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From the Easter of Francis to our own Easter in the Holy Land

Jerusalem, March 20, 2026

Dear Brothers,

May the Lord grant you His peace!

The recent conflict, in addition to sowing death, destruction, and innocent suffering, has profoundly disrupted all the pastoral, liturgical, educational, and community programs that we had prepared with great commitment for this time. Once again, we find ourselves grappling with the unpredictability of events, with the sense of helplessness that arises when violence seems to prevail over every human effort, and with the uncertainty of the future, which has once again become a heavy burden. All around us, human tragedies are multiplying; they closely affect the people living beside us and those who knock at our doors. While on one hand we feel small and inadequate, on the other we thank the Lord because we cannot and will not grow accustomed to pain, nor consider it normal.

It is precisely in this context that we are called to live a special moment for the entire Franciscan Family: the celebration of the eight-hundredth anniversary of the blessed passing (*Transitus*) of Saint Francis of Assisi. Amidst the din of war, a question resonates in our hearts that is both human and spiritual: why all this evil? Why this perpetuation of violence? How can we live through this time without losing hope?

The coincidence of this centenary with the times we are currently traversing can become a grace, if it helps us to read the present through the same eyes as Francis. As the *Guidelines for celebrating the Easter of Francis of Assisi* remind us: "Celebrating the 800 years of the Easter of Francis is an invitation to contemplate our personal history and that of our Franciscan Family with a gaze of faith, capable of perceiving the presence and action of God in everything, even in the difficult and dramatic situations we have lived through or must live through in the present time."

We had planned the opening of the Franciscan Year here in the Holy Land for Monday, March 23, in the presence of the Ministers General of the OFM and OFMCap. With the outbreak of the war, it was decided to suspend everything and postpone the celebration to better times. However, reflecting on what we are currently experiencing and as we approach the Easter celebrations, it has become increasingly clear to me that right now we need to look to the Easter of Francis to learn how to live the Easter of the Lord within the concrete circumstances in which we find ourselves, here, in Jerusalem.

The centenary is not simply a commemorative moment; it is an opportunity for conversion and renewal. Pope Leo XIV, in the letter sent to the Ministers General of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, recalled that the example of the Saint—"strong in faith, firm in hope, and burning with active charity toward his neighbor"—can help us all to trust in the Lord, to live the Gospel with fidelity, and to welcome every circumstance of life in the light of faith and prayer.

For this reason, I have deemed it appropriate to confirm the date of March 23, 2026, for the opening of the Franciscan Year, despite the limitations imposed by the security situation, celebrating it in a simple yet significant form. In the coming days, the guidelines and all necessary information for the celebrations and jubilee events in the Custody of the Holy Land will be communicated.

At the beginning of his evangelical life, Francis had heard these words: "The Lord revealed to me that we should say this greeting: 'The Lord give you peace.'" In this greeting, the entire Gospel that Francis had discovered is enclosed: peace is God's greatest gift, not the result of human strength alone, and yet it is a gift that asks to be welcomed and lived every day. It is the same greeting that the Risen Lord addresses to the disciples on Easter evening, when he finds them locked away out of fear: "Peace be with you."

In a time marked by wars that seem endless, by divisions and fears that penetrate even into our hearts, Francis continues to speak to us—not because he offers technical solutions—but because he points to the true source of peace, which is born from a life reconciled with God. Celebrating his *transitus* means remembering that we are all called to holiness, and that the greatest contribution we can offer to this land is not primarily our works, but our evangelical life, capable of witnessing to the Risen Lord in every circumstance.

Near the end of his life, Francis said to the brothers: "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing." He did not feel he had arrived; rather, he desired to begin again. His Easter reminds us that every day is a favorable time to renew our response to the Lord, to return to the simplicity of the Gospel, and to serve with greater love the brothers and sisters entrusted to us.

This is particularly true for the Easter season we are preparing to celebrate. The limitations, the hardships, and the state of war force us to return to the

essentials—to the origin of our vocation and our mission in the Holy Land. Christianity is born from an event, and the Holy Places are the concrete geography of this event of salvation. Our faith is not an idea, but the incarnation of the Son of God in history and in a specific place. For this reason, since the beginning, the Church has guarded these places not only as a memory of the past, but as a living sign of the event that continues to act in the present.

When we celebrate the liturgy, we become contemporaries of the Lord's Easter. What we celebrate happens **today**, and it transforms our lives. This occurs in every part of the world, but in the Holy Places, we are called to guard the "here" of salvation. As Friars Minor, on behalf of the Church and for the entire Church, we have received the mission to dwell in these places, to celebrate the divine liturgy there, and to keep alive the memory of redemption, as the Bull *Gratias Agimus* reminds us.

For centuries, the Friars have guarded these places in every circumstance, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood, but always with fidelity and dedication. Today, we too are called to that same faithfulness.

I invite you, therefore, to live the upcoming Easter celebrations with particular intensity and awareness, remembering the grace and the responsibility of being able to pray and celebrate in the places of the Lord's Incarnation, Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Our prayer, even when it seems hidden and fragile, is already a proclamation of the Gospel.

On Easter night we will sing: "A death-defying duel was fought: the Lord of life was dead; now he lives." This is our faith. In the Risen Christ, we are more than conquerors.

Let us support one another in fraternal communion, to remain faithful to our vocation and to continue, even in these difficult times, to proclaim with our lives that Christ is the light that dispels the darkness.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

Fraternally,



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