



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The Holy Land: dear to the heart of Pope Francis



Before the Pope in Verona, Aziz and Maoz bore witness to the desire for peace that lives in the hearts of the Israeli and Palestinian inhabitants of the Holy Land.

The Holy Land continues to be at the centre of Pope Francis' concerns, who never tires of renewing his call for peace, so that life may prevail over death in this strip of land that is suffering so much at this time and is so dear in everyone's heart. In recent months, Pope Francis has repeatedly called for the presence of Israel and Palestine at his side.

On May 18, in Verona, during the meeting "Arena of Peace - Justice and Peace Will Embrace" scheduled as part of the Holy Father's pastoral visit to the city, an Israeli and a Palestinian from the association Parents Circle, which for years has brought together relatives of those killed in the conflict in the Holy Land, briefly shared their experiences. Maoz Inon is an Israeli entrepreneur who strives to work for peace. His parents were killed by Hamas on October 7. Aziz Abu Sarah is Palestinian and his brother was killed by Israeli soldiers. "Our pain and suffering have brought us closer together, led us to dialogue to create a better future," said Maoz and Aziz before being interrupted by the long applause of all those gathered in the Verona Arena on the occasion of Pope Francis' visit. "We are entrepreneurs and we believe that peace is the greatest undertaking," they said before going together to embrace Pope Francis who addressed them with words of encouragement. A few days later, on May 25 and 26, the first World Children's Day was held at the Vatican. On this occasion, a small group from Jerusalem and Bethlehem also had the joy of participating. The group was received personally by Pope Francis along with other children from war zones. Despite the difficulties encountered by these young people, their presence is a source of hope. The children of Gaza joined the event spiritually by sending a short video.



Finally, it was deeply touching to see Pope Francis again on June 7, 2024 in the Vatican Gardens, ten years after the historic invocation for peace in the Holy Land. Francis recalled the event in these terms: “the late President of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, and the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, accepted my invitation to come here to implore from God the gift of peace. Some weeks prior to that, I had been a pilgrim in the Holy Land and had expressed a great desire that these two leaders might meet, in order to carry out a significant and historic gesture of dialogue and peace.” The current situation seems to plunge us even deeper into darkness than in the past, and Pope Francis, in his speech delivered in the presence of the ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, in particular those of Israel and Palestine, and of several members of the College of Cardinals, continued with these words: “Every day I pray that this war will finally end. I think of all who suffer in Israel and in Palestine: Christians, Jews and Muslims. I think of how urgent it is that from the rubble of Gaza a decision to stop the weapons will finally arise, and therefore I ask that there be a ceasefire.”

Ten years ago, an olive tree was planted in the Vatican Gardens on the occasion of this prayer for peace. The Holy Father concluded, “This evening, then, we wish to renew our intercession, once again raising to God our prayer for peace, as we did ten years ago. We wish to ask the Lord to give continued growth to the olive tree we planted on that day, which has already become strong and flourishing because it has been sheltered from the wind and watered with care. Likewise, we must ask God that peace may spring forth in the heart of every person, in every people and nation, in every corner of the earth, protected from the winds of war and nourished by those who daily strive to live in fraternity.”

Elena Dini

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