

Prosfonisis 26/04/2014, by abbess Maria, Orthodox Monastery Asten

Παναγιωτατε, ευλογειτε.
Your All-Holiness, Your blessing!

With heartfelt pleasure I wish to welcome you to our, and your, monastery. It was a great surprise that you could come to us, due to the change in your program for today. For this reason I also want to thank our Metropolitan Athenagoras, whose idea it was to come celebrate Vespers here.

This year is a special year for us: it is twenty-five years ago that your predecessor, His All-Holiness Demetrios, gave his blessing to open this monastery, under the direction of our beloved former Metropolitan, Panteleimon.

Your All-Holiness, you are bringing us your blessing, a double blessing, for it is the blessing of you as hierarch, and the blessing of the holy city of Constantinople.

I am personally also very thankful to you that I could be with you ten years ago in Constantinople and in Cappadocia, where it was given to me to experience this blessing of Orthodoxy. It was with awe (με δέος) that I walked through the streets of the City, with awe and trembling that I visited the holy sites in Cappadocia.

Now you have come to us in this beautiful time of the Resurrection, and you are proclaiming to us: Christ is Risen!
Χριστος ανεστη

Many visitors to our monastery ask: why is Easter, the Resurrection, so important in the Orthodox Church, even more important than Christmas or Good Friday? I cannot say it any clearer than the Apostle Paul: "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty."

In other words: without the Cross there is no Resurrection, but without the Resurrection there is no Christianity. Again Saint Paul says: "If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

So, we know: without the Cross there is no Resurrection. And even if in some countries the Church is "crucified," she is still the church of the Resurrection. "Yesterday I was crucified with You, O Christ; today I arise with Your arising." This message of the Resurrection which you are giving us, precisely now on Thomas Sunday, is so badly needed here in the Netherlands!

In the past we, Christians from different churches in the Netherlands, were indignant that in a country such as Soviet - Russia churches stood empty, or were used for other purposes. But now we, the Christians of the Netherlands, have a problem ourselves. We have to figure out what we can do with all the hundreds of empty churches in this country. It is a question of hundreds, even thousands, of churches that are closed, or have to close, to disappear. Every year some of them are demolished, but if possible we try to find a useful purpose for the buildings: some churches become mosques, others become workshops, clubhouses, hotels, apartments. As long as it is "useful," we are satisfied, because many of us have no longer interest in church buildings.

Here in my fatherland we have never known a totalitarian regime. Such a regime was not needed to fight religion; religion became, all by itself, ever less important. Without the message of the Resurrection, all that counts is the economy and a high standard of living. Without any compulsion from above, in the last fifty years about half of all Christians have lost their faith and left their churches, and only about a tenth of the believers go regularly to church. Many people doubt if Christ really existed, and only few believe in a life after death. When even pastors and theologians openly say that they no longer believe in the God of the Bible, and don't believe at all in a life after death, then slowly but surely the churches become empty. In this context I would like to praise the zeal of our brothers, the Old Catholics, who have invited you. I

have heard that there are about six thousand believers, spread over about twenty-four organized parishes.

According to official data, the number of Greeks with a Greek passport in the Netherlands has doubled in the last twenty years, from 7.000 at the beginning of the nineties, to more than 14.000 now. When and where are they going to church? May Your prayers and your support inspire, awaken and stimulate the faith of all the Orthodox in the Netherlands.

Your All-Holiness, I wish to say something from my heart in Greek, but because my Greek is so poor, I will use the words of a well-known children's book, in which a teacher says to the children of the City of Saint Constantine (and of course to us all):

Εδω (δηλαδη Ἐκεῖ πού εἰσθε) εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεύουσα, ἡ Νέα Ρώμη, τῆς ανατολικῆς ορθόδοξης αὐτοκρατορίας το κλέος. ..κατ' ἀπ' τα πόδιά σας, θεμέλιο τα αἵματα μαρτύρων, γνωστῶν καὶ ἀγνώστων... Γωνιά στη γωνιά, καλτερίμι στο καλτερίμι, βογγᾶ ὁ πόνος αὐτῶν πού πάτησαν σ' αὐτό τον τόπο. Αὐτές οἱ πέτρες ὅλες εἶναι λειτουργημένες. Ἐχουν τῆ δικῆ τους ἀξία, που δεν εἶναι ἱστορικὴ πια. Εἶναι σαν τα κόκκαλα των αγίων πού μυρίζουν ἀνάσταση.

That is why your presence and your witness and your blessing is so important. In your city, στην Πόλη, there sounds a voice, the voice of the martyrs who loudly cry: Christos anesti.

We hope that through you, through your coming to us, this voice will help us, Orthodox people in the Netherlands, to fight the good fight and strengthen our faith in the Resurrection, so that we all can say with heart and soul: Christ is risen! And to all churches: "Shine, shine, New Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon you!"

Φωτιζου, φωτιζου, ἡ Νεα Ἱερουσαλιμ,
Ἡ γὰρ δοξα Κυρίου ἐπὶ σε ἀνετείλε.

Σας ευχαριστοῦμε ἀπο καρδιάς.