



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Pope Leo to Eastern Christians: "The Church needs you"



A speech that touched the hearts and burning issues of Eastern Churches whose Jubilee is being celebrated in these days: "I am happy to be with you and to devote one of the first audiences of my pontificate to the Eastern faithful," began Pope Leo XIV.

Amazed at the beauty and wealth of the people of God gathered before him, the Holy Father continued: "You are precious in God's eyes. Looking at you, I think of the diversity of your origins, your glorious history and the bitter sufferings that many of your communities have endured or continue to endure."

Citing the important contribution of the Pontiff who had the same name as his, Leo XIII, he recalled that he "[devoted] a specific document to the dignity of your Churches, inspired above all by the fact that, in his words, 'the work of human redemption began in the East' (cf. Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Dignitas*, 30 November 1894)" and "pointed out that 'preserving the Eastern rites is more important than is generally realized'."

In the face of current events, Leo XIV put emphasis on the word with which he began his pontificate: PEACE. Peace that unfortunately often lacks in the contexts in which Eastern Churches sow, live and offer their witness.

"Who, better than you - stressed the Pontiff - can sing a song of hope even amid the abyss of violence? Who, better than you, who have experienced the horrors of war so closely that Pope Francis referred to you as 'martyr Churches'? From the Holy Land to Ukraine, from Lebanon to Syria, from the Middle East to Tigray and the Caucasus, how much violence do we see! Rising up from this horror, from the slaughter of so many young people, which ought to provoke outrage because lives are being sacrificed in the name of military conquest, there resounds an appeal: the appeal not so much of the Pope, but of Christ himself, who repeats: 'Peace be with you!' (*Jn* 20:19, 21, 26). And he adds:

‘Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives it’ (*Jn 14:27*). Christ’s peace is not the sepulchral silence that reigns after conflict; it is not the fruit of oppression, but rather a gift that is meant for all, a gift that brings new life. Let us pray for this peace, which is reconciliation, forgiveness, and the courage to turn the page and start anew.”

The Holy Father then continued engaging himself at the forefront: “I will make every effort so that this peace may prevail. The Holy See is always ready to help bring enemies together, face to face, to talk to one another, so that peoples everywhere may once more find hope and recover the dignity they deserve, the dignity of peace. The peoples of our world desire peace, and to their leaders I appeal with all my heart: Let us meet, let us talk, let us negotiate!”

In addition to inviting those who have been forced to leave their lands and live in the diaspora to “preserve your traditions without attenuating them”, Leo XIV addressed a message of thanks to the witnesses to the faith among whom we recognize, as Order of the Holy Sepulchre, many Christians of the Holy Land who, as living stones, remain in the Land of Jesus, sometimes “hoping against all hopes” as the apostle Paul said of Abraham (Rom 4:18): “I would like to thank God for all those who, in silence, prayer and self-sacrifice, are sowing seeds of peace. I thank God for those Christians – Eastern and Latin alike – who, above all in the Middle East, persevere and remain in their homelands, resisting the temptation to abandon them. Christians must be given the opportunity, and not just in words, to remain in their native lands with all the rights needed for a secure existence. Please, let us strive for this!”

We join the thanks from the Holy Father for the witness of Eastern Christians whom, in particular through ROACO projects, we have had the opportunity, as Order of the Holy Sepulchre, to get to know better and support in some of their needs.

What we receive is far greater than what we give.

Elena Dini

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