

**The Good Friday Collection for the Holy Land:
An invitation to solidarity with the Churches and people of the land of Jesus.**

The Good Friday Collection aims to promote love for the Lord's Land in the hearts of the faithful, so that the Church there will survive, feel cherished and sustained by every Christian, and continue to bear witness of faith in Him who was born, preached the Gospel, died and rose again in that Land.

This initiative was born from the explicit will of the Supreme Pontiffs. Pope Paul V, in the Apostolic Brief *Coelestis Regis* of 22 January 1618, first invited the Universal Church to pray and to collect funds for the Catholic community that lives in the Holy Land and for the maintenance of the Places of the Redemption of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Benedict XIV confirmed this purpose for the Collection with the Apostolic Brief *In supremo militantis Ecclesiae* of 7 January 1746.

The last pontifical document dedicated exclusively to the Holy Land and the Collection was the 1974 Apostolic Exhortation *Nobis in animo* (cf. AAS 56:177-188) of Saint Paul VI, who was also the first successor of the Apostle Peter to make a pilgrimage to the Land from which Salvation came to us. On the purpose of the Collection and its concrete destination, he wrote, "Already Saint Paul took to heart the fate of the faithful of Palestine, and became a zealous promoter of a collection for those who, among the faithful of Jerusalem, were poor. The Churches of Macedonia and Achaia generously accepted his appeal. To the extent of their availability, each of the Christians decided to send relief to the brothers who resided in Judea. The communities that arose among the gentiles felt indebted to the members of that Church, from whom they had received the wealth of spiritual goods, which they reciprocated with the fruit of their charity. The Apostle himself brought relief to the Holy City, seeing in the collection a bond of unity between the new communities of believers and the original Church in Jerusalem" (*Nobis in animo* 17).

Not without a providential plan, the historical events of the thirteenth century brought the Order of the Friars Minor to the Holy Land. Since then, the sons of Saint Francis have remained in the land of Jesus for an uninterrupted series of years to serve the local Church and to guard, restore, protect Christian Holy Places; their fidelity to the desire of the Founder and to the mandate of the Holy See has often been sealed by acts of heroic virtue and generosity.

The Congregation for the Eastern Churches, by pontifical mandate, has the responsibility of coordinating the intervention of the Universal Church to make it fair and effective. Catholic communities and organizations seek support for the needs of the numerous schools, formational and cultural institutions, hospitals, clinics and charity centers, as well as pastoral and educational structures.

We must not forget the fact that, alongside the Sanctuaries and the Holy Places, there lives and works a community of believers in Christ, made up of faithful belonging to the various Churches *sui iuris*. Their traditions have their roots in that pluriformity typical of the primitive Church, but which together make up the unique face of the Catholic Church. Over the centuries, it

has undergone countless tests and has been subject to many vicissitudes. Lately, especially due to the phenomenon of emigration, it risks being greatly reduced and weakening, and is therefore increasingly in need of our understanding and help, both moral and material.

The day that the Supreme Pontiffs have chosen for the Collection *pro Terra Sancta* is the Friday that precedes Easter, although each community is able to choose another appropriate circumstance to propose the solidarity initiative to the faithful.

As a rule, the Custody of the Holy Land receives 65% of the Collection, while the Congregation for the Eastern Churches receives 35%, which is used for the formation of candidates for the priesthood, the upkeep of the clergy, school activities, cultural formation, and subsidies to the various ecclesiastical circumscriptions in the Middle East.

Pope Francis receiving the Patriarchs, the Major Archbishops, the Cardinal Fathers and the Bishops in the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches underlined, “My thoughts turn especially to the blessed land where Christ lived, died and rose again. In it – as I was reminded even today by the voice of the Patriarchs present – the light of faith has not gone out, rather it shines brightly. It is ‘the light of the East that has illuminated the Universal Church, ever since a rising sun appeared on us (Lk 1:78), Jesus Christ, our Lord’ (Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen*, 1). Every Catholic therefore has a debt of gratitude to the Churches that live in that region. Among other things, we can learn from them the effort of daily exercises of ecumenical spirit and interreligious dialogue. The geographical, historical and cultural context in which they have lived for centuries, in fact, has made them natural interlocutors of many other Christian denominations and other religions” (21 November 2014).

“... the Middle East is a hope, a hope that we must cultivate” (Pope Francis at the Audience granted to the participants in the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Eastern Churches (R.O.A.C.O), 22 June 2018).