

Day 32

Arabic Our Father

With Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, IVF, parish priest of Gaza



Gaza Parish

Gaza is considered the poorest area in Palestine and one of the most densely populated areas in the whole world with about 5,046 persons per sq. km, combined with a high level of unemployment. The highest population age group is under 15 years (50.3%). Social problems are enormous and mostly concealed because of strong family customs and social context, where individuals have no right to freedom of expression. Christians represent 0.05% in this exclusively Muslim region. Gazans have suffered considerably during the past decade of political upheaval. Border closures, strikes, and curfews were abnormally excessive in the Strip. The stagnant economy and many years of violence have severely affected the social and economic well-being of the family. Years of military control, frustrated life expectations, and near-poverty conditions have created a volatile society and open to wide swings in political instability. This creates insecurity and fears that contribute further to social deterioration.

The Latin Convent includes a Latin Patriarchate school with 300 students, a kindergarten for 50 children, the parish priest's house, and the Church of the Holy Family. There are also two Religious Sisters' communities within the premises, who help in the parish activities and are responsible for two homes for children and elderly with disabilities. The Holy Family School in Gaza was built in 1974 by the Latin Patriarchate. It is considered the best school in Gaza, providing a high standard of education, cultural exchange, a Christian atmosphere, and provides religious instructions for Christian children. The school has about 657 students and, as everywhere in Gaza, it is overcrowded. The Rosary Sisters founded a school in 2000 and has more than 800 students today, 10% are Christians.

<https://lpj.org/en/the-patriarchate/diocese/parishes/palestine/gaza-parish-holy-family-church>



Voz Católica

This is a publication in Spanish from the Fathers of the Incarnate Word, including Fr. Romanelli. If you speak Spanish, take a look for updates on his parish in Gaza.

<https://vozcatolica.com/p-gabriel-romanelli/los-numeros-de-la-guerra-7-mar-cristianos-en-gaza/>

Latin Patriarchate

Introduction

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem is a diocese of the Catholic Church whose territory includes Cyprus, Jordan, Israel and Palestine. It is supported by six Vicariates that operate in different fields of action to support the Christian communities in all of these countries. Since November 6, 2020, Msgr Pierbattista Pizzaballa has served as the current Patriarch of Jerusalem. The Latin Patriarchate has an ancient and complex history, which is intertwined with that yet more ancient and complex one of Jerusalem. We will content ourselves here with illustrating more the significant historical passages to understand the origin and characteristics of this Catholic Institution of the Holy Land.

Jerusalem and Ottoman Palestine at the beginning of 1800

Since the end of the Crusades (1270), Jerusalem lived in a state of relative isolation, which lasted until 1800, although the presence of Christians was uninterrupted. At the beginning of the 19th century, Jerusalem was still isolated, both for political and geographic reasons (including the fear of urging in some way the return of the “Latins” – a name given to the Europeans in general by their use of the Latin Language) and only until the mid-19th century with the invention of the steamship that could come more quickly from Europe and land at the port of Jaffa, it became easier to reach it. The presence of the Latins in the Holy Land since the time of the Crusades was preserved thanks to the Friars Minor, Franciscans to whom the Pope later gave the task of becoming “custodians” of the Holy Places, from which the title “Custody of the Holy Land” derives (and “Custos” is the title given, till now, to the superior of these Middle Eastern regions, that make up the Holy Places). Little by little, France, which, since the 12th century, obtained from the Caliph of Baghdad Haroun Al-Rashid, the protectorate of Catholics in the Holy Land (lost after the French Revolution), regained the right of protection over the Holy Places and the Christians who lived within the Ottoman Empire.



Besides the Latins, the Greek Orthodox also intensified their presence in the Holy Places, which began after the fall of Constantinople (1253) and advanced their claims on them. To this must be added the claims of the emerging Russian Empire. Before long, during the 19th century, the Greek and Russian Orthodox joined forces to gain supremacy over the Holy Places.

Three events particularly contributed to the opening of Palestine to the West during the 1800s. The first was the campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte in Syria in 1799 (in continuity with that of Egypt), which, despite being a military failure, had the effect of reawakening the greedy European Powers towards Palestine. The second event was the invasion of Palestine by Mohammed Ali, an ambitious Egyptian Viceroy, which allowed the opening of the region to Western influences, the establishment of Christian Missionary Societies and the end of discrimination against non-Muslims. Finally, the third event was the Crimean War (1853-56) of which the Holy Places became the pretext: it ended with the Treaty of Paris (1856) and sanctioned the defeat of Russia, leaving the question of the Holy Places unresolved.

The restoration of the Latin Patriarchate

Jerusalem was the first “Episcopal” See in the history of the Christian world, with St. James the Lesser, and after his martyrdom, with his successors. But other episcopal sees that had preeminence in the ancient world (Antioch, Alexandria of Egypt, Rome) and Jerusalem became the see of the Patriarchate only in 451, together with Constantinople. Since then, there were many successive Patriarchs in Jerusalem, until the end of the Crusades era (1099-1291), when the Crusaders elected a Patriarch of the Latin Rite for both Greeks and Latins, contrary to the desire of Pope Urban II, who wanted the authority of the Greek Patriarch respected. The Latinization of the Patriarchal See was considered legitimate by the Latin, but not by the Greeks whose Patriarch went into exile. After the fall of St. John of Acre (1291) there was no longer any Patriarch in Jerusalem, and the title was attributed to some prelate of the Papal Court of Rome (called in *partibus infidelium* = “in the lands of unbelievers, an expression used also in the abbreviated form in *partibus*) to indicate the bishops, today called titular bishops, whose dioceses, purely honorific, are found in countries occupied by the Turks.

This ancient dream of restoration will be brought forward by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*). Since its inception, in the 17th century, *Propaganda Fide* devoted a lot of energy to the Middle East, but its efforts were blocked, particularly by the French Revolution (1789) and its consequences in Italy. It was only at the beginning of the 1800s that *Propaganda Fide* tried to apply new missionary methods, with the introduction of other Religious Orders, with the formation of indigenous clergy,



the creation of schools, etc. All this became possible due to the facilitations granted directly to Christians, first by the Egyptian Authority and then by the Ottomans.

Propaganda Fide began to seriously consider the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate when it saw the success of the missionary word of the Russian Orthodox and the Protestants in the Holy Land. The opposition of the Franciscans and France and the weakness of the pontificate of Pope Gregory XVI, however, rendered this question only a subject for discussion. It was the election of Pius IX in 1847 that the project took shape. A harmony of favorable events gave the young pope the possibility of realizing the project. The Sublime Gate (a name of the executive organ of the Ottoman Governate) sent its Ambassador Chebib Effendi, in February of 1847, who proposed to the Holy See a direct agreement for the protection of Christians, to overcome the repeated interference of Western nations in the Ottoman Empire. The project was favorably welcomed by Pope Pius IX, who had already in mind an ambition program for the Christians and Oriental Churches, and who also wanted to affirm the autonomy of the Holy See vis-à-vis the European Powers. The times were ripe at the international level, the numerous local constraints were overcome, so the word of Propaganda Fide resumed with the drafting of the practical questions, connected with the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate and put in writing by the English Cardinal Charles Acton. The latter listed the different reasons for the establishment of a Latin diocese in Jerusalem and the issues inherent in this restoration (the title of the new bishop, borders of the diocese, resources, etc.). Propaganda Fide defined these aspects and the Pope announced to the world with the apostolic letter *Nulla celebrior* of July 23, 1847, the successful restoration of the Patriarchate and, on October 4, 1847, the name of the new Patriarch.

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