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Audience with a Delegation of the Custody of the Holy Land on the centenary of the journal “La Terra Santa”

The following is the Holy Father Francis address to the delegation from the Custody of the Holy Land, whom he received in audience this morning in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, on the centenary of the journal “La Terra Santa”:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

[Excuse me if I remain seated, but my leg hurts today... It hurts, it hurts when I stand. This way it's better for me].

I welcome you on the occasion of the centenary of the journal “La Terra Santa”. I thank the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr. Francesco Patton, O.F.M., for his words of introduction. And I greet with gratitude all of you, who work on the editorial staff of the magazine in its various language editions and for Holy Land Editions; as well as those who work on the websites and social media and all the collaborators at the Christian Media Center. The service you perform today is in line with the communicative intuition that guided Custos Ferdinando Diotallevi a hundred years ago, and consists - as he wrote in the first issue of the magazine - in “making the Holy Land, the Land of God, the cradle of Christianity, the venerable sanctuaries where the Redemption of the human race was effected, better known”.

To make known the Holy Land, means communicating the “Fifth Gospel”, that is, the historical and geographical environment in which the Word of God was revealed and incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, for us and for our salvation. It also means making known the people who live there today, the life of the Christians of the various Churches and denominations, but also that of Jews and Muslims, to attempt to build a fraternal society in a context as complex and difficult as that of the Middle East.

Communication, in the time of social networks, must help to build community, or better still, fraternity (see Message for the World Communications Day 2019). I encourage you to recount the fraternity that is possible: the fraternity between Christians of Churches and confessions that are unfortunately still separated, but which in the Holy Land are often already close to unity, as I myself have had the opportunity to observe; to tell of the fraternity that is possible among all the children of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims; to tell of the ecclesial fraternity that is open to migrants, displaced persons and refugees, to restore to them the dignity they were deprived of when they had to leave their homeland in search of a future for themselves and their children. To tell all of this.

I thank you because, to recount the Holy Land, you endeavour to meet people *where and as they are* (see Message for World Communications Day 2021). Indeed, to carry out your reports, your enquiries and your publications, you do not limit yourselves to the calmer territories; you also visit the more difficult and afflicted situations, such as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Gaza. I know that you try to present stories of goodness, those of active resistance to the evil of war, those of reconciliation, those of the restoration of dignity to the children robbed of their childhood, those of refugees with their tragedies but also with their dreams and their hopes. Thank you, because to carry out your work in this way, you have not spared the soles of your shoes, and I know that you will not do so in the future, to be able to recount all of this.

Indeed, in communicating a certain reality, nothing can completely replace personal experience, living there. And you live and work in the very place where the Word of God, his message of salvation, was made incarnate and “encounterable” in Jesus Christ: not only in his words, but in his eyes, in his voice, in his gestures (cf. Message for World Communications Day 2021). Jesus’ attractiveness “depended on the truth of his preaching; yet the effectiveness of what he said was inseparable from how he looked at others, from how he acted towards them, and even from his silence. The disciples not only listened to his words; they watched him speak. Indeed in him – the incarnate Logos – the Word took on a face; the invisible God let himself be seen, heard and touched (cf. *1 Jn* 1.1-3). The word is effective only if it is “seen” only if it engages us in experience, in dialogue” (*ibid.*).

Dear communicators of the Custody of the Holy Land, you are required to make known what the Synod on the Word of God (2008) and then Pope Benedict XVI called “the Fifth Gospel”, that is, that Land where the history and geography of salvation meet and allow us to make a new reading of the biblical text, in particular the Gospel texts. There “we can see, indeed, tangibly feel that reality of the history that God brought about with men and women; beginning with the places of Abraham’s life and including the places of Jesus’ life, from the incarnation to the empty tomb, the sign of his Resurrection. Yes, God entered this land, he acted with us in this world” (Benedict XVI, Regina Caeli, 17 May 2009). And the Paschal Mystery also illuminates and gives meaning to today’s history, to the journey of the peoples who live on that earth today, a journey unfortunately marked by wounds and conflicts, still today, but which God’s grace always opens up to hope, hope of fraternity and peace (cf. *ibid.*). In this sense too, by telling the story of the Holy Land, you are telling the “Fifth Gospel”, the Gospel that God continues to write in history.

Through the means of social communication, you are able to enrich the faith of many, even those who do not have the opportunity of making a pilgrimage to the holy places. You do so by means of your professional commitment, carried out skilfully every day in the service of the Gospel. This is valuable for believers throughout the world and, at the same time, supports the Christians who live in the Land of Jesus. And I want to take advantage of this opportunity to express my closeness to them. I always remember them, also in prayer. Please, when you return home, convey my greeting and my blessing to the families and Christian communities of the Holy Land.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord’s providence and the protection of the Holy Virgin always accompany you in your activities. I heartily impart the apostolic blessing to you all, and to the other collaborators who were unable to come. And I ask you, from the Holy Land, for a prayer for me too. Thank you!
