



ASIA/HOLY LAND - The Catholic Bishops of the Holy Land: how to live the Year of Faith in these difficult days

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - With a pastoral Letter which has just been published, the Assembly of Bishops of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land offers its contribution to the itinerary that the universal Church is called to fulfill in the Year of the faith. The Pastors of the Catholic Churches in the region, citing the Post-Synodal Exhortation of Benedict XVI "Ecclesia in the Middle East," remind everyone that "The example of the first community of Jerusalem can serve as a model to renew the current Christian community" .

The Year of Faith – stressed at the beginning of the pastoral Letter sent to Fides Agency - takes on a connotation in the land that "was the geography of this story of faith," from which raised "the great cloud of witnesses of faith that populate the Scriptures " and where the Church herself was born at Pentecost. "The Mother Church of Jerusalem, guardian of the faith of the Apostles," write the Bishops of the Holy Land "is our Church and continues to give even models of faith: the Blessed Maryam Bawardi, Blessed Marie-Alphonsine, the Venerable Samaan Sruji " .

The Letter does not hide the troubles in which local Churches are called to live the Year of Faith. "Our land," write the Bishops " continues to be torn by violence, injustice, occupation and insecurity. Many are locked up behind walls and checkpoints, others languishing in jails, suffer discrimination, cry for their loved ones, yearn for their family members who cannot be together, they live in fear and anxiety." Even the revolts that are shaking the whole region have taken enigmatic features: "Around us" the Bishops recognize " a known world is crumbling and powerful dictators are deposed. Many of our brothers and sisters in faith have chosen to emigrate, leaving our communities even poorer and fragile."

In a scenario that "sometimes is threatening," Middle Eastern Bishops recognize that faith itself may be tempted to despair. And yet the hard times make it even more clear that faith is not a matter of effort, but is a free gift of the Lord. "The faith we seek is a grace, and so we pray that our risen Lord can really increase our faith and make us His joyful witnesses and full of hope. (...). We must seek the grace of God in the midst of all these events, even where there is death, blood, forced emigration and persecution." Only with the help of grace Christians in the Middle East will be able to discern what their role in this storm which is raging around them.

To ask for the gift of faith, the Bishops suggest cultivating the ordinary gestures of Christian life: the diligence in approaching the sacraments, attendance at Mass and the inter-ritual celebrations, attention to catechism, the practice of pilgrimage and prayer in Holy Places. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 09/10/2012).