



HOLY LAND CO-ORDINATION 2012

Closing Mass - Patriarch Twal's Homily

12 JANUARY 2012

“Arise! Come to our help! Redeem us, as your love demands.” (Ps 44:26)

You came, you saw, you walked with us. In love, you renewed our friendship. In a spirit of communion, we prayed, and together we experienced the joy and pain here in our way of life. You enlightened, encouraged and offered us hope in our resolve and witness, to live our vocation to be the continuing Christian presence in this Holy Land.

My dear friends, the faithful of the Holy Land of all rites and conferences, your brothers and sisters in Christ, those you have encountered in Gaza, Nablus, Jerusalem, Haifa, Galilee and elsewhere, in unison express their gratitude, because through your interest and prayers, you made us see and feel the redeeming love of Christ, who never leaves us alone. And so it is that your presence in our midst, even for a few days, is a profound demonstration of your concern and zeal to journey with us, side by side, hand in hand.

We are grateful for the unwavering support of the German Association of the Holy Land, the Friends of the Holy Land in England, and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher worldwide. We never forget even the smallest sign of solidarity from your parish churches, the faithful and Bishops. May I ask you for more collaboration with our local church, and more coordination for the future?

Our Holy Father, in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, states that “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.” (*Porta Fidei*, 7) Faith working through love (Gal 5:6) becomes a new reason for understanding and action that changes the whole of man's life. (cf. Eph 4:20-29). If only we will heed this call that ushers us into a new life, of openness to understanding one another, of bringing in a promising shift in the realities of our life? We are full of hope and trust in God's mercy that permeates us all.

Concern for each other is a gift. In the words of St. Paul, “Let us then pursue what leads to peace and to building up one another.” (Rm 14:19) Let us strive, more than ever, to recognize our responsibility for every child of God and in solidarity with each other.

A few weeks ago, a parish sent us a cheque. The representative wrote that it was a gift to celebrate Christmas for our parishioners in Gaza, even if the only news they hear about their city is terrorism and some of those living there are terrorists. Some of you were in Gaza, and I am sure that you remember the faces of the women and children, the men, the old and the young who bared their hearts and shared with you their faith and hopes for the future. Your presence brought them joy, a gift of liberating joy from God, a ray of light that shone in their lives, even just for a few hours.

In Gaza and elsewhere, any expression and act of solidarity, means so much for our Christians as a recognition that they are not alone and forgotten.

In today's Gospel, Jesus touched the man who came to him. He was cleansed but he was asked not to tell anyone. Yet, he freely proclaimed and told his story. Dear friends, you saw and experienced the endless restrictions, strained life situations and conditions there. In contrast, you had a glimpse of our joy in the Church. The heart of our community life, is our parish church where our faithful feel the security of a loving home, where charity is fostered and faith in God is nurtured. Now, as you return home, you too, can freely proclaim the truth and reality of what you have seen, what you have experienced, to everyone and anyone, everywhere. Many people in the world need to freely know the truth about what you have seen and heard, directly from you who came and saw.

Your Mother Church of Jerusalem continues to embody Calvary. We direct our eyes to Jesus on the Cross, as the greatest sign of His love for us, especially in our struggles and fears, in our yearning for conversion, reconciliation, unity and peace in this land. We must not look away, for as long as Jesus remains in the center of our being, we will not stray from the path of light, from Him who is our light.

We live in the most beautiful Diocese/Land and, at the same time, the most complicated. Yet it is a land of many surprises: first, the birth of the Divine Child; then the resurrection from the dead after three days. It is our fervent hope that in due time our Lord grants us a third surprise when He will allow the transformation from Calvary to the Church of the Resurrection and of Peace. As He has risen on the third day, we too can rise with Him in our desire that, in this very Land, we can all live in harmony as children of our one Father, and we can be true witnesses of our faith.

In the words of Isaiah "Because of the Lord who is faithful, ...in time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you, to restore the land and allot the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners: Come out! ... along the ways they shall find pasture, on every bare height, shall their pastures be." (Is 49:7-8)

I ask that you invite the faithful that our Lord has entrusted to your care to visit us. Encourage them to come, to see the holy places alive in the Gospel, to walk the Land in the footsteps of Jesus, to experience an encounter with our local communities, and to touch the living body of Christ, in the "living stones" and the Church of this Holy Land.

As we end this fraternal gathering, may you be for the faithful of the Holy Land, a living force and a radiant light standing tall with Christ in the world.

We wish you safe travels as you return home. We send our greetings and love to your faithful. We are grateful for your prayers and support. God bless you!

+Fouad Twal

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem