



20th January, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In my capacity as Patron of the Catholic charity, *Fellowship and Aid to the Christians of the East* (FACE), I am very happy to commend to you the annual International Day of Prayer for Eastern Christians, which will take place this year on the Sixth Sunday of Easter (14th May, 2023).

The Day of Prayer for Eastern Christians was launched by l'*Oeuvre d'Orient*, a French charitable body which has been actively supporting Eastern Christians for over 160 years. From its inception, in 2016, the Day of Prayer has been supported by the Dicastery for Oriental Churches. Over the past three years, thanks to the initiative and organisation of the British charity, *Fellowship and Aid to the Christians of the East* (FACE), the Day of Prayer has been observed by dioceses across England, Wales and Scotland.

This Day of Prayer brings Eastern and Western Christians together and offers an opportunity to give thanks to God for all that we owe the Oriental Churches: the first preaching of the Gospel, the origins of the monastic tradition, many of the early Church Fathers, and, above all, the witness of the Eastern Christians down the centuries which has been, and still is, an inspiration to our faith.

Today, Eastern Christians are a diminishing presence in the Middle East. Maintaining their presence in those lands is essential for stability in the wider region, as well as for guaranteeing Western Christians an unbroken heritage and tradition from the source of our faith. Our Catholic charity, *Fellowship and Aid to the Christians of the East* (FACE), devotes itself exclusively to supporting the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and India, through long-term projects in education, healthcare, pastoral support and interreligious dialogue, so that Eastern Christians may remain in their homelands.

During the season of Easter, when we come to rejoice with renewed faith in the power of the Risen Lord, our Day of Prayer will offer an occasion to focus on Eastern Christians, many of whom are suffering from the effects of war and discrimination, especially those in Ukraine who are dispossessed and displaced, and to pray that the joy and blessings of Easter will fill their hearts with hope, so that together we may all come to rejoice with renewed faith in the power of the Risen Lord.

Accordingly, I would plead that this Day of Prayer for Eastern Christians be observed in your parishes on the Sixth Sunday of Easter, and that an opportunity be given to the faithful not only to pray in union with these Christians but also to show their solidarity with them through an optional collection in aid of FACE's projects under the patronage of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

With the assurance of my prayers and warmest wishes,

Yours in Christ

Michael Cardinal Fitzgerald, M.Afr., OBE

Fellowship and Aid to the Christians of the East

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