

Pastoral Letter

To our Antiochian Sons and Daughters

In Western and Central Europe.

Saints Peter and Paul, 2008.

Fathers, Senior Priests.

The Societies, Councils and Boards.

Beloved Sons and Daughters in the Lord, in our Antiochian Parishes in the Diocese of Western and Central Europe.

May the Lord's peace and mercy encompass all of you.

"This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

This is what the beloved Apostle John addressed to us, and with these words I am starting my first discourse to you. I have just been commissioned by the Spirit, through the Fathers of the Holy Synod of Antioch headed by his Beatitude our father Patriarch Ignatius IV, blessed and amply respected, a pastor to our Antiochian Orthodox Diocese in Western and Central Europe.

Light has no darkness in it. Light is joy and consolation. Light is a soft breeze that moistens the heart. Light is peace and safety. Light is radiance and beauty. Light is assurance and pleasantness. Light is lofty and sublime. Light is reconciliation and fraternity.

This Light came to us and we met Him. He manifested Himself to us and we touched Him. Hence the beloved says also: *“The life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us... And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.”* (1 John 1:2-4).

The mystery which was kept in silence from all eternal times has been revealed by His love, as salvation, joy, peace and life. Our Jesus is our life, joy, peace salvation and bliss. Therefore we preach Him as life and salvation in the world, so that man perceives that eternal life consists in knowing Him as the true God alone.

And how beautiful is the prayer Jesus addressed to His heavenly Father for His disciples, when He said: *“Holy Father keep them in thy name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one”* (John 17:11).

I kneel down on my knees and raise my eyes to the heaven asking the Father of all light to keep you, to bless you, to protect you, to increase you, to help achieve your aims and put away from you every misfortune. I cannot see here more sweetness than the invocation made by the hierarch during the Holy Liturgy when he says (while raising his eyes towards the Ruler of All and blessing the people): *“Look down from heaven, O God, and behold and visit this vine which thou hast planted with thy right hand and establish it”*.

You are the parish that the Spirit has entrusted to me. You are my children in the Lord, my brothers and my beloved. *“There is no greater love than this to lay down one’s life for his loved ones.”* (John 15:13).

I ask insistently for your prayers and invocations so that God would strengthen me and you too, for the new task I have been commissioned to. We shall be, by His grace, the one family that will call with one mouth and one heart, saying: *“Our Father who art in Heaven”*. We shall be the one family whose sons and daughters with one hand, clergy and God-loving people, shall build the house and set it up on the truth, faith and love. The fatherly house is for all His sons and daughters, and each one of them has his standing and role; the family shall be considered incomplete if only one of its sons and daughters would be missing, and let us not forget that the Lord Jesus has left aside the ninety-nine sheep and sought out the lost one.

This testimony is an obligation for us, especially in these days when the world is stumbling by its might, pride and hatred, determining man to search for peace everywhere without finding it, because the earthly peace is other than God’s peace. Today the world is in need of the word of truth and salvation, probably more than in any other time; and here lies our responsibility and our role to be the guides to the harbour of peace.

I have a great hope in your love. I shall seek to gather the house together, so that we shall be faithful guardians of what we have been entrusted with, in order to make the name of our Antiochian Orthodox Church there where the faithful were first called Christians, shining in Europe.

Asking from God His grace and blessings for all of you.

+ John

Metropolitan of Western and Central Europe.