

HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church of Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2009 -

When Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem resigned in March 2008, he left a message with the Church of Jerusalem. He wanted the local faithful to develop the awareness of being a Church inserted in human society. Not a Church in a monastery, devotional and isolated from reality. Rather, a Church which, because of its sacraments, finds the strength to act within society. Much is still to be done to transform all Christians into true missionaries within the context of the place where they are called to live.

The continuing departure of Christians from the Holy Land is a cause of concern. As the first Arab Patriarch, we are not crushed between two realities [Islam and Judaism]. Rather, we belong to these realities. We are Palestinians and there are also Christian Jews. A Christian aware of his vocation in the Holy Land does not feel crushed but feels at home.... The issue of Christians in the Holy Land now and in the future will depend on the awareness they have of their vocation and identity. Christian emigration is dramatic. We tell people: By going you leave behind two things, your land and your vocation. You have received the vocation to remain here to witness to Jesus in his land.

Heroic Christians have responded to the Patriarch's message, but they cannot survive without the material and spiritual support of the universal Church. We Catholics in Australia have a rare opportunity to support them materially by contributing generously to the collection that is taken up on Good Friday for the upkeep of the shrines of the Holy Land and for the support of Christians in the homeland of Jesus.

The collection is spent, for example, to give Catholics opportunities for work and to support their families, so that they can live with dignity in their own native land and not be forced to emigrate, leaving the shrines frequented only by pilgrims and tourists.

Certainly, the stone fabric of the precious shrines needs constant attention, but what will they be without the continued loving presence and Christian witness of the "living stones", the indigenous Christians?

Micheal, father of a family in Bethlehem and an Arab Catholic, has sent his Catholic brothers and sisters in Australia a message. He writes: We hope and pray to God that you are all in good health and are happy. We wish you all the best, especially during Lent and the Easter season.

We are living with all kinds of difficulties here in the Holy Land. Nothing is changed, talking about peace, but there is no peace. How would peace come to us unless we change our thoughts and spirit? We need to pray for people on both sides to change from hatred to love.

We have to carry the pain of Our Lord Jesus Christ if we are to feel true grace and salvation. Without carrying the pain, we cannot be sanctified by Jesus and experience the victory of the Resurrection.

AMay His peace spread all over the world. God bless you and protect you.@

I join my blessing to that of Micheal and all the courageous faithful in the Holy Land who will benefit from your generosity on Good Friday.

Signature

*Friar Carl Schafer OFM
Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)*