



CONGREGATIO
PRO ECCLESIIS ORIENTALIBUS

00193 Roma Ash Wednesday, 2024
Via della Conciliazione, 34
Indirizzo postale: 00120 Città del Vaticano

Dicasterium a die 5 Iunii 2022

Prot. N. 1/2024

Dear brother in the episcopate,

“And now our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem.” How we wish the words of Psalm 122 were a description of what is happening in our days! Instead, many pilgrims remain far from the city of their dreams, while the inhabitants of the Holy Land continue to suffer and die. Throughout the world, the roar of weapons that bring death resounds. And there is no respite, even though God has assured us that “For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for fire.” This is the prophecy of Isaiah (9:4). We have seen and continue to see men in arms shedding blood and killing life itself. Yet, in the next verse, Isaiah announced that “A child is born to us [...] the Prince of Peace.” For us Christians, that child is Jesus Christ, God made man, God with us.

Pope Francis has never ceased to express his closeness to all those affected by the conflict in the Holy Land and to cry out to men and women of goodwill, urging them to work for peace and to respect the sanctity of every human person. In recent times he expressed these words: “I am close to all those who are suffering, Palestinians and Israelis. I embrace them in this dark moment. And I pray for them a lot. May the weapons be stopped: they will never lead to peace, and may the conflict not widen! Enough! Enough, brothers, enough!” (Angelus, November 12, 2023).

The pilgrimage to Jerusalem has a history as ancient as Christianity itself, and not only for Catholics. This is made possible even today by the generous work of the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land and the Eastern Churches present there. They maintain and animate the holy sites, a living memory of Jesus’ steps and actions, a visible testimony of the God who made Himself flesh and blood to save us, mud animated by the breath of His Spirit. Thanks to their dedicated work in those places, we continue to pray unceasingly for the whole world.

Since its origins, the Church has continuously and passionately cultivated solidarity with the Church of Jerusalem. In the late medieval and modern era, the Supreme Pontiffs intervened several times to promote and regulate the Collection for the Holy Land. The Collection was last reformed by Pope Saint Paul VI in 1974 with his Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Nobis in Animo*’. Pope Francis has also often emphasized the importance of this ecclesial gesture.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is not merely a pious tradition for a few. Everywhere in the Catholic Church, the faithful have an obligation to offer their contribution to the so-called *Pontifical Collection for the Holy Land*, which is collected on Good Friday or, in some regions, on another day of the year. We will do the Collection again this year, hoping in your particular generosity.

And do you know why? Because, apart from the custody of the Holy Places that saw Jesus, there are still Christians living and operating in the Holy Land, amid many tragedies and difficulties often caused by the selfishness of the powerful of the world. Over the centuries many died as martyrs so as not to see their Christian roots cut off. Their Churches are an integral part of the history and culture of the East.

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But today, many of them cannot take it anymore, and abandon the places where their fathers and mothers prayed and witnessed the Gospel. They leave everything and flee because they see no hope. And ravenous wolves divide their spoils.

The Christians of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and many other lands turn to us and ask, "Help us to spread the sweet aroma of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:15) again in the East.

I address you so that their cry does not go unheard and that the Holy Father can support the local Churches in finding new ways, opportunities for housing, work, and educational and professional training, so that they may remain and not get lost in the West, a world they don't know, which is so different from their feelings and their way of witnessing their faith. If they leave, if they leave their small businesses serving pilgrims who no longer come to Jerusalem and Palestine, the East will lose part of its soul, perhaps forever.

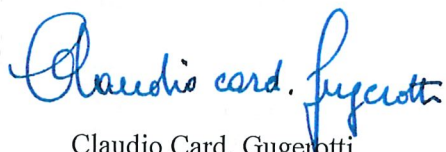
Make them feel the solidarity of the Church!

I express Pope Francis's gratitude to the local Churches, to the Franciscans, to the many charity volunteers, true children of peace, witnesses of the Prince of peace, and also to all of you for your prayer and your contribution for the Holy Land and for all those who dwell there.

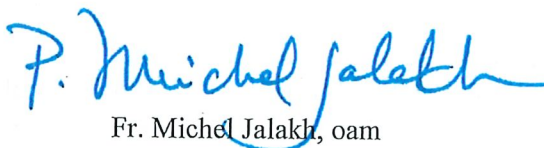
May the Lord bless you and reward you. Thanks also to each of the Bishops who will take to heart this blessed initiative.

Thank you on behalf of those who cry and those who die because of the madness of war. Thank you especially on behalf of those who have lost their children or see them horribly mutilated. Help us to help them!

May the Lord bless you with abundant blessings and consolation.



Claudio Card. Gugerotti
Prefect



Fr. Michel Jalakh, oam
Secretary