

Message from the Custos of the Holy Land

Regarding the Good Friday Collection 2021

Throughout 2020, in the Holy Land as in the rest of the world, we have been severely tested by the pandemic which has paralyzed a large part of economic activities, blocked the movement of people and therefore also of pilgrims. It has brought suffering to many and to most families a state of poverty which has plunged many people into loneliness and isolation.

Despite or perhaps precisely because of this situation, as friars of the Custody of the Holy Land we have tried to intensify our commitment to live our mission, the Mission that St. Francis wanted us to undertake in 1217, to be present as the leaven of the gospel in a context majority of other religions, and the mission that the Church has entrusted to us, officially starting in 1342, to take care of the Holy Places of our redemption and to take care of the small Christian community that still exists and resists here, despite the adverse conditions of history and the globalization of indifference.

We have not closed the sanctuaries, but we have tried to enhance them, intensifying our invocations in the name of all humanity and our intercession for all humanity in these special places of faith. We have tried to make these places accessible even in a virtual way, by broadcasting the various celebrations throughout the year, to keep alive the bond with the faithful and the pilgrims.

We have not stopped taking care of our parishes, with their faithful, whether they be Arabic, Hebrew or Greek speaking locals, be they migrant workers, foreign workers or refugees. The celebrations – albeit with many restrictions – have continued. The Sacraments continued to nourish the lives of our faithful. The commitment to catechesis has continued. The care of the sick has also continued, including those with Covid-19, and the accompaniment of the dying has continued too, so as not to abandon them to a death without human and Christian dignity. Our charitable commitment has continued to meet the needs of a population tried not only by the pandemic, but also by the disasters of war and by the cynical and cruel “Laws of the Markets”, by the absence of social assistance, by having to resort to begging in order to be able to care of themselves, to satisfy the needs of every day or to send their

children to school. We have not closed the schools and have continued to take care of the education of infants, children, and young people.

All this, of course, has a cost and a large part of this cost is covered annually by the Good Friday Collection and by the generosity of the faithful from all over the world. The year 2020, was a year, for us too, in which the expenses necessary to carry out our mission remained substantial, while the income was minimal, because the Good Friday Collection for the Holy Land was not taken in many parts of the world. This year, therefore, even more than in previous years, we friars of the Custody of the Holy Land make ourselves beggars and appeal to the generosity of your hearts.

As Pope Francis reminds us in his latest encyclical, reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan: *“To-day, and in ever increasing numbers, there are wounded people. The inclusion or exclusion of those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders”* (Fratelli Tutti, 69). Shortly after this observation turns into a question: *“It is the hour of truth: Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others? Will we bend down and help another to get up?”* (Fratelli Tutti, 70).

Please help us according to your means and possibilities, help us according to the generosity of your heart, help us to help others.

Fr. Francesco Patton OFM

Custos of the Holy Land