

THE PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA IN CRETE FOR THE HOLY AND GREAT SYNOD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa is in Crete to participate in the Holy and Great Synod of our Orthodox Church, together with 24 Metropolitans and Bishops of the Patriarchate of Alexandria from all of Africa, from 17 – 26 June. It is a Synod of great historical gravity for the Orthodox Church, since such a great and important Synod has not been convened for about 1200 years. Within the framework of this Holy and Great Synod, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, celebrated the Divine Liturgy on his own, in the presence of all the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, at the Holy Church of the Annunciation of the Theotokos Kismou, where he also did the memorial service for all those participants in the various preparatory Conferences – Committees of the Holy and Great Synod, who have passed on, and on the following day, the Sunday of Pentecost, participated with all the Primate in the glorious Con-celebration in the Cathedral of St Minas in Heraklion.

Despite the official, particularly heavy and obligation-filled programme of the Primate of Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios and Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria found about 30 minutes far from the prying eyes of all, with minimal police presence and visited the home of Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria's family in New Alikarnassos. The Patriarch's family was expecting them there, where between his mother Cleopatra and the two Primate emotional moments unfolded. Present were also all the members of his sister's family and her husband, Roula and George Mahlas. The Ecumenical Patriarch showed particular interest in the health of the mother of the Patriarch of Alexandria, who spoke with him and despite her advanced age, wished both the Ecumenical Patriarch and her son the Patriarch of Alexandria to be strong and united for the good of Orthodoxy at a particularly difficult time for humanity. Both Primate and particularly the Ecumenical Patriarch, had the opportunity, even for a short while to taste genuine Cretan hospitality and food prepared by His Beatitude's sister, Roula Mahlas.

Reply by His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa at the start of the deliberations of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church.

Monday of the Holy Spirit, 20th June 2016, Crete)

"Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forever more"!

With immeasurable praise and thanksgiving to the Holy and Consubstantial and Undivided Trinity and with deep joy and spiritual gladness we respond to Your inspired opening speech, on behalf of their Beatitudes the Primate of all the Orthodox Patriarchates and Autocephalous Church, giving thanks to Him who grants all good things, that he called us together "during these distinct days" and has already counted us worthy of starting the deliberations decades before, for the much sought after Holy and Great Synod of our Orthodox Church.

Glory to the All-Merciful God, who is worshipped in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, for this gift, for the fulfillment of the expectation, for the achievement of its objectives, for the completion of hope, for the victory of the Church and for the communion of us all in this event which is enormous for the entire Orthodox world. The "grace of the Spirit like tongues of fire", has established a coherent manner throughout the Church, has already inspired the thoughts and the intellect of us all, assisting its great mystery, in the unity of faith and in participation in the common cup of Life.

The Holy Orthodox Church of Christ this year celebrates the Holy and Great Feast of Pentecost and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, by gathering for this major and great ecclesiastical event on the Great Island of Crete which brings forth great men and this Sacred See of the Ecumenical Throne where great and wonderful things are said and hymned,, saying "come Holy Spirit". Come and abide in us and cleanse us from every impurity and save our souls, O Good One.

Having in mind the responsibility and the mission, in intense and extended prayer, "confessing the grace, preaching the mercy, not hiding the benefaction" we gather in Synod all the Orthodox Church as instruments of the Spirit, to take the appropriate decisions, having as our aim firstly and primarily the salvation of our flock, in today's diverse and changing world.

We all have the conviction that, that in times of varied dissents and conflicts, the Orthodox Church is called on to preach word of unity, of awakening, one that is contemporary, a word of faith and salvation. The Church is called on in times of varied confusion to preach peace, reconciliation and forgiveness which comes from the perpetual source of Jesus Christ, revealed and lived in Ecclesiastical and Patristic Tradition and to call on all people of good will to be inspired by the free richness of the Orthodox Life in Christ and Witness.

The Church gathers. And this fact is a success and a profit. The Orthodox Church does not fear dialogue. It historically proceeds in dialogue, in freedom, in truth and in love. For this reason no dissension, reservation or differing position constitutes a "stigma" or a "blow" to the much-desired unity, but rather the possibility of pluralism and the final promotion and revelation of the Truth, certifies the Mystery of Ecclesiastical life and demonstrates the effect of the Holy Spirit, which leads "to all truth" occasionally even from differing positions. The Church, as continuously "living and moving", has need of this Synodal expression. The structures of contemporary life are constantly changing. New enemies of the faith as well as old ones awaken and rise. Confronting them needs contemporary methods, which only the Pan-Orthodox Synodal institution is able to guarantee.

Today the heart of our Pan-Orthodox family is beating on the great Island of Crete. Today are turned to us all the hearts of those who believe and await as "the dew of Hermon" the announcement of our Synod, in hope and love. Today the illumined children of the Church all over the world are gladdened. Today this place is made into the "upper room" and a tabernacle of grace. Today all our ever blessed predecessors rejoice in heaven, those whom we commemorated already liturgically and remember their labours in preparing for this Synod., Today, in experiencing the Mystery of Pentecost, being of one accord, in genuine joy and jubilation, we find ourselves faced with the sacred duty of historical responsibility. Today the beginning is blessed, after the passing of centuries, of this gathering of all the Holy Churches of God, towards a common decision on issues of the Church, with the prayer that, in the will of God, a path of common journey will be opened for each of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches.

Let us go on our way then, Your All Holiness and Holy Brothers, to the efforts of the matters in hand to reach sacred tasks with a deep duty to God and man, so that this Synod can be an historic point forward, in the fulfillment of the plan and will of the Thrice Holy God.

With these thoughts, embracing all with a "sacred kiss" we fraternally pray that God will grant that our deliberations of the Holy and Great Synod be productive, illumined by the Most Holy and Ceremonial Spirit, to the glory of God and the salvation of the World! So be it!