

### **What motivated L'Œuvre d'Orient to invite Cardinal Pizzaballa to France at this particular moment?**

L'Œuvre d'Orient decided to invite Cardinal Pizzaballa to France, in collaboration with the Shrine of Paray-le-Monial, the site of the apparitions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary. This invitation stemmed from a simple conviction: France needed to hear directly from a pastor who lives side by side with the people of the Holy Land on a daily basis.

Since October 7, 2023, many have been speaking about the Holy Land. Few can bear witness to it with the human, spiritual, and pastoral depth of Cardinal Pizzaballa. Through him, the realities experienced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and Jordan were able to be heard, far from the simplifications and purely ideological interpretations of the conflict.

We also hoped that his words would reach a wide range of audiences: French political leaders, Church leaders, and the faithful. The meetings he held with the President of the Republic, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the President of the Senate, the Permanent Council of the French Bishops' Conference, and the thousands of pilgrims present in Paray-le-Monial demonstrated just how much his words are listened to and respected today.

What struck me most was that he never came merely to speak of a crisis. He came to speak of a future for the peoples of the Holy Land—a future founded on education, dialogue, and the rebuilding of trust.

### **How do you assess the significance of this visit in supporting the Christians of the Holy Land, whose concerns and aspirations Cardinal Pizzaballa carries and represents?**

The primary purpose of this visit was to raise awareness of the Christians of the Holy Land. They are often mentioned when they are under threat, but far less so when they continue to live, teach, provide care, pray, and serve their communities.

For L'Œuvre d'Orient, this visit is part of a longstanding and unwavering commitment to the Christians of the Holy Land. We stand by them through prayer, by raising awareness among the French public, but also through the concrete support we provide to their schools, parishes, social works, and development projects. Inviting Cardinal Pizzaballa was also a way to ensure these communities are heard and not forgotten.

Cardinal Pizzaballa forcefully emphasized that Christians in the Holy Land do not wish to be perceived merely as a vulnerable minority in need of protection. They want to continue carrying out their unique mission within deeply wounded societies: educating young people, maintaining places of encounter, fostering dialogue, and contributing to the common good.

This visit also provided a better understanding of the complexity of the current situation. The cardinal spoke truthfully about the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians, without ever

resorting to caricature. This freedom of speech, rooted in a concrete closeness to the people, left a deep impression on those who heard him.

Finally, I believe this visit served as a reminder that supporting Christians in the Holy Land is not merely a matter of responding to humanitarian emergencies. It also involves supporting their specific vocation: to remain in this land, to sustain educational, social, and ecclesial institutions there, and to continue to be artisans of dialogue and peace.

**what moment, encounter, or message do you believe will leave the most lasting impression on the people of France?**

It is difficult to single out just one moment, given how eventful this visit was. I believe, however, that what will leave the most lasting impression is the consistency of the message conveyed by the cardinal throughout his stay.

Whether addressing the President of the Republic, senators, the bishops of France, the teams at L'Œuvre d'Orient, or the thousands of pilgrims gathered in Paray-le-Monial, he delivered the same message: to face reality head-on, to reject the dehumanization of others, and to continue believing that a shared future remains possible.

In Paray-le-Monial, this conviction found a particularly powerful spiritual expression. Meditating on the Sacred Heart, the cardinal presented love not as a feeling, but as a decision. In the face of violence, fear, and hatred, he reminded us that forgiveness is not forgetting, that justice remains necessary, but that Christians cannot allow themselves to be trapped in the logic of permanent hostility.

Cardinal Pizzaballa does not minimize any suffering, nor does he sidestep any difficulty, but he refuses to consider reconciliation impossible. In the current context, these words carry particular weight.

If there is one lesson I personally take away from Cardinal Pizzaballa's visit, it is that the future of the Holy Land will not be built solely through political agreements or material reconstruction. It will also depend on the ability of men and women to rebuild trust, to educate the younger generations, and to keep spaces for encounter open.

It is precisely here that the Christian presence remains irreplaceable. Through their schools, their social works, their parishes, and their commitment to serving all, they help keep alive the possibility of peaceful coexistence.

It is no coincidence that this visit concluded in Paray-le-Monial. Between Jerusalem and Paray, there is a shared call to keep one's heart open. Cardinal Pizzaballa reminded us that the Church's mission is to be an instrument of healing, reconciliation, and hope. In a region torn apart by war, this vocation is demanding; it also holds immense promise.