Boniface VIII International Prize awarded to Cardinal Fernando Filoni

What can the first Jubilee held in Rome seven centuries ago tell us today?

The Grand Master and the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, spoke at length on the Christian roots of Europe, during the ceremony to present the Boniface VIII International Award to Cardinal Fernando Filoni.

The Grand Master of the Order was awarded the prize in the papal city of Anagni last July, in the presence of David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament. In his Lectio Magistralis, Cardinal Filoni centered his reflection on the first historic Jubilee of 1300, called by Pope Boniface VIII.

While the Holy Land had long been the foremost and favoured destination for pilgrims, the political-military landscape in the 1300s made it a hostile one. In fact, continued Cardinal Filoni, “the Holy Land in 1300, without the protection of Christian principles, still the scene of wars and further attempts at conquest, became a difficult destination to reach and beyond the possibilities of the majority of European faithful. Rome then became the centre of pilgrimages for the great multitude of men and women on a journey of faith and in search of penitential grace, attracted by the Eternal City,” he said. “The Jubilee of 1300 actually remains the greatest ecclesiological act of Boniface VIII, all the more significant in the context of the numerous spiritual movements that demanded the reform of the Church and the papacy; the Jubilee was a response to this, born of the faith of the believers, and Rome represented the new ‘Holy Land’, a less complicated destination to reach for the pilgrim, if one thinks of the seas and unknown lands and not infrequently enemies to cross. The tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul attracted the imagination of many, and the presence of the Successor of Peter impressed the faith of the pilgrim.”

Today’s context is certainly different, but even in 2021 we keenly feel in need of God’s mercy and pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is intrinsic to the Knights and Dames and at the heart of membership in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, is not easily achievable due to the complicated health and safety measures in place in nations across the world.

And yet, the experience of the Jubilee of 1300 which, starting from an objective difficulty, was able to follow the desire of the faithful and the impulse of the Spirit, teaches us that there are no boundaries to God’s mercy. Even if for many it will not be possible to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land during these months, let us keep up our desire to be encountered by God in the situations of our lives, leaving the doors open to His grace that always finds a way to reach us.

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