

HIS BEATITUDE CELEBRATES IN ZIMBABWE THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS ELECTION TO THE APOSTOLIC AND PATRIARCHAL THRONE OF ALEXANDRIA

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa celebrated the completion of seven years from his election and elevation to the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of St Mark (9th October 2004 – 9th October 2011) in Harare, Zimbabwe, the county he served for four years as Metropolitan and from which God called him to take on the steering of the Alexandrian Church.

His Beatitude conducted the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Harare, together with His Eminence Seraphim Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola and His Grace Nikodimos Bishop of Nitria and Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, the venerable clergy, as well as the Exarchs of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in South Sudan and Cyprus, Fr Inokentios and Fr Athenodoros. And then, H.B. Theodoros II said

“With mixed feelings of joy and emotion we stand among you today. The joy is due to the fact that we are meeting once again known and beloved people, people blessed by God’s Grace, who make up the fullness of the local Church of Zimbabwe. The emotion stems from the memories and feelings which we keep in the safekeeping of our hearts, of the four years of our pastoral service at the Holy Metropolis of Zimbabwe.

We are here among you again on a significant day, both for our ancient Patriarchate, as well as for ourselves personally, to enjoy our face to face communication with you and together to rejoice through our sacramental meeting at the holy altar of the Risen Christ.

Dear brothers,

Today, 9th October, our Holy Church celebrates the memory of the Holy Apostle James, son of Alphaeus. According to Orthodox tradition the Apostle James preached the Gospel in the wider area of Gaza, today known as Palestine, and suffered a martyr's death in Egypt, in the city of Ostrakine.

Witness and Mission is the heritage of the Apostle James and of all the Holy Apostles to the Church. Mission, the sowing of the word of God into the pure hearts of our fellow man, according to the final command of our Lord: «Go and teach all nations». And witness: a witness of conscience, of travelling the path of the difficulties and labours of life together with our suffering brothers and sisters, a witness to being crucified with them on their personal cross.

And these two elements comprise the most important characteristics of the multifaceted missionary and humanistic work of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in its path through the ages.

Still, today, 9th October, the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of St Mark, modestly and humbly celebrates yet another anniversary. It is the completion of seven whole years from the day of our election as its 115th Primate. From the Holy Metropolis of Zimbabwe God called on us to take onto our shoulders the enormous responsibility of leading the Orthodox Church of Africa at the start of the 21st century, preserving the heritage left by the Apostle and Evangelist Mark, first Bishop of Alexandria. This calling is not a triumph or personal glory, but a laborious and most

responsible effort, for which we will answer on the Day of Judgment to Christ, Arch-shepherd of the Church.

During these seven years our aim has been the continuation of the efforts of our predecessors and the further promotion of our Patriarchate as a centre of unrepeatable spiritual, moral and material contribution to the proud nations of Africa.

The decisions, fervent zeal and total dedication to the service of the faithful children of this continent, were, from the moment of our election, the basic axle on which we base our strengths and on which we fulfill our vision. As a tender father, as a brother and friend, we wish to be present, opening wide our paternal embrace to accept all people whatever their race, language, descent and culture.

During this seven-year period we have literally traversed all of Africa, from end to end. This is because we wish to pass on the enthusiasm and assurance of the Gospel message to the hearts of Africans, Greeks, Arabs and others who live under our spiritual jurisdiction, to follow their progress at first hand, to share in their difficulties and their joys, to show our concern and to act in a spirit of sacrifice and support, pain and anxiety.

Our aim and motivation, together with our elected Bishops, such as your Metropolitan, His Eminence Seraphim, a man of contribution and sacrificial love, as well as our hard-working clergy, monastics, catechists and all the staff of the missionary effort of our Patriarchate is to preach «Christ Crucified» and to serve man, caring for and ceaselessly encouraging the building of churches, institutes, universities, schools, seminaries, clinics, orphanages and other works for the spiritual upliftment of the faithful, as well as for the solution of social and living problems.

Simultaneously, we are striving to see to other

works, of a lengthy nature, some of which have already been completed and others which are being developed in Alexandria and Cairo, in Egypt. These works were preceded by the renovation of the Patriarchal Mansion in Alexandria, the see and «activity centre» of our ancient Church, which for every official or simple visitor is the mirror of the two-thousand year journey of our Patriarchate in this world.

The renovation of the second see of the Patriarchate in Cairo followed, as did the recreation of the famous Patriarchal Library of Alexandria, one of the most universally important libraries, with a history greater than 1100 years, enriched by some of the most rare manuscripts, ancient writings, codexes and books, and the beginning of the restoration of this invaluable spiritual wealth of 50,000 works. We also undertook the renovation of the «heart» of the Patriarchate, the centuries old Holy Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified, where not even for one day during its 1500 years of liturgical life, has the name of the Triune God ceased to be praised, as well as the re-operation after 470 years of the Patriarchal Academy of Alexandria within its grounds, one of the most important nurseries of the indigenous staff of the missionary effort in Africa.

Already undergoing are the building works of the museums for the ecclesiastical and historical precious relics of our Church, which our predecessor Patriarchs preserved, giving their blood during the years of persecution and killings, the total renovation of the enormous in size and spiritual dimension of the Holy Monastery of St George in Cairo, the Monastery in whose grounds two thousand years ago the new-born Christ found refuge in the arms of His All Virgin Mother and the Righteous Joseph, when sought by Herod, and it is there that the Great Martyr George was imprisoned and tortured; also many other works which it is our duty to preserve for the sake of history and of our faith and which with God's help we ought to complete.

At the same time we are called on to travel around the world to present at inter-Orthodox, inter-Church and inter-Faith official meetings, the Apostolic witness and heritage of the Alexandrian Throne which was adorned with the figures of the great Fathers and teachers of Orthodoxy, such as Athanasios the Great and St Cyril.

Beloved brothers and sisters,

As the author of these majestic works and of even more visions, we wish, through our continued presence and ceaseless interest to make everyone aware, so that as they see the pure desire of the workers of the Gospel in Africa, to reinforce in every way possible, the strengthening of the voice of Orthodoxy and of her Message of the Resurrection to it, for the regeneration and rebaptism of its citizens.

We do not wish to go down in history as an ideologist, to be recognized or to be charismatic. But we do wish to be recorded in your hearts as a true father who knows how to love, with as much effort, pain and sacrifice as are needed for this.

We know from beforehand that in this struggle we are often alone and under watchful criticism, from a safe distance, and sometimes even from within our circle, of various people and even colleagues. We leave them all to the just judgment of God and ask for His mercy on all.

The majority of your hearts, those pure and genuine African hearts, is our refuge and comfort and seeing your bright smiling faces is the praise, rest and source of our strength. So, as it was given to so abundantly by a traditional leader in Northern Cameroon in February 2009, when bidding us farewell, he said the following proverbial saying: *«Thank you for coming to suffer with us...»!*

Please pray then for the progress of our Church and for strength from above for your humble father, Pope and

Patriarch Theodoros II, who wished to celebrate together with you simply, but with warmth and beauty, this anniversary of the completion of seven years from his election, by the Grace of God, to the historic Throne of St Mark, and we, turning our eye in supplication to Heaven, lift our hand and bless you, praying night and day for all of you. AMEN!"