

The following is Fr Manuel's letter translated from the Arabic

"I am moved with pity for them" (Mark 6:34)

He's moving with steady steps towards the Holy Land of Palestine and its "living stones" which have built the church of Christ here. He's a Christian pilgrim following the footsteps of Christ. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.) Isaiah 40:3-5

We Christians welcome him. We open for him our hearts to land in the "straight road". We made our hills and mountains low in front of him. We filled with flowers our valleys. Our rugged land is made a plain. All this to say: "blessed the "BLESSED" who comes in the name of the Lord. He is our "father", our "sponsor", and he is our "spiritual home" as we all live and dwell in his heart. Our church in Gaza - the Holy Family Church - gives him the title of "Honorary Christian Palestinian Citizen" in Gaza.

We will all ascend to meet him in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. However...We were hoping his holiness would have chosen a time when Jerusalem, its holy places, and its people were not under the horrible occupation.

We, the people of Palestine, Christians and Muslims, do not accept that your holiness goes through the small gate of the apartheid wall which surrounds "the city of peace", or for you to go out of that opposite gate surrounded by Israeli guns in order to get to "City of Nativity".

We did not want for your eyes to see the Church of Jerusalem torn apart by the war, or to see the Palestinian people crucified at the Golgotha of Jerusalem. We wanted you to look at a Glorious Tomb where "Christ the Redeemer" was risen.

We did not wish for your heart to hear the moaning of a Palestinian people crushed by an occupation in Jerusalem, or for you to feel a Zionist earthquake cracking the walls of our holy places. We rather wanted you to feel the happiness of a similar earthquake signaling the Resurrection of Christ in the hearts of Palestinian Christians.

We, the Palestinian Christians, sons and daughters of the resurrection witnesses, promise you that "Christ was risen and our people will rise as well".

If Your Holiness could not see us in our church, gathered around our beloved and distinguished Patriarch Fouad Twal in Jerusalem, then it's a situation we

refuse. We can not accept that the doors of Jerusalem get shut in front of us and for us to be sent to Bethlehem to meet you. All Palestinians were born in Jerusalem and no one can take away our birth certificates. We will not accept meeting you anywhere but in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on the "Way of the Cross" and on the court yards of the blessed Aqsa, alongside with Muslims our people.

There, we will give you "a plucked-off olive leaf" so you could promise all those in denial and doubt that peace in the Middle East is coming by smashing down the occupation and getting Jerusalem back to PEACE and PEACE back to Jerusalem.

We have heard the good news that Your Holiness will give the offerings of the Mass of Holy Thursday to the Gaza's catholic community.

Your Holiness, you are the "broken bread" in the Cenacle for the redemption of the world; you are the faithful and prudent steward whom the master put in charge of his servants to distribute the daily bread Jesus obtained us from His Father; you are the teacher and the messenger sent to give us the message of Lent: "This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own."(Ecclesiastes: 58:7-8)

We have been exposed to a holocaust and have been under occupation for over sixty years. We in Gaza have been crushed with a barbaric war. Where else but in Gaza were the words of Psalm implemented? "All day long my enemies taunt me; in their rage, they make my name a curse. I eat ashes like bread, mingle my drink with tears." (Ps: 102: 9-10) Break us with generosity your bread. Open your heart to us who are sent to Diaspora by Israel and give us refuge and shelter.

Give us your scarlet cloak and gird yourself with sackcloth to cover our shame and nakedness, then like a mother pelican Give us here on a platter your christian heart to feed us. Who else but you can scream in the face of injustice and wrong-doers of Israel and say just like Moses did:" release my people."? Who else but you can be above the power of the American Veto, hit it with the Cross and cover it with thorns, then hand it over to be crucified?

We will remain your children; committed in hope until Christ's peace comes to Christ's land. And if the world fears for your safety from the people of Gaza, and they stopped you from praying with us, and scared you off the peaceful road which Jesus took when he escaped to Egypt, we assure you that our hearts in fact are peaceful, quiet and safe between our Muslim people in Gaza. We have the same rights and the same obligations, we are all the people of the Holy Land of Palestine. We love and respect one another and we're going to work together to free our land. Yes, "be moved with pity" for us just like Jesus was and come to us and take home in our hearts.

Your son in Christ  
Father Manuel Musallam  
Gaza April, 1st, 2009

Have a blessed and grace filled Easter.