle East is still, today, the prime cradle of the three great monotheistic religions. However, this multi-significant place never ceases to offer worship to the 'god' of war, sacrificing on the altar of violence today's prosperity and tomorrow's hope of the people of the Middle East.

And as Golgotha experienced at that time the horrors of our Lord's Passion, so the Middle East witnesses today the horror and despair of insecurity. Back then our Lord was beaten, mocked, taunted, spat on, forced to carry His cross and ultimately was crucified. Today, hoards of people flee their homelands, starting on a journey which may end in a minefield or the cold waters of the Mediterranean.

Back then our Lord endured the agony of the cross, while those who were at Golgotha did everything possible to amplify His suffering. Today, the hoards endure the agony of forced expatriation, while those who have the power in their hands do nothing to ease their pain.

Back then, the only compassion our Lord received was from a small group of people who gathered around His Cross!. His mother, an aunt, the beloved disciple, the woman who was redeemed from her sinful life. Today, only we who have the responsibility to guide our flock to the Kingdom of Heaven, can offer salvation and compassionate sympathy.

This is the reason that on this Sunday before the Elevation of the Precious Cross, our Church reminds us through the Evangelist John (3:16) that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him, will not perish, but will have life eternal". Our mission is to express the love and compassion of God, assisting the Christians in the Middle East, so that as they bear the cross of martyrdom today, they do not lose hope and faith that the Precious Cross remains the means to our salvation, the bridge which continues to unite earth with heaven".