

Pastoral Letter

**On the Occasion of the Antiochian Day of Solidarity
Scheduled for September 15, 2013**

In Support of Humanitarian and Relief Work

By the mercy of God
John X
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

Giving is the Criterion of our Belonging to the Reign of God

“Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me” (Matt. 25: 40)

The Holy Antiochian Synod has set the 15th of September of this year as a day of solidarity for all local and international parishes in order to support the humanitarian and relief work, which the Patriarchate of Antioch and the All the East has undertaken in the collaboration of national, governmental, ecclesiastic, and civil entities. The amount of pain and suffering endured by our sons and brothers in Syria until today is beyond any description. Moreover, the available resources are limited and can only cover a small part of the basic and essential needs of life, such as food, water, clothing, medicine, medical treatment, and shelter.

We believe that God created us, gave us life and asked nothing in return for this precious gift. He was generous with us in a way that is proper to the Creator. He granted us the blessings which allow us to have a royal life in every sense. Yet we drifted away from the truth and willingly chose to go astray from his grace; thus, our lives were filled with pain, sickness, evil, and death.

God Himself did not remain distant from this new reality for He sent His only Son to live among us as one of us in order to return us to the right path again, enlighten our darkness, lead us to life, show us the Truth, teach us how to use our freedom, heal our wounds, give life to our souls, forgive our sins, and grant us His heavenly happiness.

He humbly shared human life with us; He accompanied the widow of Nain at the funeral of her only son and brought him to life; he searched for the bleeding woman and healed her soul and body; He taught His disciples to share their bread and fish with the people who marched after Him and how to feed them with their hands; He tested the faith of the Canaanite woman and granted her what she desired after having strengthened her faith; He healed the centurion's servant; He did not arrive on time to the house of His sick friend Lazarus, but He brought him back to life and for his sisters Mary and Martha; He approached and touched the eyes of the blind man, the possessed, the leper, and the man with the withered hand, and dismissed them all healed both in soul and body.

He gave us the best of all commandments, a solution to all our suffering: to love God through loving our brother and neighbor. Humanity is subject to evil and miseries we bring onto ourselves, knowingly or out of ignorance, because of our egoism and our own interests, whether we are individuals, groups, or countries.

The Lord did not request anything for Himself. He did not ask us to honor Him, nor to express gratitude or acknowledgment. On the contrary He accepted suffering from our hands; and, from us, He heard curses, encountered blame and aggression, bore neglect and betrayal, and accepted flagellation, mockery, and crucifixion.

He firmly commanded us, to love our neighbor, for He made this love the criterion of our belonging to the Reign of heaven. He commanded that our worship be associated with serving our neighbor, and He made loving and helping the weak and the needy equal in dignity to serving Him. He placed us between two charges: on one hand the parable of the Samaritan enlightens our minds and stimulates our solidarity with our needy brothers, taking care of them and standing by their side; on the other hand the parable of the last judgment, which confronts us with determining our eternal life starting now, by choosing for instance to be deaf to the voice of the needy, to remain blind to their suffering, to keep our hands tied instead of reaching out to help our neighbors, to shut our hearts to the pains of our brothers, or distract our minds with other than helping others.

Today the perseverance of most of our children who are affected, in need, homeless, sick, wounded, unemployed, and facing adversity cannot continue without the support of all brothers, whether wealthy or not, and not only financially speaking, but also through the effective love given, and factually expressed in the consideration provided to he who lost a job, a home, a loved one, a provider, or others. God never stops stretching His hand towards us in our misery; He helps us, heals us and saves us instead. Ought we not stretch our hands towards our brothers in return?

Some are doing so daily on the ground. But today those who live geographically afar from this reality, their tangible help is needed, as is their participation through a donation graciously given to their Church, which would be sent to the Patriarchate to support the efforts it is undertaking in this field.

The Church today invites you, with all the love, zeal, and gratitude it has received, to honor your brother so that God honors you. The wounded heart calls your generous, loving and giving heart, wherever you are, it asks you to stretch the hand of brotherhood, support and solidarity. Grant graciously as God graciously granted you the countless generousities and the bounties beyond description. Seek to fulfill the needs of your people, and be their consolation. They are your fathers in the most precious of what you possess: faith. Give what is less in return: your contribution and generosity.

May God bless your deeds and multiply the fruits of your charities in His heavenly Reign. Amen.

Issued from our Patriarchal Residence in Damascus

Dated the 6th of August, 2013

John X

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East