



The Church and COVID-19

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Introduction



The local church and its related institutions are part of the national identity of the Palestinian people. In times of crisis, the church has always played a vital role.¹ The church doors are always open for those who seek it as a shelter. We have seen in the Gaza Strip and during Israeli wars on Gaza that the churches became a refuge for those seeking shelter from the Israeli bombardment. Food and basic needs were also provided to families.

It is not our intention to highlight the past activities of the church in crisis. The focus of this article is on the church in the context of Covid-19, which is a different kind of challenge for the church against an invisible enemy that has infected nations and paralyzed traditional daily life across the globe. The article will examine the performance of the church in dealing with this crisis from the outset, and the church's response to such an unprecedented challenge to society and to the church's message.

Today, the church's mission is to find a safe way in which to convey the word of God to the faithful in crisis, alleviate the suffering of victims and the most vulnerable, and present the Sacraments when all the churches are shut. This unprecedented global virus posed a serious challenge to the heads of churches.²

The Spiritual Role of the Church



The main mission of the church continues to be the spiritual teachings of the Gospel and to hold prayers, especially on Sundays. In the last decade, we have witnessed outreach efforts by the church in preaching campaigns, initiating social activities and religious celebrations. These efforts aim to encourage mainly youngsters to keep their faith at a time when Christian emigration is on the rise due to a variety of factors, particularly the political instability in Palestine. Efforts were put in place to counter this phenomenon and to solidify the engagement between the clergy and lay people.



Covid-19 unexpectedly intruded into one of the most important cities for Christianity, the birthplace of Jesus Christ. On 5 March 2020, the Palestinian Government held a press conference to announce that seven citizens were infected with the disease in the Bethlehem area. The disease had been transmitted by tourists visiting the area. Accordingly, the Palestinian Government took immediate and

drastic measures, including the lockdown, before Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced the emergency presidential decree on that same night.³

At one point, Mrs. Rula Ma'aayah, Minister of Tourism, requested that the Nativity Church be closed in accordance with the presidential decree with the consent of the three churches responsible for the status quo (the Orthodox, Franciscans and Armenians). Initially, the heads of churches resisted this request, namely due to the memory of the dark 39-day siege of the church by Israeli military forces during the second *Intifada* in 2002.⁴

The news announcing an increase in Covid-19 cases, along with an official request from the Palestinian Government, convinced the three churches to agree to close down the Church of the Nativity, limiting prayers to the few priests housed inside. No one imagined the idea of closure during the high season for tourism with pilgrims patiently waiting in a long queue to enter the Grotto and pray. All the

other churches in the governorate were also closed. It was no easy mission for the church to ask the faithful to pray from home and to watch Sunday mass via electronic platforms.

The parishes adjusted themselves to the new reality via social media, keeping in their mind the importance of the connection with their communities while maintaining the social distance required by Palestinian Ministry of Health regulations. Within the context of this new bitter reality, the church's biggest challenge is how to strengthen spirituality, if not to maintain faith in the minds and hearts of the faithful who have a deep conviction of the power of God to defeat the devil represented by the coronavirus pandemic. To convince the faithful to stay safe at home while following and living the liturgies is a formidable challenge for the church, especially the duties of hearing confession, anointing the sick outside the church and providing sacraments in the priest's absence.



Photo by Issanis Kassissieh

Easter



Holy Week was different this year. For the Christian world, the Holy Sepulcher in East Jerusalem represents the center of this celebration as it is from the Holy Tomb that the resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred. This year, the exceptional coronavirus situation and the strict health precautions ordered by Israel and the Palestinian civil authority closed down churches, synagogues and mosques. The public were banned from celebrating in churches including the Holy Sepulcher. The heads of churches succumbed to the danger of the spread of the virus and the main door of the Holy Sepulcher Church was closed on 25 March 2020, on the eve of the most sacred week for Christians everywhere.

