“Jerusalem at heart”

Luca Rotili, pilgrimage guide and member of the Order, wrote his testimony for us during the return flight from the Holy Land to Rome: “The Church of Jerusalem continues to be the Mother Church, and the other Churches continue to owe a debt of gratitude to Jerusalem”

“In 1992 Bishop Salvatore Boccaccio, bishop in Sabina, asked me in a polite but pressing manner to be a spiritual animator for groups of pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land. Before becoming bishop, Father Salvatore had been CEO of the Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi. I hesitated. I tried to oppose it. Imagine, I don’t even know where the Holy Land is... I thought to myself: so much to learn, to deepen, so much fatigue, sun, getting up in the morning... no, no, it’s not for me. He convinced me by firmly inviting me to go with him on a pilgrimage. On the evening of the first day I had a microphone in my hand, 50 people hanging on my every word and a fever of 38 from stress. Sharp memories. A blow to the heart, the roots, the charism, the life.

In twenty-six years I have accompanied some 250 groups of pilgrims in this incredible experience. The Order arrived only some time later, again at the suggestion of Bishop Boccaccio... you know Luca, I see your attention to the local community and I believe you express the full charism of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, perhaps your activity could be amplified: think about it! On a warm Saturday in May 2000, in the splendid setting of the Cistercian Gothic Abbey of Casamari, I was clad in a heavy cloth cloak, yes heavy and warm, but... I truly felt it was part of me, my skin. Always.

Guiding so many people through this wonderful experience on a true journey leading to an encounter with the mystery of God, listening to what the Holy Land has to tell us, was an incredible grace for me. It was meeting and touching the totally other in a special way: when one reads the Gospel one hears the Word that was made flesh in this land; when one enters into contact with the silence of the desert

one hears the echo of the experience of Jesus drowned in the devilish temptations; when one walks the streets of the villages and towns, one puts one's feet where the Lord put them; when one visits the shrines, one becomes a witness to the miracles that Christ performed there. When one arrives at the Holy Sepulchre one becomes a herald of his resurrection. The pilgrimage is a desire to retrace the story of Jesus, letting oneself be enchanted by the poetry and charm emanating from the streets of this land, from the crowded markets full of the smells of distant spices, from the silent deserts, the colors, the songs, the sound of quick steps along the alleys. But. Yes, that's right, but!

But the stones don't talk. That's right, stones do not speak! It is the people who inhabit those stones that speak, they are the living stones!

The Church of Jerusalem continues to be the Mother Church and the debt of gratitude of the other Churches to Jerusalem remains. Today, then, support is necessary because the local Church in the Middle East has no means, it certainly does not receive funding from the State. Nor can it expect support from the faithful, who are a religious minority within their own countries. A minority in need of help. So greatly in need of help!

It is a question for us, Knights and Dames, of witnessing to help pilgrims move from a simple economic contribution to a real "taking charge", beginning to compromise – also and above all through prayer – with the reality of those who live in the Holy Places.

Listening to the silence of the stones, I discovered the charism of the Order".

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