

PASTORAL VISIT BY THE PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA TO THE HOLY METROPOLIS OF ZIMBABWE

The Alexandrian Primate, Theodoros, following his address in South Africa to the Pan-African Parliament on the cooperation of Nations for common dealing with poverty in Africa and in the global community, traveled specially to the Holy Metropolis of Zimbabwe and Angola to be briefed on the continuing drought in the country and to work with the local Metropolitan Seraphim and his colleagues regarding the assistance that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria can offer to the local population for the immediate needs of food for the more than one million people who are already suffering due to the ongoing drought, and which has reduced to the minimum all agricultural production in the country.

His Beatitude arrived in Zimbabwe on Wednesday 14 October accompanied by his exarchs in Greece and Cyprus, His Eminence George Metropolitan of Guinea and the Reverend Athinodoros Papaevripiadis. At the Metropolis he was awaited with Greek flags borne both by indigenous clergy as well as members of our community and representatives from the local Missionary parishes from the local populations.

Welcoming the Alexandrian Primate His Eminence Seraphim Metropolitan of Zimbabwe stressed that the important visit of the Primate of Orthodoxy to Zimbabwe will contribute to the better organization of the Missionary and philanthropic efforts, as well as the support of our Community for its survival in difficult times.

The Alexandrian Primate, who is well aware of the social problems of the African Continent, from his ceaseless pastoral journeys to the 54 countries of the African continent, stressed that the social contribution of the Patriarchate of Alexandria to the suffering people and poor and orphaned children of Africa, over and above the pastoral responsibility of the Patriarchate for Orthodox catechism, is a priority for daily ministry. He underscored the fact that his message to the Members of the Pan-African Parliament and to the leaders of the countries of Africa is that they must all co-operate to bring social justice to eradicate the scourge of poverty and to offer equal opportunities to the children of Africa, for good health, nutrition and education, referring to the tragedy that we experience when thousands of children die daily because of a lack of drinkable water and medical care. After the working meeting with the local Metropolitan and his colleagues, on Missionary issues,

The Alexandrian Primate visited the Ambassador of Greece Mr. Leonidas Kontovounisios where he had the opportunity of meeting with the Leaders of our Community and to be briefed on the difficulties which they face, as well as being himself able to inform them on the initiatives and the activities of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria for the strengthening the cause for peace and security in Africa and globally. Amongst other things he mentioned the importance of the initiative taken by the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Kotzias on the organization of a special conference next week on "Religious and Cultural Pluralism and peaceful coexistence in the Middle East" with the participation of Political, Religious Leaders and Academics to propose steps to end regional conflicts and for the protection of Human Rights in the Middle East and the peaceful co-existence of Peoples and the common understanding of the problem of displaced persons, together with the uncontrolled number of refugees from these areas because of the intensity of warfare in the region.

His Excellency the Ambassador of Greece Mr. Kontovounisios addressed the Alexandrian Primate and stressed that "the enormous ecclesiastical, social, educational and Missionary work done by the Patriarchate of Alexandria, is well-known to all,

vividly giving the nature of Orthodoxy in Africa, particularly during your Patriarchal tenure. Just as famous around the world are your key personal interventions on issues of concern to Christians and others, but also to the broader international community, including the phenomenon of terrorism”.

On the next day, Thursday 8th October, on the occasion of the local annual feast of the falling asleep of the venerable Efterpe, His Beatitude conducted the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy at the Chapel of the Dormition of the Theotokos, together with His Eminence George Metropolitan of Guinea and the priests Fr George and Fr Athinodoros.

The homily was preached by the Theologian and Member of the local Missionary Council and active member of our Community Mr. Panagiotis Psillos, who made particular mention of the splendour of the Theology of St Gregory Palamas regarding the salvific work of Jesus Christ for the salvation of mankind.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy the Alexandrian Primate mentioned contemporary figures of saintly women, when recently in Russia he visited personally the places where they had lived and did great spiritual works, like Saint Matrona the Blind and Saint Xeni in St Petersburg, where he served as a sacristan in a secluded cemetery. “A holy humble person such as this”, said His Beatitude, “was also the Venerable Efterpe, who through her prayer, her humility and her spiritual struggle daily experienced the divine commandments, following the Lord’s path, and her heart was granted grace and became a living dwelling of the presence of God’s love through her love for each and every person and her concern that no-one should lose the hope of Paradise. We need these kinds of figures in these times too for continued social injustices to cease, as they lead to conflicts with tragic consequences for us all. Peace is built by our sensitivity to protect in every possible way the human rights that are violated by people who are removed from the path of God”.

The Alexandrian Primate also prayed for the end to local conflicts and the problem of the drought in Zimbabwe, stressing that the best gift from us all for THE eleventh anniversary of his election to the Alexandrian Throne St Mark the Evangelist (9 October 2004) is that we all unite our prayers with his for peace in the whole world and prosperity for all people.