
Attack on Israel. Patton (Custos of the Holy Land): “This is not a reaction to a surprise visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound”

“I honestly believe that no one had expected such a meticulously planned attack. I was afraid that something would happen after the confrontations and violence we witnessed in recent months. What happened was not a reaction to a surprise visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, it was a well-planned attack.” The Custos of the Holy Land, Father **Francesco Patton**, speaks to SIR from a “completely empty” Jerusalem.



“The situation is extremely serious: a state of war has been declared. We know that the places where we live are safe, but we have to be careful and we have to watch out for any possible developments of the situation. There is a great risk of the conflict spilling over into the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, and we must be very careful and patient,” says the Franciscan. Since the day of the attack, October 7th, the Custody has given precise instructions to its friars to act with caution at this critical moment. This means “remaining in the monasteries” or travelling “only when necessary for study purposes or work.” The Custody notes that the restrictive measures imposed by the Israeli authorities in a state of war “apply to the territory of the Custody, that is, to Jaffa, Ramleh and Jerusalem (including Beit Hanina and Ein Karem).” The ceremony of reception in the diocese of the Latin Patriarch and new Cardinal, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, which was to take place this week, has been postponed to a later date.



The attack carried out by Hamas saw many cities in the West Bank, where the Custody administers several parishes and shrines, rallying in support. The Custody's message is clear: “We are trying to keep our communities distant from political conflicts at the moment, as we always do in these cases. There have been demonstrations supporting Hamas, as can be seen on television and social networks, but we recommend not getting involved because that's not why we're here. Our invitation is always one of moderation and prayer. In situations of conflict, Christians are always the weakest party. In fact, after every war, it often happens that a large number of Christians emigrate abroad.”



Father Patton's thoughts are with the pilgrims in the Holy Land: "We have decided to leave the shrines open so that they can visit them and pray in them, so that they live out their religious experience to the full." "We do not know exactly how many groups are here at the moment, some are in Bethlehem, others in Galilee, in Nazareth. They will return to Italy as soon as possible." To date, the prospects are bleak:

"I am afraid that with this attack we will again be alone with the local faithful for a long time."

He continued: "For my part, I have said that it is not safe to organise pilgrimages. As soon as it is safe again we will announce it and invite the churches to return. October is the month of the rosary: I ask everyone to pray for this tormented land."

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