

Address on the Occasion
Of the Re-dedication of
Saint Saviour's Anglican Church, Acre

His Beatitude
Patriarch Theophilos III

21 February 2017

Your Eminence Archbishop Suheil,
Dear Father Hosam,
Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Reverend Fathers,
Dear Friends,

As we gather for this blessed occasion, we recall the words of Saint Paul:

“I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

And in the Psalms we read:

“Bring to the Lord glory and honour. Bring to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in His Holy Court” (Psalm 28, 29:1-2).

Worship is at the heart of the Abrahamic traditions. We say that those who wish to understand the faith and life of the Christian Church must begin by experiencing worship. For worship of the Divine, which is the source of one's existence, is an inherent act of the human soul.

“Indeed, in Christian tradition, the proper relationship between the created and the creator is best expressed through the relationship of worship. In every assembly of worship, Christians express their understanding of the nature of the Incarnate Logos, i.e. our Lord Jesus Christ, and of humanity's relationship with Him”.

It is in this way that we experience the unity of heaven and earth. It is the Divine Eucharist that we also experience the unity between divinity and humanity. In fact,

the Divine Eucharist, which is reasonable worship, i.e. Logiki Litria, in Greek, is a foretaste of deification, i.e. eternal life.

We are honoured to be present today, Archbishop Suheil, as you re-dedicate this church in Acre. Acre is an ancient city in which the witness of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worship has been manifest for millennia. Indeed, it has become a mosaic of ethnic and religious communities, all which synthesize this harbor. Acre embraces its Jewish, Christian and Muslim civilizations as part of our present, living tradition.

Our active, functioning churches here are an essential part of this vibrant, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious landscape, where both an ancient indigenous Christian community as well as pilgrims from all over the world give testimony to the essential Christian character of the Holy Land.

The restoration of this Church of Saint Saviour, after more than a quarter of a century during which it has been closed, is an important witness to this long tradition of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and to the fundamental role of places of worship and prayer. By restoring this church to the use of the Anglican diocese, you are emphasizing the life of the diverse Christian *martyria*, and you are making a unique contribution to the long and unbreakable character and destiny of this city.

If Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the world, then Acre is surely the spiritual gateway to the Holy Land. For centuries pilgrims would alight here on their way to Jerusalem, and from Acre they would return to their homelands, having been refreshed by the spiritual blessings of the Holy Places. The Rum Orthodox Church of Saint George and the underground Church of Saint Nicholas are also living testimony that we are not newcomers, but we Christians are an organic part of the fabric of this Holy Land.

We would like to take this opportunity, Your Grace, to commend you for your pastoral zeal, and for the great effort that you have made in restoring this church. Your deep commitment to the Christian presence in the Holy Land, your attentive care for your flock and for many Anglican pilgrims who come to our region every year, as well as your clear support for Anglican institutions, including schools and hospitals that serve not only the members of the Anglican Church, but all peoples of our regions without distinction, are an inspiration.

As a sign of the long-standing and important relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion, and between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Anglican diocese, we wish to present to Saint Saviour's Church this icon of the Resurrection for the veneration of the faithful. May it be a sign of hope that shines forth from the Holy Tomb of our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. After all, the Church of Jerusalem is first and foremost the community of the Resurrection.

May God bless you, Your Grace, Archbishop Suheil. And may God bless this city of Acre and our beloved Holy Land, for we consider this initiative to be a major contribution on behalf of both the Christian community and the local authorities to promoting peace, reconciliation, and mutual respect, which are the fruits of harmony.

Thank you.