



BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND & WALES

HOLY LAND CO-ORDINATION

Patriarch Twal's Homily at Co-ordination closing Mass in Jerusalem

Church of the Holy Sepulchre, 13 January 2011

Your Excellencies, dear brothers, sisters, and friends of the Holy Land Coordination, today, we come to worship together here at the very heart of Christianity, as you prepare to return to your countries. It is because of this place, ultimately, that the Church of Jerusalem calls herself "Mother Church". Two years ago in this very place Pope Benedict XVI was moved to return to the essence of the Christian experience, declaring clearly: "I wish to proclaim anew [...] to the men and women of our time, the Church's firm faith that Jesus Christ was crucified, died and was buried", and that "on the third day he rose from the dead." Here, the sacrifice of Jesus brought forth its fruit, victory over sin and death.

I am very much aware of your many sacrifices to make time this week, and the many resources expended in order to come all this distance to be with us. On behalf of your brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, I thank you with heartfelt gratitude.

Your presence among us is another sign of how God's grace can always surprise us. Certainly, no one ever imagined the Incarnation beforehand, and the Incarnate Word being born in a cave in Bethlehem. That was and still is a surprise for us. And this same man, Jesus, continues to astonish us by his sacrifice on the cross and his rising from the tomb to open for us the way to eternal life. Though it was what the world was waiting for, it was still unexpected. By the same grace of God, your solidarity with the Church of the Holy Land surprises us, making us profoundly grateful.

Coming to this very place is necessary, so that we do not forget to look for this surprise, the longed-for but unexpected victory. This tomb in front of us looks like the end of a story. Instead, it is the beginning. It looks like the ending that met its tragic climax a few yards away, on Calvary. We are praying here today because this tomb could not contain the One who was laid here. This diocese, Christ's living Body in the Holy Land, is very much alive even though it is living through a prolonged period of Calvary, as indeed many dioceses in the Middle East do. During his visit, the Holy Father said, "The Church in the Holy Land, which has so often experienced the dark mystery of Golgotha, must never cease to be a valiant herald of the luminous message of hope which this empty tomb proclaims." This is our hope, which the darkness of evil cannot take away.

In our life of faith, we live a foretaste of Christ's victory. We experience the peace of Christ and are eager to share it with everyone. The Church in the Holy Land also longs to taste Christ's peace, in an end to the extended period of struggles that has scattered so many of her sons and daughters! Your presence encourages us to remember this and to look for this surprise. We must never lose hope, and with courage, patience and determination, we wait, we pray, we trust – may this revelation come soon!

After his resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples to go forth to all the nations and announce the Gospel, (Mk 16:25) promising them that "I am with you always." (Mt 28:20) You too will set out for different parts of the world. May you find the courage to speak to all of what you have seen, heard, and

touched; and to share your experience and encounters with the living stones of this land during your visit. May what you have done in these days not only remain an occasional gathering, or an interesting and moving interlude, but indeed an inspiration to your preaching, and to the life of the faithful in your community and diocese. As you return to take on the responsibility of tending and feeding the flock entrusted to you, may their meeting be a touch point for a future of ongoing communication, consultation, affirmation, spiritual nourishment, and communion.

Through the holy women, the Lord's chosen messengers, Jesus told his disciples to take courage and proceed to Galilee where he would meet them. Here, at the epicentre of the history that has given us our hope, our lives and our salvation, we are being sent forth. Our true birth into life is here, where Jesus defeated death, and fulfilled the promise of life that was made to us in creation. Our visit in faith is a renewal of mission for each one of us. Because we have touched with our own hands and seen with our own eyes this empty tomb, we are ever more certain that the one sending us forth will meet us where we are going. Even as her apostles discovered in their mission, that "the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message," (Mk 16:20) so too may it be for your, for us and for everyone here.

Everywhere is Galilee. May you discover that Christ is working with you upon your return to your Galilee – your homes, your offices, your churches, your dioceses; to witness to what the Lord has done and to encourage your flock to live in faith, to listen to His call, to follow, imitate, and live Christ's solidarity with suffering humanity!

By being so well covered in the media, your visit has made a certain impression on our people: the Israelis, the Palestinians, the civil and church authorities. It has created a certain expectation, a confidence, that you and the faithful of the world will not forget their brothers and sisters in faith, here in the Holy Land.

We hope that the relationships and fraternal friendships that have been fostered and nourished may continue to deepen though the years. All of us are brothers and sisters, born of the evens of this land, the Mother Church of Jerusalem. May Christ's unexpected victory radiate in your ministry wherever you are! Our prayers are with you, for safe travels to your Galilee, where you will meet Him. God bless you!

+Fouad Twal
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem