
All Saints' Day. Patton (Custos Holy Land): At the Gaza graveyard, "faith is stronger than war"

The solemnity of All Saints' Day marks the beginning of November, traditionally a month of remembrance. In fact, the second day of the month is dedicated to the memory of the faithful departed. It has been customary for many years, both in Italy and elsewhere, to combine the two celebrations, preferably by celebrating in cemeteries the Holy Mass for the Solemnity of All Saints. Apart from all the pastoral and liturgical aspects, the solemnity of All Saints gives meaning to the remembrance of the faithful deceased. It is the Paschal perspective of life that gives meaning to both our life and our death. Moreover, what awaits us in this perspective is not a disappearance into nothingness, but communion with God, full participation in his life, in a definitive way. The saints are those who have already attained this goal, and they encourage us to live in union with Christ on our earthly pilgrimage, in order to be united with Him in the heavenly Jerusalem. **Nourished by the word.** Before the Napoleonic Code of 1804, the deceased were buried in churches. Priests and members of the clergy were buried under the presbytery, while lay people were buried beneath the floor of the nave. The walls of churches were decorated with frescoes depicting biblical stories and the lives of the saints. The triumphant Christ or the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, crowned in heaven, could be admired in the apse basin, suggesting the purpose and meaning of earthly pilgrimage. On the wall opposite the apse, however, the Last Judgement was often painted as a reminder of the need for personal responsibility in everyday life. The congregation would gather in the nave (then as now) to celebrate the sacraments and the most important moments in life, from birth to death. The Eucharist, in particular, was and is celebrated as a special opportunity to receive nourishment from the Word of God and the Body of Christ, which transforms those who receive it into one body in Christ and allows the members of His Body, the Church, to lead their lives with the same sentiments and dispositions that belonged to Christ Jesus. Nourishing ourselves with the Word and the Body of Christ transforms us and makes us abide in Him. Nourishing ourselves in Christ. Although not very hygienic, this practice offered a beautiful image of the Church: A people, formed by persons living in this concrete historical context, nourished in Christ in order to be transformed in him; a people that knows that sooner or later it will have to cross that passage called death, aware that every believer is called to do so in the light of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus; a people that knows that life's destination is to participate fully in the life of God in the communion of saints, and that for this reason it is nourished by the Word and the Body of Christ. Finally, a people that freely chooses to live according to the prophetic and unconventional spirit of the Beatitudes.



[Although these may sound like theoretical events of a distant past, what has happened in the Holy Land in recent days reminds us of them today, through the words of a young man from the Catholic Parish of Gaza. While the bombing raged all around him, he wrote on WhatsApp: "Good morning world, do you remember me? My name is Suhail Abodawood, from Gaza. Right now, my Church is my sanctuary, because salvation and safety are only in Jesus Christ. I always pray the rosary, I do it as an offering and to ask my Lord for peace for our Church and our city. I trust only in God and I put my life in the hands of the Lord: He is my only Saviour and I pray that I may share in His glorious salvation. I am now facing very serious difficulties. The situation is extremely dangerous. I have been sleeping in the church for the last few days, it is the safest place at the moment. We attend Holy](#)

Mass twice a day and pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary to give us more faith to cope with our predicament.

Faith is stronger than war.

Every day we lose something that is ours, homes and people. We are praying from the bottom of our hearts, asking God to give us peace and justice in our Holy Land. On October 25, before Mass began, I received the news that my home had been bombed and destroyed. My first reaction was one of sadness and shock, but then I realised that our lives are more important than any material thing. During Mass, I prayed to our Lord Jesus Christ with special intensity, asking Him to give me more strength and faith to cope with my suffering. In spite of everything, the Holy Church is my first and last home, it is my belief. It became my true home after the one I had was destroyed. The Church will always be my home. Jesus Christ will always be in my heart wherever I go. We will continue to pray, to fast, and to give thanks to God for all that He has given us, for as long as we are alive. We will sacrifice ourselves for Jesus as He sacrificed Himself for us.”

“Hope and determination are stronger than any war in our Holy Land.”

I don't know if Suhail Abodawood is still living or if he was killed in the bombings. But I am sure that in his youth he understood what it means to live this life in communion with Christ and in the communion of saints. May the Spirit of the Lord keep the light of faith, hope and charity burning in us, that we may continue to live even the darkest hours of life and history with the light of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, a way necessary for us also to reach the communion of Saints. (*)
Custos of the Holy Land

Francesco Patton (*)