



Reflections from the Holy Land Mid-Summer Thoughts

Unlike previous year's summer reflections, this year for various commitments they come a bit later than usual, and I am so glad I was late so that I can include our joy and feelings of great pride at the announcement of appointing our humble Patriarch as Cardinal. I was honored to join him on his first visit after his appointment to the city and refugee camp of Jenin in the northern part of the West Bank in order to survey damages sustained by the LPJ parish complex in the city center as a result of the recent Israeli army incursion as well as to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters there. Noteworthy were the statements of congratulations he received during the visit whether by civic leaders such as the Governor and Mayor or by institution directors during the solidarity visit to Jenin hospital or by grassroots and community leaders and ordinary citizens and refugees on



the destroyed streets and alleyways of the refugee camp. Putting the heavy damage of destroyed water and electric infrastructure aside, my takeaway from the visit is the respect that the Church and its leaders have in our local societies. His Eminence's message was one of compassionate solidarity and prayer for peace and justice. The true work and value of the Church could not have been more evident than on the streets of Jenin which has become the symbol of resistance for the Palestinian people. The visit was truly an inspiring one that will certainly keep us moving forward to carry the heavy cross and be a source of comfort and encouragement and faith for so many.

Outside of Jenin, one cannot ignore the current most right-wing government in Israel and its actions on the ground. On the Palestinian front, more land confiscation and settlement construction, more violent attacks by settlers on innocent citizens on the West Bank encouraged by government ministers who call to wipe off Palestinian villages. Military incursions, arrests and killing. The two-state solution in the eyes of these politicians is officially dead with their calls for the collapse of the Palestinian Authority. On the Israeli front, Israeli society is divided right down the middle and the internal conflict mostly for the preservation of legal structures that ensures a democratic government rather than moving towards a dictatorship. Never before has there been such wide rifts and conflicts between Israeli Jewish societies characterized by continuous demonstrations and disruptions to daily life by hundreds of thousands on a regular basis. In short, a complete mess created by the government which is only about six months old without any hope for improvement or change in course anytime soon. Desperate times indeed!





As far as our other work is concerned, the school year at our 44 schools ended on time in June with great academic achievements based on the results of the government administered unified exams. Many projects were implemented in the schools to make the students' experiences more positive, yet the needs continue to be great. The schools administrators have big plans for development, expansion, and rationalization where possible. As for the pastoral activities, with increased funding this year, many more activities are being held including youth activities, summer camps and Sunday schools attended by thousands. It is wonderful to see record numbers participating in these activities focused to strengthen the faith.



As for the humanitarian support, with deep sadness and regret, the funds allocated for the year by the Order of the Holy Sepulcher have been depleted in the areas of social assistance, tuition support, medical emergencies, and medicines. Regretfully only life-threatening cases are being considered for the time being until we are able to secure additional funds. This comes at the worst possible time as the needs are great and are growing without the needed resources in hand. Today, this is the most painful dimension in the life of an administrator having to say no to clear humanitarian cases given the restrictions while your heart is saying yes to support and one feels guilty with every application that has to be denied or put on hold. Please pray for those who are suffering and are denied support for now!

Two additional areas of specific interest that are worthy of highlighting. The first being the appointment of Fr. Matthew Continho as the new Vicar for the Migrants and Asylum Seekers which as a Vicariate continues to offer support for the most marginalized in Israel. We wish Fr. Matthew all the best as he assumes this leadership role and commit our continued support. The second area is the renewed commitment to the Vicariate of Cyprus. During a recent visit, not only the needs of our parishes there were highlighted given that there are no churches or parish facilities in some locations, but more importantly the responsibility we have to provide pastoral services for the tens of thousands who are on the Turkish side of the border who are unattended to due to various political restrictions. On a personal note, it was disturbing to see Churches converted to mosques or to entertainment bars in Famagusta while our faithful have no place to turn to practice their faith and conduct pastoral activities. A lot of work is ahead of us for Cyprus, and we shall keep tackling the issues one issue at a time!



As we emerge from the long and tedious process of administrative and financial restructuring, we are proud to announce the launching of a five-year strategic plan for the LPJ that will be inclusive and comprehensive exercise that will eventually put clarity to our future plans. Now is the time to look back, evaluate and plan for the future. The strategic planning process will take time, and will at times be difficult, but a truly necessary exercise so that we ensure that we are aligned with the needs of our faithful and devise plans to meet the needs to the best of our ability.

Please accept my best wishes for a restful summer. Keep praying for your brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, with our hope that justice and peace will prevail soon despite the negative outlook.

Sami El-Yousef
Chief Executive Officer
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