

*Dicastery from 5 June 2022*

Prot. N. 1/2023

Dear Brother in the Episcopate,

In the account of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, we hear reported among the signs accompanying the death of Jesus, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, and the rocks split" (Mt 27:51-52). Just as humanity was slowly recovering from the consequences of the pandemic, a few weeks ago we witnessed the upheavals caused by the terrible earthquake. Felt even in Jerusalem, it caused great damage and a very high number of deaths in Syria and in southern Turkey, lands visited by the Apostles, where early Christianity thrived with outstanding monastic and eremitical traditions. We are all indebted to the theological schools that flourished there and contributed to the development of the understanding of the mystery of Christ, even if we often do not know them due to the persecutions that extinguished them.

To the drama of the war that has lasted for over twelve years in Syria, the strong seismic shocks added devastation caused by collapsed buildings. Many of our brothers and sisters in faith and in humanity have faced a new exodus from their homes, this time no longer for fear of bombs or for what the invasion of the Plain of Nineveh had meant in Iraq, but because their very houses trembled. The refuges of families and intimate dwellings of their deepest affections faced the risk, alas often realised, of turning into deadly tombs.

The ravages of the long war and the recent earthquake have once again laid bare the fragility of the securities to which humanity entrusts its hope, and make us feel more strongly the desire to take root in the Rock of God's fidelity in the Pasch of Christ, dead and risen. We saw His image desecrated a few weeks ago by vandalism at the Church of the Flagellation, along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. That mutilated Crucifix invites us to recognize the pain of so many of our brothers and sisters who have seen the bodies of their loved ones tortured under the rubble or hit by bombs. We are called to walk the way of the Cross hand in hand with them, knowing that, in every age, each sepulchre, just like that of the Basilica of the *Anastasis* in the Holy City, is not the last word on the life of man. The precious presence of the Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land not only guarantees the maintenance of the sanctuaries, but also safeguards the life of the Christian communities, often tempted to lose their vocation to be Easter people in the lands blessed by the presence of the Redeemer.

In recent weeks, many houses of Franciscan Friars and Sisters, as well as those of other Religious Orders and Congregations, have become tents and shelters for the displaced in Syria as in Turkey. More generally throughout the Holy Land, they remain sources of hope by caring for the littlest ones, educating schoolchildren and youth, accompanying mothers in difficulty, attending to the elderly and the sick, as well as offering housing projects for new families and creating jobs, so that it is worthwhile continuing to stay in the Places of Salvation.

The universal Church and all of humanity have once again shown themselves attentive in this emergency, coming to the aid of those afflicted by the natural catastrophe. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, following his predecessors, this year too has instructed the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches to revive the invitation to solidarity with the Christian community of the Holy Land as Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Nations, had already done with a collection for the Church of Jerusalem. The material gesture to which he calls us is accompanied above all by a word that rekindles our sense of keeping alive the memory of the origins, as the prophet Isaiah recalls: “Consider the rock from which you were hewn” (Is 51:1). The Church spread throughout the world with the preaching of the Apostles, and each of us through Baptism, has become a stone called to remain united to the foundation, which is Christ the Lord, in order to construct a spiritual building. In Jerusalem are our wellsprings, and we want to remain united with the brothers and sisters who continue to testify to the Gospel there. Let us cherish the historical memory of the Upper Room, making our homes and parishes cenacles of prayer and charity. Let us reinforce the spaces of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre and restore them to light, but above all, let the announcement of the Risen Lord abide in our hearts. Let us maintain the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, but let us allow our lives to be changed daily by the Word of the Lord as the Virgin Mary did. Let us join the rejoicing angels in the mosaics of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, but let us take care of those who are born and remain on the margins of our society, like the Holy Child in the cave, surrounded only by shepherds.

I ask you with all my heart that the Good Friday Collection therefore be generous, like so many “mites” of the widow praised by Jesus in the Gospel.

On behalf of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, I thank the bishops, the parish priests, all the religious and parish communities, as well as the commissioners of the Holy Land, who everywhere in the world help to achieve this annual pilgrimage to the sources of Christian existence. Thanks, especially on behalf of those who, through your goodness, will return to a more dignified life.

Sincerely,



✠ Claudio Gugerotti  
Prefect

Rev. Flavio Pace  
Under-Secretary

