



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN  
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF  
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## Towards new destinations in the lands of the Bible

An ecumenical pilgrimage to Egypt



Fr Gianni Toni, Prior of the Order next to Rome, met Theodore II, the Coptic Orthodox Pope, during a pilgrimage to Egypt in the footsteps of the Holy Family.

The following is an account of the revival of an ancient yet new pilgrimage, brought to life for each Dame and Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. In our time, with so many stories of immigrants and people fleeing their own land, I wish to speak of a family dear to all of us who fled from the wickedness of the powerful in search of a safe place: the Holy Family and the flight into the land of Egypt.

The pilgrimage I will tell you about took place from June 15 to 21 with almost fifty participants, Catholics and Orthodox Copts. The group was led by the Catholic bishop of Viterbo and Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, Monsignor Fumagalli, by the Coptic Orthodox bishop for Italy Barnaba El Soryany and by myself, Prior of the Delegation of Latina, with the president Unitalsi for Lazio Mrs. Preziosa Terrinoni.

We share this experience in the hope that other pilgrims, drawn from across the world, would choose to repeat this journey, with a certain goal: to return to the roots of our faith, in that Land of God to rediscover the great sense of being children of the same Father and thus of being brothers and sisters. Moreover, this was the concept underlined by Bp. Giacinto Marcuzzo of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem: "This is an initiative that needs to be experienced by many because only in this way can we reach the unity desired by every human heart attentive to others!"

The area of Maadi is home to a sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin Mary. According to local tradition, this is the place from where the Holy Family embarked for Egypt. It was moving to see more than 500 people, Muslim and Christian, give witness together and welcome those who came to relive a story that is today more relevant than ever before!

One of the Masses of our pilgrimage was celebrated at the Italian Hospital: there we prayed for those who shed blood for the faith or because of violence. Here one lives a very particular kind of ecumenism: that of martyrdom because Christian blood has no theological distinctions.

A pilgrimage to the land of the Holy Family would not be complete without a visit to the Coptic Orthodox Pope, Tawadros II, who showed his joy in meeting us with a fraternal welcome and full of consideration towards Pope Francis, ending with the invitation not to forget to pray for one another!

Yet this experience in Egyptian lands led us above all to confront ourselves with a reality present in many parts of the world: asceticism, monasticism and the life of hermits. It is in Egypt that, at the beginning of the first centuries of Christianity, monasticism was born, taking root in the desert thanks to Anthony the hermit and St. Pachomius.

Thanks to the Coptic Orthodox Bishop Barnaba, we had the opportunity to learn about the experience in the Egyptian desert of the Coptic monastery of Wadi Al Natrun (about seventy kilometers south of Cairo) with a monastic presence of up to 150 monks.

We had the opportunity to experience the fraternal welcome and to celebrate Holy Mass, which was attended by about fifteen monks with the bishop of the monastery and which was presided by our bishop, Msgr. Fumagalli. When asked how we had arrived at this exceptional gesture, the response of Bishop Barnabas was very elementary but very effective: "We are all Christians"!

In our own small way, we are convinced, because we have experienced it, that talking about unity and ecumenism means first "meetings that go towards the other" and the other is always our brother and sister ... in image of God the creator!

**Father Gianni Toni**

Prior of the Delegation of Latina and Unitalsi regional assistant for Lazio

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