



Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa addresses Latin Parish of Jerusalem

Following is the text of the message Most Rev. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, sent to the Latin Parish of Jerusalem on May 3, 2018:

To Fr. Nerwan Al-Banna, OFM,

The priests and the religious

And all the faithful of the Latin Parish of Jerusalem

Subject: Clarifications about the parish of Jerusalem

Dear faithful and brothers in Christ,

The Lord give you peace!

The parish of Jerusalem is the first parish of the diocese. Historically it was the first to be canonically erected. But it is also symbolically the first diocesan entity, because it has always faithfully preserved the living memory of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Mother Church of Jerusalem is made alive and visible by your presence.

It is a priority and fundamental for all of us, therefore, to not only preserve, but rather to strengthen our presence in Jerusalem and preserve the Christian character of the Holy City. The identity of Jerusalem would not be complete without a living and vibrant Christian presence. The Holy Places and the presence of many pilgrims are not enough to affirm the Christian character of the City: without the presence of a local community, alive and active, there cannot be a Church.

First of all, I would like to thank the Custody of the Holy Land which from the beginning has accompanied the birth and development of the Latin parish. Thanks to its service over the centuries and until today, we now have a beautiful, lively and joyful community. The whole Church is grateful for this precious and not always gratifying service.

If much has been done, much still remains to be done. In recent years the city has undergone many changes from a social and urban point of view. The city has expanded and often the homes of the faithful are now far from places of worship. All this solicits reflection, above all from the pastoral

point of view, even within our community. Everything changes. We too change, and we must ask ourselves what these changes demand from our presence in the Holy City, here and now.

Our parish was originally concentrated in the Old City and its surroundings. Today it is distributed over a vast territory: in addition to the Old City and its surroundings, we now have Kufor Aqab, Er-Ram, Beit Hanina, Betfage, Bethany, Beit Safafa, and several other locations. These neighborhoods are far from each other. It is therefore greatly dispersed.

This is certainly a positive sign, which shows the vitality of our presence, its growth and its development. However, this phenomenon poses serious challenges for all of us from the pastoral point of view. On the one hand it is difficult for priests to adequately reach all these places and on the other hand, it is difficult for people to reach these places of worship and meeting.

This situation, that is, the dispersion of the faithful over a vast territory, urges us now to ask ourselves how to ensure a proper pastoral service to everyone in their current locations. This discussion began in various diocesan entities, in which the following question was asked: would it be useful to create a second parish in Jerusalem, so as to strengthen our presence on the territory?

However, this debate has raised many questions and fears, mainly related to the political issue and the new changes that are happening in the city. We too see this. But I can assure you that this has never been taken into consideration and has never been the basis of our evaluations. Honestly, I doubt that political authorities would be interested or even influenced by our pastoral decisions. However, because of all this, I understood that it is good and wise to listen and to take into consideration all observations in this regard.

I wish with this letter, to calm and assure the whole parish: there is no intention and there is no reason to make decisions that are contrary to the common feeling of the parish community. We are looking for solutions: whether it is to create a new parish in Jerusalem, or other solutions that can help the community of Jerusalem and the Church to think about their presence in the Holy City and to fortify it. This reflection is still open, and it is important that you are part of it.

I consider this whole discussion, however, a providential moment. This proposal was a sort of “electric shock” that moved the whole community to reflect and discuss about itself and its future prospects. And this was really necessary. We need to meet and reflect together and ask ourselves how to grow and improve.

I invite everyone, above all, to pray. We need to pray a lot for everything that is happening around us and in our territory, but we must not forget our first community. I invite all of you to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, of our city, of which we are an integral part and that we love. Without prayer and without looking heavenward, we would end in only human discussions, while we must first of all listen to God’s will. In the coming weeks I want to meet all of you, where possible, to listen to you, to assure you of my closeness and to discern together with you what the Lord is he is asking us.

May the Blessed Virgin intercede for all of us and bless all your families.

+ Pierbattista Pizzaballa
Apostolic Administrator