
Gaza Strip: mgr. Broglio (Hlc), “Christians always refuse unilateral positions”

(from Gaza) “We are here to be witnesses of the universality of the Church and of our attention and care for you. The Lord teaches us not to be indifferent to the lives of our brothers and our neighbours”. This is how yesterday mgr. Timothy Broglio, archbishop military ordinary of United States, greeted the Catholic community of Gaza during the Mass officiated in the Latin parish church of the Holy Family, the only one in the Strip. It was the first stage in the pilgrimage of solidarity (11-16 January) of the bishops of the Holy Land Coordination (Hlc) in Gaza, Ramallah and East Jerusalem. The group of delegate bishops from the European and North American Bishops’ Conferences, with members from Ccee and Comece, was received at the Erez Crossing, on the Israeli border, by the parish priest of the Strip, father Gabriel Romanelli. In church, the meeting with the community and Mass. In commenting the passage from the Gospel about the Baptism of Jesus, mgr. Broglio pointed out that “the Christians’ life, harmony and fullness always refuse unilateral positions, which would only make us withdraw onto ourselves. Sometimes, we have to sacrifice some of our freedom to set an example of rightfulness. Humbleness and courage are needed in ordeals and pains. It’s difficult, especially for you, in your situation. But the Baptism of Jesus leads us on along that way. To defeat evil, we need to live in communion with Christ”. “The Church – he ended – will relentless continue to invoke justice, respect and equality for those who live in the same land”. After Mass, the Hlc delegation visited the disabled children in the Home of Peace, the shelter run by the Sisters of Mother Therese of Calcutta – who have recently opened another wing to accommodate sick and lonely adults and elderly people too – and had lunch with the parishioners. The day ended with a visit to the outpatient’s hospital of Caritas Jerusalem and to some young people who benefited from a “job creation” project. In greeting the delegation, the parish priest, don Romanelli, thanked the bishops for their support. “On our part, we try to make our community stronger through a number of pastoral projects, ranging from an oratory to the study of theology, from trying to prepare our young people for work to training and advice for couples and families. It’s hard – he stated – we need to cope with the Christians’ slow exodus from Gaza, 15 years ago they were over 3,500, now they are less than 1,000. Without help, we are bound to end like Libya and Afghanistan, where Christians have virtually disappeared”. Today, Monday, the delegation is expected to go to Jerusalem, where it will meet mgr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and other people. In the evening, it will go back to Ramallah. Promoting dialogue and peace in the Holy Land: this is the theme of this pilgrimage, which is aimed at bringing support and solidarity to the Christian communities of the Holy Land. It has been organised, at the request of the Holy See, by the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. According to a long-established tradition, the Hlc bishops’ yearly visit of solidarity covers four lines of work, marked with 4 “Ps”, “Prayer, Pilgrimage, Persuasion and Presence”. Prayer with the local communities is the connecting thread that joins every part of the journey together, pilgrimage is the style of visit that includes lots of meetings with the local ecclesial and political institutions. The bishops are also in charge of promoting pilgrimages to the Holy Land in their own countries. Persuasion: once back at home, the bishops work to make their governments, diplomats, embassies and media aware of the local Christians’ living conditions, not to ask for privileges but for dignity and justice. For them and for any other group living in the same conditions. Lastly, presence. With this journey of solidarity, the bishops want the local communities to feel that the universal Church is close to them so they will not feel deserted. Within the Hlc 2020 group of delegates, Italy is represented by mgr. Rodolfo Cetoloni, bishop of Grosseto.