When going to the Holy Land is far from simple: echoes from the 1300s for our today

Pilgrims arriving in Rome, illustration of the manuscript "Croniche" by Giovanni Sercambi, 14th Century. State Archive of Lucca

"Since the third century, the Holy Land has been one of the destinations coveted by pilgrims and visitors in search of spiritual sentiments and places dear to the faith: Let us think, for example, of the pilgrim of Bordeaux (333), of St. Jerome, who then settled there (386), of Egeria, who left us a *Peregrinatio ad loca Sancta* (383), of Helen and the Emperor Constantine (4th cent.) and then again of the Empress Eudoxia (5th century), Francis of Assisi (1219) and many others".

The *Lectio Magistralis* offered by the Grand Master of the Order, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, as he received the Boniface VIII International Prize focused on the first historic Jubilee of 1300 which was invoked by Pope Boniface VIII.

While the Holy Land had long been the foremost and favoured destination for pilgrims, the political-military landscape in the 1300s made it a hostile one. In fact, continued Cardinal Filoni, "the Holy Land in 1300, without the protection of Christian principles, still the scene of wars and further attempts at conquest, became a destination difficult to reach and beyond the possibilities of the majority of European faithful. Rome then became the centre of pilgrimages for the great multitude of men and women on a journey of faith and in search of penitential grace, attracted by the Eternal City".

It is of interest that the impetus for this first Jubilee did not come from above, that is, from ecclesiastical or political hierarchies, but rather from the people who, at the end of 1299, were desirous of a means to access God's mercy at a time when the century was drawing to a close marked by vibrant religious ferments.

In this context, the Grand Master noted how "the Jubilee of 1300 actually remains the greatest ecclesiological act of Boniface VIII, all the more significant in the context of the numerous spiritual movements that demanded the reform of the Church and the papacy; the Jubilee was a response to this born of the faith of the believers, and Rome represented the new 'Holy Land', a less complicated destination to reach for the pilgrim, if one thinks of the seas and unknown lands and not infrequently enemies to cross. The tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul attracted the imagination of many, and the presence of the Successor of Peter impressed the faith of the pilgrim".

Today's context is certainly different, but even in this 2021 we keenly feel in need of God's mercy and pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is intrinsic to the Knights and Dames and at the heart of membership in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, is not easily achievable due to the complicated health and safety measures in place in nations across the world.

And yet, the experience of the Jubilee of 1300 which, starting from an objective difficulty, was able to follow the desire of the faithful and the impulse of the Spirit, teaches us that there are no boundaries to God's mercy. Even if for many it will not be possible to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land during these months, let us keep up our desire to be encountered by God in the situations of our lives, leaving the doors open to His grace that always finds a way to reach us.

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