

## **Jerusalem and the Glory** **By Metropolitan George (Khodr)**

Of all the Palestinian scenes nothing has moved me like the Intifadah [insurgency] of stones since its detonation until it was rekindled now. I am amazed how unarmed children (what weapon can the stones be?) are saying no to armed soldiers. This refusal for me is the apogee of martyrdom – as we understand it biblically – and it's shiniest representative been, in my opinion, the death of the kid Mohammed Al-Dorra, whom I mentioned in my sermon last Sunday saying: "our love and prayers are offered to Mohammed Al-Dorra."

The night following the Divine Liturgy, I watched the televised interview with Yasser Abed Rabbo [Palestinian Information Minister] who was able, for three hours, to talk about the pain that his nation is suffering without any sign of grudge: the Palestinian resistance has become for many a tradition of love.

It hurts to see injustice, is there still a need to expose it after all this oppression exercised over an entire nation in the scope of the Holy Lands? And the greater injustice is the support for the continuation of this oppression despite the cries of the prophets.

They always questioned how could Jerusalem become a killer?

How can the Jews today disregard reading the condemnation for murder written in their tradition? "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope." (Is 5: 20) This is a tragedy befalling a monotheist nation like ours — which was called to do justice — meanwhile their devotees are murderers. They summon all nations if oppression befalls upon them—while oppressing the others doesn't disturb them. This is the tragedy of their religious atmosphere since no one there can discern the disaster in this domain. Rightfully Jeremiah said: "For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? Or who shall bemoan thee? Or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch my hand against thee, and destroy thee;" (15: 5-6) Why none of the Western Christians is not using this old rebuke against the present day Israel who, on the contrary, still enjoys the status of the spoiled kid? We declared this truth 52 years ago and kept repeating it over the generations mayhap they shall listen, but they shut their ears as if forcing the blood upon us.

And blood was spilled in the place of worship transforming the souls of the victims to another temple where the blood-sprinkled bodies prostrated a passionate prostration. And the Glory descended upon the Aquasah [Temple Mount]. And God attracted us spiritually to Himself: in martyrdom one passes through heaven. In what meaning Jerusalem

becomes a way to heaven? A very complicated say indeed. In some religious literature, Jerusalem is the centre of the world. Of course, this is an image suggesting that, in the cosmic body, Jerusalem is the heart – and one is subsequently included with it in this vision – in the atmosphere of metaphor where one needs the material in order to attain the unseen. From this perspective Jerusalem is the yearned for (Israa in our reading), and the spring of yearning (Meaarag in our reading) at the same time. He who wrote from the exile in Babylon: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!” wasn’t merely longing for his homeland, but was seeking after the Divine presence in its Temple. Later, the Holy City became the image of the Heavenly Jerusalem descending from above as the City of God.

In this spirit, Lady Rabeaat Adawiyah wasn’t seeking the House in her pilgrimage, but the Master of the House. No one seeks after the rocks in the Holy lands but after an icon. And seeking after things on high, Early Christians were not concerned with Jerusalem, which they left before it was captured by the Romans in 70 A.D. Their Saviour was in heaven and here His tomb is empty. Even the Patriarchate of Jerusalem ranked fifth in honour among the other churches since the fifth century. The fact that the Christ did sanctify the land which He stepped upon, is not so critical for the Christians for whom His Gospel and His presence in the Holy Gifts is much more precious than the earth of Jerusalem.

In-depth, despite the historical aspect in which Jerusalem is connected to every religion, the real meeting point for all the monotheistic religions becomes that when the city surpasses itself and stretches forth towards God. But before attaining His face, one remains with the symbols where begins all conflict and political game.

After politicising the symbols, the Hebraic State declares the existence of a Palestinian presence above the earth (the Aqusa Mosque) but an Israeli authority below the earth (the second Temple, despite the fact that this was not archaeologically proved). By artificially migrating from religious symbols to political covetousness everything becomes ridiculously permissible.

There is then an accord between all religions over Jerusalem if we aimed at the meanings, and a disaccord if we pursued the symbols.

The intellectual step that the Arab Christian theologians stepped, starting since the 60’s, was by overlooking the land and focussing on the man. This antinomy was expressed through these words, for the first time by Patriarch Elias IV, who headed back then a joint Orthodox-Maronite delegation to the Islamic summit in Lahore. In a first impression, one is transported from the Holy Places to a no-place—to the face of one’s God. And in a second movement, one descends from the vision of the gracious face of the Lord to the coexisting faces of the inhabitants of the City –

this City that becomes holy through the justice – which is their right upon the nations of the earth.

The unity of Palestine, despite all the historic quarrels over the right of existence for this or that party on this or that area, is the essence of justice for both Arabs and Jews only if the Jews abandoned the Zionist idea. We would have then gone to Madrid and to Oslo and the bloodshed would have being spared.

All politics is a compromise, but some compromises are impossible – not only because they are humiliating – but also because they are unviable. Within the frame of a possible political solution today, awaiting the hoped for peace, is:

First, a Lesser Palestine including the West Bank, Gaza and a complete and undivided Eastern Jerusalem.

Second, to stop the expansion of all kibbutzes.

Third, the return of all the refugees to their hometowns and villages. And the rest is mere details.

This necessitate both parties' return to the negotiation table, unless the present conflict did not surpass all this deliberation, unless the Hebraic State did not madly insist on its limitless craziness and unless our beloved people in Palestine did not march to the extent of their heroism.

Awaiting this, all Arabs are looking forward towards their upcoming summit. I can't understand why this summit was delayed, how can they cold-blooded watch the massacres? Is it our destiny to become like the story of Shahrazad [One Thousand and One Nights] awaiting a new story delaying us every night? Arab mentality enjoys the poetry and likes to believe that merely by speech they can substitute the action. The least what can those Arabs who have diplomatic relations with Israel do is to freeze this relation as a symbol of protest. This can be a start for an Arab action aiming at soliciting the mediation of the US to justly interfere between Israel and the Arabs. But most regretfully, the Arab diplomacy can't understand the impossibility of resisting Israel without the necessity of upsetting the US. This Arabic circus cannot save Palestine. Only one thing can annoy the Americans and that thing is the Arab oil. For the US to keep exploiting limitlessly and without an account the Arab oil – for the US to remain comfortably listening to Arab poetry against her – this means that the US will never cut the “umbilical cord” between her and Israel. The defiance of the entire Arab nation against the American tyranny has no relevance if the oil was not subordinated to serve the Palestinian cause. Arabs themselves must invent a mechanism to limit the American greed in their riches.

Remains all that huddle about sending troops and enlisting volunteers (where from?!) to fight beside the Palestinians and which remains a merely performed song.

None of the Arabs is dying for the Palestinians. No one is saving the Arab dignity except the Palestinian youth in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Gaza and elsewhere. I don't know the scheme of this salvation, all I know is that it springs from the Palestinian brave hearts, which have signed an eternal pact with life.