

Lunedì 13 maggio 2024  
Auditorium *Immacolata*  
San Salvatore - Gerusalemme

## **Studium Biblicum Franciscanum** **Centenario di Fondazione**

**Intervento di S.B. Card. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Patriarca di Gerusalemme**

*(Institutional Greetings)*

The faith of the Church is founded on the Word made flesh. It is the heart of the mystery that the Church has always celebrated in various ways in the liturgy, the sacraments, her works, thought, art and every other aspect of our personal and civic life.

And this Word made flesh has left the traces of his way on this earth. The Church has never stopped looking for these signs and guarding them carefully. Indeed, Christianity is not a mere narrative among others; it is not even an abstract spirituality detached from real life. Rather, the Christian faith is a "mystical" experience. A "spiritualist" is someone who reduces the incarnation to an illusion, someone who downgrades Jesus to the status of a sage. A "mystic", on the other hand, is a materialist par excellence: someone who believes in the "Word made flesh" and perhaps sees it, touches it. A mystical experience is, for example, that of Thomas, who wants to touch the risen Christ. Christianity is so little "spiritualistic" that it is the only religion that speaks not only of the salvation of souls, but also of the resurrection of bodies.

The *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* (SBF) played an important role in this context. At a time when modern scholarship was critically examining the Holy Places and questioning the historical and theological framework on which the Church was founded, the SBF patiently and scientifically demonstrated, little by little, that what the Church has always believed, namely that the places where the Word became flesh, are not the work of sophisticated piety, but the fruit of a consistent, serious and solid tradition.

It was and is a fundamental contribution not only to the local church, but to the whole church, because with the means of modern science it has definitively and stably linked the Christian faith to a place, a country and a history, thus confirming - if one can say so - the faith of the church.

Bible study in the Holy Land therefore always has a different flavor. Everywhere you can study the biblical languages, but everywhere they are considered "dead" languages that are no longer used, except in the Holy Land, where they are spoken languages. Everywhere you can study biblical geography, but only here are the places still alive, inhabited and cared for. Here the Word made flesh is alive not only in the spirit but also in the flesh. Here the study of the Bible is a kind of "mystical experience".

Through the SBF, the entire Church of the Holy Land, which I represent here, has made an irreplaceable contribution to the life of the Church, and I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of our Church to thank all the current and former professors of the SBF for the enormous service they have rendered to the Church, and to thank the Custody of the Holy Land, which from the beginning has wanted, supported and encouraged all the initiatives of the SBF, and without which it might not have been possible to do all that has been done.

I had the grace to spend my first ten years of life in the Holy Land at SBF, alongside those who are now considered the penultimate generation of professors. It was a crucial incubation period for which I am grateful to God and those professors, most of whom are now in heaven.

In addition to the hard work of learning the methods, the study of the languages, the meaning of the scriptures, from the love that emanated from these professors for the scriptures, for the land and its traditions, for its inhabitants, for the Church, I also learned to lay my head on these stones and to love the scriptures, because love is always contagious.

My wish goes out to the new generation of professors and to the students who will gradually follow: Stay true to the history of SBF and proclaim the Word made flesh with the same passion and competence, with the same love and enthusiasm as your predecessors.

In fact, the Church continues to need you to study, investigate and question everything that has to do with the person of Jesus using increasingly modern scientific instruments. The question of Jesus will never cease to fascinate humanity, research on his person will never cease to raise questions, doubts, new or old ideas or ideologies. Therefore, it will always be necessary to have someone who helps us to understand, to evaluate, to listen, but above all to propose cordially and solidly the firm and clear, competent and well-founded answer of the Church.

In short, we will always need an SBF to help us all live the Christian faith mystically. This is my wish for the next 100 years of the SBF.

Thank you!

†Pierbattista