
Terra Santa. Card. Filoni (Order of the Holy Sepulchre): “Support to local Christians continues despite Covid-19.”

“We are in constant contact with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem on the humanitarian needs and concerns of the local Christian communities so as to be prepared to intervene as required”, interviewed by SIR the Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, Card. **Fernando Filoni**, described the efforts put in place by 30,000 Knights and Dames worldwide to help the Mother Church of Jerusalem in its response to Covid-19. This is a long-standing commitment that was further intensified in the past months of the pandemic which, the Cardinal said, “has direly hit also the Holy Land. Indeed, no world region was spared by the Coronavirus, to varying degrees.” The numbers speak for themselves: in Israel, where the second lockdown is underway, over 8300 infections were reported at the end of last week alone, with almost 1500 deaths. Cases have doubled in less than a month: from 100,000 to 200,000 infected. There are just under 50,000 cases in the Palestinian Territories, and the numbers are growing.



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The institutional purpose of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre is to strengthen the Christian life of its members, to support and to foster the cultural, charitable and social works and institutions of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, especially those of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, with which we have long-standing ties. We learned that our institutions in the Holy Land were also suffering the impact of the lack of pilgrims as a result of Covid-19. The Holy Land draws its vital resources from the pilgrimages and the tourism that sustain the livelihood of thousands of Christian families. Thus emerged the idea of a 'Covid-19 Humanitarian Support Fund' to which our 30,000 Knights and Dames have generously contributed, attesting to their deep love for the Mother Church of Jerusalem. And if a mother finds herself in difficulty, her children are the first to respond. Our support stems from the deep spiritual roots that bind us all to the Holy Land, especially to the institutions that keep the presence of the local Church alive. *Should we neglect supporting our Christians in the Holy Land, their presence would be at risk of disappearing, and the Holy Places would be reduced to museums or tourist sites. We must therefore ensure sustenance for vibrant, welcoming communities, heirs to the Mother Church of Jerusalem on which we all depend.*



Since last May, the Fund has collected three million Euros, in addition to the ordinary contribution sent every month to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Three areas have been funded through local institutions. Most importantly, schools: we have approximately 50 educational institutions attended not only by Christians but also by students of other faiths, especially Muslims. As confirmed by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the funds were used, among other things, to pay the school fees of 1,238 families in Jordan and 1,180 in Palestine. We are also financing various facilities providing care for the elderly, the disabled, the sick. Finally, families: thanks to contributions from the Fund, the Latin Patriarchate has been able to support over 2,400 families in more than 30 parishes with food vouchers, sanitation products and supplies for children, medicines and bills, also ensuring a fair distribution of resources. In the coming weeks, we will continue sending aids so as not to abandon those in need.



The style is reflected in the goals set for the Order by the Popes, which are essentially two: the sanctification of its members and support for the Holy Land. These are the two legs that allow the Order to walk. If our help was purely economic, we would fall into a category of charity, but since we are an Order emanated from the Church, our members are bound by a spiritual commitment. The connection to the Holy Sepulchre is a powerful reminder of the mystery of the death and resurrection of our Lord. It is the fountainhead of our faith, the spring our members draw from. This is also why the dames and knights must maintain close ties with their local churches. Furthermore, I would like to add that a document has been prepared on the spirituality of the Order that will deepen our vocation and mission, deeply rooted in the Word of God and in the Tradition of the Church, thereby deepening the religious significance of membership in the Order. **May last Pope Francis approved the new Charter of the Order...** This approval is a valuable gift that formally confirms the Order as a central body of the Catholic Church and encourages us to serve the Holy Land with ever greater commitment. We are entrusted with attending to the 'Body' of Christ manifested in the living, present-day reality of the Holy Land, the poor, children, young people, migrants, families, sacred works and buildings. **Your Eminence, extending our gaze to the Middle East - a region you are familiar with as Apostolic Nuncio to Jordan and Iraq (2001-2006) -, how do you view the current situation in this area of the world marked by decades of conflict, with an escalation in other areas such as Syria and growing tensions in Iraq and Lebanon. Peace and stability appear to be a mirage...** I think we should ask

ourselves whether this region, shattered by wars, tensions, with hundreds of thousands of people killed and wounded, millions of displaced persons and refugees, is doomed to continue being forced to live in this seemingly hopeless reality. As Holy See we have constantly proposed the path of dialogue, without which there is no future. It is essential to overcome a conflicting perspective. I believe that the People of the Book: Christians, Jews and Muslims, are not just any people. They share the same roots, they can engage in dialogue, break away from the logic of conflict and demonstrate that it is possible to look to the future together. I met many Christians whose lives have been scarred by wars, worried about the future of their children. They faced the choice of leaving or staying - confiding in a positive development. Hopefully, the Abrahamic root will generate harmony and bear good fruits. I have in mind the current relations between Israel, Egypt and Jordan: there are difficulties but also many positive aspects. Why not extend this dialogue also to other countries?



Abu Dhabi, where I was participating, represents a seminal, in some ways revolutionary moment. But if we are not to lose this revolutionary aspect, we must continue in our efforts. The good that has unfolded must no longer encounter closed doors. Christians, Jews, Muslims, along with the faithful of other faiths, must participate in this journey now begun.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDh0sTX3wMM&feature=youtu.be>

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