

The Homily of Patriarch John X

At the Funeral of the Martyrs of St. Elias Church of Dweilaa, Syria
Holy Cross Church, Damascus, June 24, 2025

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Christ is risen! Truly, He is risen! Let us worship His Resurrection on the third day.

Your Beatitudes, Your Eminences, Reverend Fathers, Beloved Ones,

I have set aside the word I had prepared, for the bodies of our beloved martyrs laid here before us compel me to speak to you from the heart.

You, beloved martyrs, have left us and were translated to heaven, to eternal life, in the presence of the Lord Who rose from the dead. You were martyred last Sunday, which is the Second Sunday after Pentecost, a Sunday designated by the Holy Synod of Antioch as the feast of All Antiochian Saints. You were martyred and entered into eternal life on this day, joining the company of all Righteous and Holy Antiochian Saints, and all the saints. Today, we turn to you. We ask you to pray for us, now that you rest in the Lord's embrace.

I address my beloved ones, my brothers and sisters, the families of the martyrs, the wounded, the sick, and the injured. I extend to you my heartfelt condolences and ask the Lord Jesus to keep you with His divine Right Hand, to bless you, to comfort you, and to grant you patience and consolation. I address the faithful of our parish of St. Elias, where this tragedy took place. I address all our Christian children throughout Syria and across the world. I address every Syrian, whether Muslim or Christian, in this country, because what happened is not an isolated incident, nor a personal act, nor an attack on one individual or one family. It is an attack on every Syrian and on all of Syria. It is an attack specifically on the Christian entity. Therefore, I turn to everyone, asking the Lord God to comfort hearts, to strengthen us, and to keep us steadfast in our faith, in our Church, and in our homeland.

The Apostle Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans (14:8): "For whether we live, we live to the Lord; and whether we die, we die to the Lord." The rock of our faith

is the Lord who rose from the dead. And the martyrs who lie before us today are children of the Resurrection; they dwell in the Divine Light. They did not die; they are alive. They have passed on, even if in this horrific way, to the One whom they loved. They were praying in church. They were attending the Divine Liturgy. The Gospel had just been proclaimed. What kind of attack is this?? In the church, while people are praying and saying: “In peace, let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy” – and yet this sinful attack took place. As of now, it has claimed the lives of twenty-two martyrs. Not all the bodies are laid before us, because some families have already buried their loved ones. Twenty-two martyrs, and more than fifty wounded. Yesterday, after prayer in the church, we visited the injured and wounded in the hospitals. We do not forget them, and we pray that the Lord may grant them healing through the power of His Holy Cross.

What happened is a massacre. I repeat and emphasize – it is a massacre.

It is a targeted attack on a fundamental component of our beloved Syria.

An attack on every Syrian.

(Note: In the second half of his homily, His Beatitude Patriarch John X directs pointed words at the president of Syria, Mr. Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa.)

Mr. President,

I would like to inform you that the crime that occurred is the first of its kind since the events of 1860. We do not accept that such an act happens during the days of the revolution and under your honorable leadership. This is condemned and it is unacceptable. I affirm to everyone that we, as Christians, are above all these events, and we will not allow such a heinous crime to become a cause for igniting a national or sectarian strife, God forbid. We stand for national unity and are committed to it along with all Syrians, Muslims and Christians alike. We live together as one family in this noble country. Many patriarchs and church leaders from all over the world have called me, as have politicians, presidents, prime ministers, ministers, and Muslims from this country, to express their solidarity with us and their condemnation of this horrific massacre.

I will say it boldly: Mr. President, we deeply regret that, in the immediate aftermath of the crime, not a single government or state official was present at the scene, except for Mrs. Hind Kabawat, a Christian.

We regret that deeply. We are an integral component of this nation, and we are here to stay.

Let me remind you: The two Archbishops of Aleppo, Boulos and Youhanna, were kidnapped, and much was said at the time. The Maaloula nuns were also kidnapped. And here we still are. The heinous crime was committed the day before yesterday, and we will remain here.

We appeal to you, Mr. President, for a government that does not get distracted by issuing unnecessary decisions unworthy of mention from this sacred Royal Door. We call for a government that takes responsibility and shares in the suffering of its people.

Mr. President, the people are hungry. If some have not told you this, I am telling you.

Honorable members of the government: people come knocking on the doors of our churches asking for money to buy a loaf of bread!!

With all love, respect, and appreciation, Mr. President, you spoke yesterday by phone with the Patriarchal Vicar to convey your condolences to us.

This is not enough. We appreciate the phone call, but the crime that took place is greater and deserves more than just a call. We hope the government succeeds in achieving the goals of the revolution, which, as you and everyone have said, are democracy, freedom, equality, and the rule of law. This is what we expect, what we want, and what we are working for.

I will say it plainly: we were informed that the government intends to declare an official day of mourning for the nation. Mr. President, do not announce this day as a day of mourning. As Christians, we do not desire anyone to mourn for us. Rather, I would find it beautiful that you declare this day a day of mourning for the government itself.

These martyrs are not, as some officials have said, simply casualties or ‘those who passed away.’ They are martyrs. And I dare say, my dear ones, they are martyrs for both faith and homeland.

It is important for us to know who stands behind this heinous act. We were promised that. While that matters greatly to us, what matters even more is to emphasize—and I will say it plainly—that the government bears full responsibility.

What our people want is security and peace. The primary duty of the government is to ensure safety for all citizens without exception or discrimination.

Mr. President,

We congratulated the revolution and its victory in all our speeches. We also congratulated you personally. And when you became the president of the country, we congratulated you and did everything necessary because we are true citizens of this land. We are Syrians, proud and genuine. Our country is our land and our dignity. I have said it before and I will say it again: we have extended our hands to you to build the new Syria, and we still, sadly, wait to see a hand extended back to us.

We pray, dear ones, for our martyrs, our wounded, and their families. We pray for our country and for the entire world. We pray that the future Syria will be the homeland of which every Syrian dreams.

This criminal entered the church, being armed and carrying explosives. Our young men—Jiries, Bishara, and Boutros, whom I know personally—saw him. They pulled him back, pushed him away, and threw themselves on him. They willingly accepted to be torn apart, and they were, so they could safeguard those inside the church. This is our people. They are our heroes. They were torn apart to protect, as I was told, 250 people inside the church.

Before this heroic Christian people, I affirm boldly: we do not fear, and we press onward in our journey.

In the presence of the magnitude of this scene, I conclude by affirming that they would have acted likewise to protect those around them, even if they had been in a mosque.

Our prayers are for our martyrs, and we ask for their prayers from wherever they reside in the Divine Light, on our behalf.

The Lord says in the Gospel: “Take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He also says: “I am in the midst of her; she shall not be moved” (Psalm 45:5).

Thank you all, and may the Lord protect you, Him Who is blessed forever. Amen.