

Brothers and sisters..

"I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I am in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". (John 15: 1-5).

The tree of faith has deep roots in the land of Syria. These roots are as deep as love that was planted in this land thousands of years ago. It is the love of God to his children. That love that still grows and spreads in spite of wars and fights which have never stopped on this land **"For God So loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life "(John 3:16)**

This tree of love has grown and flourished and its branches have increased. It has given a lot of fruit. Without this fruit of love we would never have been able , as Christians in Syria, to spread happiness, light and peace on the land that has been living in the dark and death where people have forgotten the meaning of humanity and children have lost any sense of childhood.

During war a lot of tree branches break and get separated from God to live in dark far from him, but in other parts of the tree many new branches flourish, the branches that remain with Jesus, the vine. Those are the ones who want to be God's children and the light in the dark land, achieving his word **" let the light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven "(Mathew 5:16)**

All those that have remained with Jesus have been chosen by God to have a mission on this land especially at war. Through our mission, we can be witnesses to Jesus , and our good deeds can be shown in spreading the happiness of remaining with him as well as planting the spirit of love and Christian thought .

I will summarize to you my dear brothers the four main domains that the Christian youth work in Syria and especially in my city, Aleppo.

The first domain is praying for Syria. Since the beginning of the war, a group of the youth started preparing the churches in Aleppo one after the other and gathering all people from different denominations under the title **"pray for Syria"**. The group of the youth with the help of priests prepared decorations, prayers and hymns with new ideas and texts every month in a different church in Aleppo. The prayer way depended on collective participation as well as individual prayers to concentrate on the needs of the long-suffering people at war. The best of that was the participation of all priests and churches from all denominations in one voice for appealing to God and glorifying his name.

The second domain was spreading the happiness of Jesus in the country of pain and sorrow. One of the objects was the initiative from The Syriac Orthodox Scout and The Roman Orthodox Scout to wear Santa Clause costumes and go to visit poor children's homes in Aleppo under the title '*go and visit them at home .. Tell them Jesus was born.*' More than a hundred Santa clauses carried the good news and the happiness of Christmas with little gifts and entered the Christian homes to spread the true happiness and hope of the visit of our savior Jesus Christ to our hearts. The experience of those joyful children at that time was unbelievable. Tony, one of the children was sleeping when he was awake surprised to see that he was surrounded by 4 Santa Clauses to share him the joy of Christmas. Thanks God for such a memorable experience.

The third domain was through collecting the *youth and the children* to have some important *meetings* which contained prayers and exchanging experiences; it also included living the happiness and hope of Christianity far from the catastrophes of war. The meetings aimed at filling people's hearts with Jesus's teachings regardless of everyday difficulties they have, and help them to go close to the church to refresh their belonging there and feel the importance of the Christian existence and the major role they play in Syria. Rim is a girl who said Goodbye to all her friends and stayed alone in Aleppo. She was sad until the first meeting which is called "*You are the Hope*", after that meeting she had new great friends and she experienced the importance of staying in Aleppo.

The fourth domain was taking care of the *Christian leaders* in Aleppo and in all Syrian cities by living a growing Christian mission in the Syrian society. These leaders are the lighthouse that witnesses to Christ before their children in the church through Christian education, life of scouts and visiting the people in need to help them. They are witnesses to Christ in a common life with Islam and other religious sects. These leaders are always in charge of the awareness and development projects in most of the organizations in the civil Syrian society, like *Caritas, JRS, The Syrian Trust* and many others. From this point comes our big interest in keeping them in their churches and training them at advanced levels by attending important meetings inside and outside Syria. And I invite you brothers to pray for these leaders in Aleppo to accomplish their mission. Let's pray together and present them the best because they are the young branches that should grow properly to give a lot of fruit in Syria.

We all know the suffering has not ended yet, but our only hope is Jesus's love for us. It is also our faith that he is the only supporter and savior. He tells us every day that "**I have told you this things so that in me you may have peace.in this world you will have trouble but take heart I have overcome the world**"(John 16:33).

Greeting and Blessing

Syriac Orthodox church

Aleppo-Syria

Safir Salim