For the faithful of the Holy Land and the rest of the Christian world, it was very painful to see the doors of the Holy Sepulcher church

suddenly closed. It was agreed that the heads of churches could remain inside to conduct mass while the faithful would watch on live streaming and other social media tools. It is worth mentioning here that the churches resisted the complete closure of the Holy Sepulcher church, especially during the Holy Week and Easter Sunday. It was strange to read in the local newspaper a statement by one senior clergy announcing that the doors of the Holy Sepulcher would be open during Easter, then suddenly the next day the doors of the church were closed.⁵ Fear of the pandemic coupled with the decision of the Jordanian Hashemite Kingdom as custodian of the holy shrines to shut down Al-Aqsa Mosque contributed to the decision. Additional pressure exerted by the *de facto* Israeli authorities resulted in the closure of the church as part of efforts to contain the virus.⁶ In collective efforts to address the faithful at such a sensitive time, the thirteen patriarchs and heads of churches published an Easter message⁷ of hope, consolation and victory over all forms of death and destruction amid the pandemic.

The Dilemma of the Local Church in Dealing with the Civil Authorities



Despite negotiations and arguments among the churches and with the Israeli authorities to ensure the historic and legal right of each church to conduct mass during Holy Week, it was clear that the Israeli police were determined to shut down the church in line with Israeli Ministry of Health requirements to fight COVID-19. Amid the shuttle talks, the three heads of churches sent a letter⁸ to the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urging them to allow the clergy to carry out their spiritual duties during Holy Week. The letter was leaked and Palestinian officials expressed great concern about its content because the letter could be interpreted as implying that Israel holds *de jure* sovereignty over Jerusalem in contradiction to all the UNSC resolutions and UNGA resolutions related to the city, as well as to the historic and legal status of the holy sites (the status quo).

An official letter⁹ signed by the Secretary General of the PLO and the Chief Negotiator Dr. Saeb Erakat was sent to the three churches stressing basic international principles related to Jerusalem, and referring to the *status quo* and the role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as the custodian of the holy sites. The letter stressed that in seeking to maintain the liturgies and mass, the church should not give legitimacy to the occupying power, violate international resolutions and

validate the Trump administration's unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel. The unofficial response was that the churches needed to deal with an "emergency situation" and hence, they had to deal with the "de facto power" on the ground. To this day, Palestinian officials have not received an official response.

On the other hand, and in preemption to the Israeli plans to annex lands of the West Bank; the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of the Holy Land churches issued a statement on 7 May 2020, expressing their deep concern and calling on Israel to respect the international legitimacy and to refrain from any unilateral illegal acts, which would result in grave consequences for the Middle East Peace process¹⁰.

Holy Saturday



Churches celebrated Holy Saturday according to the Gregorian calendar on 18 April 2020. These communities, namely the Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Assyrian and Coptic Christians, celebrate the Holy Fire: Christ's triumph over death that He is risen and death has been conquered. As part of the new reality, the celebrations took place with empty chairs and each clergyman asked his community to follow the mass from their homes via live streaming. In Jerusalem, the Latin Church opted to pray in the Patriarchate and live streaming was broadcast by the Christian Media Center. Palestinian TV and other media centers were given access to recordings. As the faithful could not light their candles with the Holy Fire, a number of Catholic



Scouts visited houses to pass the Holy Fire to the faithful. I was personally confined at home with my family and was happy to receive a knock on our apartment door in the Old City of Jerusalem by two scout members holding candles and presenting the Holy Light to us. For a moment, we cheered, but then I realized that the coronavirus epidemic is truly changing our lives and had prohibited me for the first time in my life from going to the Holy Sepulcher, three minutes from where I live. The Patriarchate brought the Holy Light to the faithful to bring hope and determination to maintain traditions, customs and liturgies despite COVID-19.

Other processions and liturgies were also dropped. The most important of these is the annual Palm Sunday procession that starts from the Mount of Olives and continues to Saint Anne's Monastery in the Old City. Hundreds of believers participate in this special procession. In fact, Palm Sunday is the only day in the year when hundreds if not thousands of Christians from the West Bank may obtain a permit from the Israeli military authorities to visit the Holy City. The event was rendered impossible this year.

