



Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church Calls for Civil Peace and the Protection of Christians in Syria



DECR Communication service, 30.03.2026.

On March 29, the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent, at the invitation of His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Great Antioch and All the East, Archimandrite Philipp (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' to the Patriarchal Throne of Antioch, took part in Matins and the Divine Liturgy at the Dormition Cathedral in the city of Damascus.

The Divine Liturgy was presided over by His Beatitude Patriarch John, concelebrating with Bishop Roman of Seleucia, Bishop John of Sergiopolis, Archimandrite Pavel (Orduloglo), elected and named Bishop of Tartus, Archimandrite Philipp (Vasiltsev), the cathedral clergy, and members of the Antiochian Patriarchate in holy orders.

The sermon after the communion verse was delivered by His Beatitude Patriarch John. The Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church said, in particular:

“Beloved in the Lord, dear brothers and sisters!

Once again I repeat the words that I once spoke from the ambo of this cathedral: Muslim brothers, between ‘us’ and ‘you’ there is no ‘and’; this means: we are you, and you are us. This is how we think, this is how we live, and this is how we relate to one another.

I would like to express words of support and convey my blessing and love to our people from Sqaalbiyah. At the same time, I address words of support and love to every Syrian, wherever he may be, regardless of his origin or religious, political, or regional affiliation.

I declare with all love: dear fellow Syrian citizens, Muslims and Christians, let us unite our efforts to restore our beloved Syria. Our country is beautiful! Let us build the Syria to which we all aspire together. So it has always been, and so it will be, God willing, despite all the difficulties and obstacles that we have to face: we will move forward and we will never look back. Such is our culture.

In conclusion, I would like to recall the story of Saint Macarius the Great, the ascetic of Egypt. It is known from his life that once this great saint was walking through the desert, praying, and saw a human skull by the roadside. He touched the skull with his staff and asked: ‘Who are you?’ Then a voice answered him: ‘I am a man who was a thief and a robber.’ Saint Macarius asked: ‘Where are you now?’ The voice answered: ‘In fire and torment.’ He asked: ‘And how do you feel?’ The answer followed: ‘In great torment and unbearable pain.’ The saint asked him: ‘Why do you feel this way?’ His answer was this: ‘Because we are all bound together in the fire, each on top of the other, so that no one can see another’s face.’ Therefore, the true hell is not to see the face of another person, whereas the true paradise is a living encounter with another person, the possibility of seeing his face, sincerely loving him, and living with him, whoever he may be. Such is our culture; this is what we want, and this is what we strive for - to live in peace and love with our neighbors.

Here, on this earth, we live our earthly life and believe in our Lord, and we go with Him on the path toward the Resurrection. We taste the coming Kingdom, the Divine life, already during our earthly life. We begin the path toward the Kingdom of God when we live according to the commandments given by God, when we live in encounter with one another, when we love our neighbor. Thus we taste the coming Kingdom, we taste its sweetness and delight.”

At the end of the service, His Beatitude Patriarch John was greeted by Archimandrite Philipp, who

conveyed to the Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church words of prayerful support and brotherly love from Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

On the night of Saturday, March 28, clashes took place in the city of Sqalbiyah in Syria's Hama province between local residents and armed Islamist militants.

That same night, hundreds of Christians came to the building of the Antiochian Patriarchate demanding protection from violence.

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