

† COLLECTION FOR THE HOLY † PLACES

Your Excellency,

It is with pleasure that I once again approach you and the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care, requesting assistance on behalf of the Christian community in the Holy Land. They, together with the inhabitants of the vast region of Middle East, continue to aspire for peace and tranquility as they have for so many years, but which hope still remains fragile.

The Universal Church is greatly preoccupied about the unstable situation in the Middle East; a situation which leads to multiple problems. First among them is the absence of peace. The joy of this Christmas has been marred, in fact, by the violence and hostility in the Gaza Strip. Several innocent children are among the innumerable victims. And the Christmas message itself has been obscured by these latest military events. This is even more unfortunate in view of the crucial spiritual and material sustenance which has been received from the Christian population of pilgrims, and whose numbers have increased significantly between the Jubilee Year 2000 and 2008.

During the course of the Synodal Assembly last October, the Patriarchs and the Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholics have expressed to the Holy Father their strong appeal for peace; an appeal inspired by the Word of God. The Apostle Paul, for example, has conveyed to us a certainty that "Christ is our peace" (Eph 2, 14). The appeal was addressed to the whole world, and was made in consideration of the actual difficulties and needs of our time.

Still further, Pope Benedict XVI constantly offers comfort to the Christians and to the entire population of the Holy Land with words and gestures of profound solicitude. These are linked with his desire to visit them as a pilgrim to the historic sites related to life of Jesus. On the day of the Nativity of the Lord, and afterwards on the Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God, the Holy Father pleaded before the world for the restoration of peace in that Land. The Pontiff's concern has been expressed particularly during his meeting for the exchange of New Year greetings with the Ambassadors of the one hundred seventy-seven nations accredited to the Holy See. The Pontiff commented that: "The birth of Christ in the lowly stable of Bethlehem leads us naturally to think of the situation in the Middle East and, in the first place, in the Holy Land, where, in these days, we have witnessed a renewed outbreak of violence provoking immense damage and suffering for the civilian population... Once again I would repeat that military options are no solution and that violence, wherever it comes from and whatever form it takes, must be firmly condemned" (L'Osservatore Romano, January 9, 2009).

The wound caused by the violence worsens the emigration problem, which inexorably deprives the minority Christians of resources for their future. The land which has been the cradle of Christianity risks to remain with fewer and fewer Christians.

In the General Audience of Wednesday, October 1, 2008, Pope Benedict X-VI has clearly emphasized the biblical basis warranting attention to the Holy Land: "Perhaps we

are no longer able to understand fully the meaning that Paul and his communities attributed to the collection for the poor of Jerusalem. It was a completely new initiative in the area of religious activities: it was not obligatory, but free and spontaneous; all the Churches that were founded by Paul in the West took part. The collection expressed the community's debt to the Mother Church of Palestine, from which they had received the ineffable gift of the Gospel". The Pope continues: "The value that Paul attributes to this gesture of sharing is so great that he seldom calls it merely a "collection". Rather, for him it is "service", "blessing", "gift", "grace", even "liturgy" (cf. 2 Cor 9). Particularly surprising is the latter term which gives a value that is even religious to a collection of money: on the one hand it is a liturgical act or "service" offered by every community to God and, on the other, it is a loving action made for people" (L'Osservatore Romano, October 2, 2008, p. 1).

The Congregation for the Eastern Churches similarly focuses, in the name of the Holy Father, upon the ecclesial community in Holy Land, and likewise conveys the Pontiff's loving solicitude, repeating his exhortation to all Catholics that they **contribute materially as well for the necessary maintenance of the Sacred Places**. It is an honor to assure you of the gratitude and prayers of the Pope towards those who carry in their heart the importance of the traditional Collection pro Terra Sancta, during the coming Good Friday. The Churches of the Latin Rite and of the different Eastern Rites which benefit from this indispensable help, acknowledge their gratitude by their constant prayer for the particular Churches throughout the world.

I have personally experienced this sentiment during my pilgrimage to the Holy Places from February 24 to March 2, 2008. This occasion revealed to me the intense desire for unity among the pastors and the faithful in the ecclesiastical mission, as well as their ecumenical and inter-religious commitment.

Everywhere, I have promised the solicitude of this Dicastery and of the Church. I was then, as now, certain that all of our Catholic Bishops will generously confirm it, for such has always been demonstrated towards Jerusalem and the Land of Our Lord Jesus.

Enclosed you will please find documents for your information, prepared by this Dicastery and by the Custody of the Holy Land. These outline some of those actions undertaken through our auspices during 2008.

Along with the entire Catholic community in the Holy Places, I am delighted to invoke upon you and your collaborators the blessings of He who "loves those who are donors with joy" (2 Cor 9,7).

In the spirit of Episcopal fraternity I remain,

Devotedly yours in Our Lord,

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri
Prefect

Antonio Maria Vegliò
Archbishop Secretary

The Question of the Week

Breaking Open the Word

Week of April 5, 2009

Palm Sunday

1. The Call to Prayer

Leader: My friends, let's pause to spend a few moments in prayer and conversation with each other. [Lead all in the Sign of the Cross] + In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. The Word of God

Leader: May the Lord be in our hearts as we recall and re-listen to a reading from last Sunday's Liturgy of the Word.

[Re-read all or part of the suggested reading.]

Readings from last Sunday are:

Entrance with Psalms reading: Mark 11:1-10

First reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

Second reading: Philippians 2:6-11

Gospel reading: Mark 14:1-15:47 (the whole passion story)

Reading suggested for this Week's sharing: **Today's 2nd reading from Paul, or selected passages from the Gospel**

3. The Two Faith Sharing Questions

Leader: As we consider this Sacred Scripture, I invite you to think about it in two dimensions. [You may wish to work in small groups if your number is large.]

- First, ask about the text itself, to draw attention to the Scripture.
 - What word or phrase in this text caught your ear?
 - What story did you hear, or image did you get?
 - What touched you as you heard this reading?
- Second, when the first sharing is complete, ask about the people's lives.
 - Use this "Question of the Week" to help people get started sharing faith:
 - **Identify and share one way that you personally "die in Christ."**

4. The Prayer. At the end of the sharing period, invite folks to pray in one of the following ways:

- The Lord's Prayer out loud together
- Spontaneous prayers
- A moment of silent prayer
- Listen to a recorded hymn