

GLORIOUS CONCELEBRATION AT THE HOLY MONASTERY OF NEW VALAMO

On Sunday 29th June 2014, a glorious Festal Con-Celebration was conducted at the Church of the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour New Valamo, conducted by His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, con-celebrated by His Eminence Leon, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland, His Eminence Ambrosius Metropolitan of Helsinki and His Grace Ioannis Bishop of Joensuu, Caretaker of the Holy Metropolis of Oulu. During the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude, in support of the fraternal relations between the two Churches, and following the invitation to do so by the Finnish Primate, ordained to the Diaconate, the French origin brother of the Holy Monastery, Kassianos, who is responsible for the archives of the Monastery and translates into Finnish patristic texts of the Egyptian desert.

Prior to the dismissal His Beatitude said in his address:

With the Grace of "Him who all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in, and through whom He reconciled to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:19-20), Jesus Christ, we commune with you in the Church of the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration New Valamo and give, as members of the Body of the Lord, as members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the witness of our Lord in the continuous ecclesiastical presence.

We are glad in that we are con-celebrating and joining in the feast with You, choice friend, brother and supporter. We are glad because today we mutually express and declare to all that we are pervaded by the mutual wish to serve the Church, as timeless bearers of the in Christ and through Christ peace-making spirit of joy and fraternity.

We are glad because this communing is taking place in Finland, a country of noble culture and great scientific progress, a country which is a model of social provisions and providence for its citizens, a country which is a model of mutual respect and love to another, to one who is different, either from the point of view of religion, or from the point of view of national or cultural roots.

Before you and before your pious flock, which experiences love and understanding as a direct means of communion in Christ between people, we place the missionary effort of Orthodoxy in Africa, from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Cape of Good Hope in the south, from the Horn of Eritrea in the east to Cape Verde in the west. On the land of Africa where the fiery sun glows and simultaneously so does the desire to discover the Sun of Righteousness and Love, Christ, we strive to make reality the truths of the Apostle of the Nations:

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v *on the common origin of all people, "He made from one every nation of man" (Acts 17:26).*

v regarding equality of all people, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28) and

v regarding the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, "do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23).

We speak to our African brothers and sisters about the God of love, whom, if he wants to come to know him, he will feel the joy of freedom. We give substance to the truth that our meeting place with Christ is none other than the face of our brother or sister. We present the Orthodox faith to the native brothers and sisters in an understandable manner, with total respect for the free personal choice of each one of them and with the prospect of salvation "in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (Eph. 3:6).

At the same time we promote the idea of Orthodox Missions as an agent of change in the environmental social body. And this, because we believe that Missionary work cannot remain indifferent and disclaim its responsibilities with regard to addressing the social problems of our fellow human beings, to the degree that it is able. This is valid exclusively in Africa, which demands justice in order that the wounds of its colonial past may be healed. It demands disengagement from the stranglehold of poverty and seeks a shield against rapidly contagious diseases, restoration of the widening social inequalities, respect of the most basic of human rights. Depending on the means at our disposal and the assistance which we receive, we seek solutions in order to face to problem of poverty and hunger, so that orphans and widows can be supported, that poor patients may receive help, that water be given to suffering humans, that education be given to unprotected children, that the elderly who have been abandoned to God's mercy may be given a shelter, that local communities can be sensitized to the protection of the environment and the prudent use of natural resources, for the cultivation of a spirit of peace in communities harmed by civil strife, that human rights can be respected as an essential prerequisite, so that the multicultural and multi-racial African communities can found their prosperity on the firm basis not only of co-existence, but also of solidarity, without exclusion and stereotypes.

In conclusion, with faith, passion, firm belief as well as hope, we continue our efforts for the suffering, miserable, the hungry and sad, those who with tear-filled eyes and lips bloodied from thirst and deprivation await relief. The common denominator of all of this humanistic effort, is our African brother and sister, as a complete and perfect image of God, beyond borders, race and colour, without distinctions and without prerequisites.

Your Eminence, Σεβασμιώτατε,

In our missionary effort to graft into the body of Africa reconciliation and peace-making "through the blood of His cross", we have you as a strong and a sensitive comprehender> Your contribution strengthens our ministry and you can be proud to claim that you participate in the products of the spiritual fields of Africa, especially in Kenya, Tanzania and Cameroon. Our presence with you here today signals yet another stop of fraternal companionship, on the road which was marked out by the late Parthenios and Petros of Alexandria and John of Finland. We thank you for the opportunity which you have given us to strengthen and deepen our mutual bonds of love and respect and we give a paternal blessing to the noble people of Finland, praying that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, oversee this

vineyard, the sister Church of Finland and consolidates her in the perpetuity of time. Amen.

Concluding his speech His Beatitude awarded the Great Cross of the Order of St Savvas to the Primate of Finland, who on his part, reserved for His Beatitude the Supreme Honourary Distinction of the Order of the Lamb of God, and also appropriately awarded the Very Reverend Archimandrite Apostolos Trifyliis, who accompanied His Beatitude. The Abbott of the Holy Monastery the Very Reverend Archimandrite Sergios gave His Beatitude the gift of an ornate icon of the Most Holy Theotokos with the Infant.

On the afternoon of the same day His Beatitude paid a visit to the Convent of the Holy Trinity in Lintula, where he celebrated Vespers. He was then taken on a tour of the Convent, which is renowned for its manufacture of candles, and prayed at the tomb of the late Abbess Marina, who did missionary work in Kenya. His Beatitude was offered the opportunity to travel over the lake which is in the Holy Monastery of New Valamo and to wonder at the uncontaminated Finnish nature and to be amazed at the respect that the Finns have for the natural environment.

His Beatitude returns to his see on Monday, 30th June 2014.