



Prot. N. (1) 1040/2021

**To the priests, the religious and the faithful of Cyprus  
and to the whole Diocese of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem**

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

It was talked about for quite some time, and for many it has been a topic of conversation for weeks, but it is now official: the Holy Father, pope Francis, will be in Cyprus in the days of December 2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup>. It is the second time a Pope goes to Cyprus; the first having been the historic visit of Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. It is the second time that Pope Francis visits our Diocese, the first having been his journey to the Holy Land in 2014.

This visit's theme, "*Exhorting one another in faith*", is a reference to the name of the apostle Barnabas, «son of exhortation» (Acts 4,36). It suggests the importance of comforting others and of reciprocal encouragement, which are dimensions essential to the dynamics of dialogue, encounter and welcome. These three being the quintessential traits of the Island's life and history, as well as of the current Synodal journey.

We are grateful and honored by this visit, which aims to be both a pilgrimage and an opportunity for encounter. It is a pilgrimage on the footsteps of the apostle Barnabas, the apostle of the nations, together with Paul, father of the Church of Cyprus. It is an opportunity for encounter with the reality of the Middle East which pours into the Mediterranean - and into Cyprus - the drama of families seeking refuge from war, poverty, power struggles and religious sectarianism.

Cyprus, in its smallness, on the one hand contains richness and splendor -but also the contradictions and dramas of the whole Middle East. On the other hand, it is a window open to the western world, with which the island has always maintained living relationships. It is a bridge which bears the beauty and the scars of history and upon which Eastern and Western cultures commingle as they walk together. This history has given the Church steadfast witnesses of the Gospel, even in the face of adversity, from Apostolic times until today. For example, at the beginning of apostolic preaching, there were Cypriot citizens in the small group of those who dared announce Jesus Christ in the vast metropolis of Antioch (At. 11,20).

The island's life is marked by the passage of the Cross. According to Cypriot tradition the oldest monastery on the island, *Stavrovouni*, was founded by Saint Helen with the donation of a relic of the *lignum crucis*. To this day we find the cross in the small island of Cyprus, just as -perhaps in a more intense and painful way - we find it in the remainder of the Middle East: political and territorial division, which becomes religious division; the drama of painful