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“You shall be my witnesses” - Witness, Justice, Hospitality

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In the video we just watched you witnessed an overview of how the Evangelical Church of Greece welcomed the refugees starting in January 2015.

Now allow me to share with you briefly the motive which energized us, a small church (about 0,04% of the Greek population), to undertake the task of welcoming, feeding, clothing and becoming a friendly ‘neighbor’ to tens of thousands of refugees who came mainly from Syria, but also from other war torn countries of the Middle East and continue to come. There is only one motive: the Lord Jesus Christ.

No other factor could have motivated us to initiate and maintain a holistic hospitality for more than three years now, either at the Port of Piraeus or at Eidomeni or at the various Camps or at the cities where currently many reside, than the call of our Lord to love the ‘least of our society’.

Human altruism and philanthropy could have taken us up to a point, but not this far. If it was not for Jesus Christ and His call to love the unlovable and be His witnesses, then none of us would have turned to look to these ‘intruders’, of our land, a people of different religion, culture and language. A ‘threat’ according to some in Europe.

It was God’s constant and sobering question, demanding an answer from us, “Where is your brother?” (Gen. 4.9) that did not allow us to continue in our reclusive religious passivity, while they were knocking at our door. It was His call to us to be His hands, His feet, and His open arms and to offer ourselves, our resources, our homes and our churches, for the alleviation of their pain caused by the hell war brought to their lives. It was Paul’s instruction to Titus to teach believers to “lead in doing good works which are profitable to people” (Titus 3.8).

The Lord’s word captivated us. We could not see secular NGOs get involved and the Church be absent. No, we believed the Church should be there and do its best.

There were a number of goals, however:

1. The Witness of the Christian Church

The responsibility to welcome the Refugees was not a Protestant obligation nor an Orthodox or a Catholic. It's a Christian obligation.

Consequently, it was important for us to welcome these people in the name of the Christian Church and not in the name of our particular ecclesiastical community.

We are not naïve to forget our scandalous divisions, yet this is an internal issue of ours and this meeting is purposed to work towards our unity. Yet, towards them it was important to offer the love of the Christian Church. Period.

And of course, we could not have done it without the help, especially the financial help, of other Churches, like the Evangelical Church of Germany. We may have been in the forefront, but many others were behind, praying and supporting.

Yes, the Refugees were welcomed by the Church and for the sake of the Church.

2. The Witness of Our Continent: Europe

We were also motivated to welcome these people for the sake of our beloved continent: Europe.

To many of them, Europe is identified with Christianity and in their collective memory they remember Europe's not so Christian behavior in their lands, both in the distant past and in recent times.

Thus, it was important for us, as we were the first Christian European country they were stepping into, not only to dispel the negative stereotyping of our Continent, with which they were raised, but to replace all that with a Christian narrative of a generous and loving hospitality. We wanted their first European experience to be welcoming, friendly, respectful, dignified.

Yes, the Refugees were welcomed by Europeans and for the sake of the Europe.

3. The Witness of Our Homeland: Greece

As you know, since 2009, my people have gone through a very difficult time due to the economic austerity measures which were implemented. If that was not enough, since 2015 we have been called to welcome more than a million refugees. Yet, despite our difficulties, we along with countless Greeks, felt that our economic problems should not deter us nor serve as an alibi in not welcoming these people.

As a country we had nothing to do with the wars in Syria and in Iraq, yet since the beginning of 2015 we were called to pay a high price in welcoming the countless waves of the refugees that those wars caused. We did not focus on this injustice, however, but rather on those fleeing wars and we wanted to help our country treat these people with decency and respect.

Thus, we perceived it as a great opportunity to show to the world and especially to Europe, that despite our own enormous economic difficulties, we can remain humane and welcome the downtrodden.

Yes, the Refugees were welcomed by the Greeks and for the sake of the Greece.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Allow me to finish with a passage from the Word of God which spoke so strongly to us during all this time and kept us going despite the challenges.

"¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love, because he first loved us. ²⁰ If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also." (1 John 4).

The Christian faith is not a faith of fear, but of love!

Thank you and may the Lord bless you!

Rev. Meletios B. Meletiadis