

The Patriarch of Alexandria awarded the Grand Cross of the Apostle Mark to Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis

Today, Monday, June 21, 2021, His Excellency the Prime Minister of Greece . Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis paid a visit to the See of the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

With particular honour and formality His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa welcomed His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Greek Government, Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis to the Patriarchal Mansion.

Also present were Their Eminence Metropolitans Nicholas of Ermopolis, Nicodemus of Memphis, His Grace Germanos Bishop of Tamiathus, the Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod Archimandrite Nicodemus Totkas and Archimandrite Elpidoforos Lemnaios.

During their official cordial meeting in the Throne Room of the Patriarchal Palace, His Beatitude awarded the Prime Minister Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis the highest honorary distinction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Grand Cross of the Apostle Mark.

"I am glad because today, after such a dynamic meeting with an enlightened leader of Egypt, Fattah El-Sisi, you thought that a friend from the past was waiting for you in Greek Alexandria. My President, from the bottom of my heart, welcome to Greek Alexandria. I am glad that God required me, when I left our island, Crete, wandering in many places, to take on the role of a missionary and to bring a message of love and fellowship of the peoples. I want to thank you for including a meeting with a missionary Patriarch in your program. I leave Alexandria to travel, walking for hours in the vast countries of Africa, and to give my hand to be embraced outside of my African home, by these children you see in nUganda, Kenya, Tanzania; they learn to speak Greek, the language of the Ptolemies", stressed Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa during the award ceremony, making special mention of Konstantinos Mitsotakis and the encouraging words he would give him during their meetings.

"We are few but we do not leave these Thermopylae," the Patriarch added, praising the very good cooperation with President Sisi and the Egyptian authorities. Then, addressing the Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and All Africa, the Prime Minister emphasized, *"I can not help but recognize in your person the path not just of the enlightened Hierarchy, who started from Crete, to serve the love of Christ to the ends of Africa, but in your person I see the missionary of love, care, humanity. And of course – as you rightly said – a continent opens out at our doors, a forgotten continent for many, but for many others the continent of the twenty-first century, with enormous potential, enormous prospects. A continent that until recently was forgotten for both Greece and Hellenism and you often fought alone, with minimal powers but with the strength of faith to support you in the most difficult moments to be able to perform this great missionary work"*.

The following is the address of the Prime Minister to Theodoros II, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa:

I am very excited to be here today, with you at the Patriarchate of Alexandria, fulfilling a personal promise I made to you the last time we met: On my next trip to Egypt to find some time to come and visit you, to shake your hand, to tell you how much I personally, but how much all Greeks also appreciate the great work you are doing, here at the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

And since this is the first time I am visiting this city that bears the name of

Alexander the Great and in which Hellenism flourished and left its own special mark, I cannot help but feel the weight of history on my shoulders. A history of a Patriarchate, identified with a city but also identified with a continent. And I cannot fail to recognize in your person the path not just of the enlightened Hierarch, who started from Crete, to preach the love of Christ to the ends of Africa, but in your person I see the missionary of love, care, humanity. And of course – as you rightly said – a continent opens out at our doors, a forgotten continent for many, but for many others the continent of the twenty-first century, with enormous potential, enormous prospects. A continent that until recently was forgotten for both Greece and Hellenism and you often fought alone, with minimal powers but with the strength of faith to support you in the most difficult moments to be able to perform this great missionary work”.

And I was thinking as I came how difficult it must be to start from here in Alexandria, from the Patriarchate to travel by plane, train, bus, often on foot, to the depths of this beautiful continent to preach the word of Christ, at a time when if it taught us anything, it is that a pandemic – which came from nowhere – does not discriminate, does not distinguish between races, colours, rich, poor. We have all found ourselves humble and equal in the face of this great challenge.

On this continent, then, you are doing your great work and I want you to know that in my person and in the Greek State, as a whole, you always have a helper. And this visit also has two personal details for me which I would like to conclude by mentioning: the first one you also mentioned; after all my father was a man who loved you very much and appreciated your work very much. And I am sure that from where he is today he will smile and rejoice for my visit here to the Patriarchate.

And of course I am very happy, because today I am accompanied by my mother-in-law who was born in Alexandria, she is an Alexandrian, as are tens of thousands of our fellow citizens who were born in this beautiful city and in difficult conditions were forced to leave it.

However, the heart of Hellenism beats in Alexandria. Maybe more shrunken, maybe smaller, but always just as powerfully. It beats just as powerfully and the duty of the Motherland is to always be close to Hellenism wherever it is. Especially when it is a city with the historical weight of Alexandria. Again,

I want to express my gratitude that you took the time to accept me. I also have a personal gift for you and I have something that is more practical, more useful. As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Greek revolution, a collectible watch. We have only 200 pieces and we give them for you to remember us and to remember how important this anniversary is for Hellenism as a whole.

The Patriarch and His Excellency The Prime Minister had a private meeting at the Patriarchal Office, where during their meeting they exchanged views on the diverse and multifaceted activity of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate on the African continent and on issues of contemporary concern, including the course of the pandemic.

His Beatitude expressed his satisfaction with the attitude of the Egyptian authorities on matters of religious freedom and the comfort regarding the religious and cultural rights enjoyed by the Orthodox Church there.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis reiterated to His Beatitude the full support of the Greek State in the mission of the Second Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and in particular on his works that have a humanitarian, cultural, social and educational character, describing the whole endeavor as admirable, because of the inherently adverse conditions and limited means that exist on the African continent. He thanked him

for the contribution of the Patriarchate and his personal contribution too, in strengthening the presence of Hellenism, in a vulnerable and important region, such as Africa. At the same time, he asked Patriarch Theodoros to strengthen the training and educational programs related to the dissemination of the Greek language and Greek Orthodox education, under the auspices of the Church there.

On his visit the Prime Minister was accompanied by the Minister of the Environment and Energy Kostas Skrekas, the Ambassador of Greece to Egypt Nicholas Garidis, the Director of the National Intelligence Service, Panagiotis Kontoleon, the Director of the Diplomatic Office of the Prime Minister, Ambassador Eleni Sourani, the National Security Adviser, Athanasios Dokos, the Government Spokesperson, Aristotelia Peloni and the Consul General of Greece in Alexandria Athanasios Kotsionis.

At the end of the official visit, the Primate of Alexandria bade farewell to His Excellency the Prime Minister at the main gate of the Patriarchate.