In some areas in the West Bank, drive-in masses were conducted to strengthen the faith of believers and lift their spirits at a time when fear and helplessness are overcoming the hearts and minds of people confined to their homes. For this reason, Archbishop Pizzaballa, the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, emphasized in his Sunday Easter sermon¹¹ that we should not allow fear of the virus to defeat us or shake our faith as the resurrection of Jesus Christ defeated death and he rose victorious from the tomb. In other words, we are requested to keep our faith strong, support each other and pray for all people. I was honored to take part in the Easter Sunday mass as the only lay person there.

The arrangements for churches celebrating Holy Saturday according to the Julian calendar were no different from those of the sister Catholic Church. With coronavirus fears, mass was limited to a few priests and the faithful were absent physically. The washing of feet liturgy, led by His Beatitude Theophilos III of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, was not conducted according to tradition in the premises of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, also known as the Church of the Resurrection.

On Good Friday, the annual procession in Saint Jacob's Cathedral was also canceled for the first time in hundreds of years. The prayers were conducted inside the cathedral in the presence of a few members of the choir and were shorter in length. Physical distancing was well observed by all attendants. In Saint Elie's monastery on the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the faithful attending the

Good Friday liturgy exceeded ten persons, breaking the regulations and resulting in a fine of NIS 500.00 each and NIS 5,000 for the monastery rector.

The Holy Saturday procession inside the Holy Sepulcher was broadcast by different TV networks as the church was completely empty. On that special sacred day, the church is usually overflowing with thousands of worshipers, seated or standing in every corner and on its roof. The narrow streets of the Old City are also full, despite the Israeli police erecting barriers around the Holy Sepulcher, and crowds enjoy the celebrations of the Holy Fire and watch the scout groups parading in the Christian Quarter with drums, tambourines and bagpipes.

The streets were deserted this year. The Jerusalem Orthodox Scout members, rather than performing as every year, took the flame to homes in and outside of the Old City, reaching out to the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The historic main door of the Holy Sepulcher was open for a while that morning as permitted to allow for the Holy Fire appearing from Christ's tomb to be taken to different corners of the Orthodox Church across the world as is the tradition.

The Church and its Material Support to People



The Church runs health, educational and social institutions to reach out to people in Palestine. The ongoing lockdown obliged each church to check on its congregation and extend both spiritual and material support to poor families or those who had become unemployed.

Many churches have contributed financially or sent food parcels to those in need. Church institutions have been working further on priorities during the spread of the disease or adjusting to the new realities. Such efforts have been exhibited by Caritas, while the Pontifical Mission¹² in Jerusalem has been fundraising to secure financial support for health institutions, in particular for the purchase of ventilators and other medical equipment. Also, the Latin Patriarchate with the Grand Magisterium of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem have launched a special “COVID-1- Humanitarian Support Fund” dedicated to Palestine.

The Vatican announced that the annual collection for the Holy Land from all over the world by the generosity of the faithful has been rescheduled for 13 September 2020.¹³



Photo courtesy of Olivier Fitoussi/Flash90

Private schools run by the local church in East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Strip are facing real challenges with the closure of their educational institutions, including colleges, universities and schools, in accordance with the orders of the Palestinian authorities. Online classes are a new experimental method endorsed by local churches to keep the semester running and avoid further disruptions to the educational sector. Despite all the difficulties, online teaching continues, but a financial crisis is expected regarding the salaries of the teachers and employees.¹⁴ This will add to the burdens faced by the church to keep its institutions running during the times of the coronavirus.¹⁵

To mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, and following the initiative¹⁶ of King Abdullah II of Jordan, the Hashemite Custodian of the Islamic and Christian Holy Sites in the Holy Land, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, exempted all tenants of properties of the Orthodox Church within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem from the rent for 2020 as the city is undergoing exceptional circumstances.¹⁷ At the same time, the Patriarchate and other churches are distributing thousands of food parcels and donating to hospitals in different areas as part of the Church's social responsibility.¹⁸ The donations are part of continuous efforts to alleviate the current sufferings of people and the churches in the Holy Land have no other choice but to deal with the negative repercussions of the disease.

The Holy See and the Pandemic



As in other states, the Holy See was taken by surprise by the spread of COVID-19 but it did not take long before His Holiness Pope Francis took unprecedented decisions and drastic steps to counter the disease and protect Vatican City. No one imagined that the mass conducted by His Holiness in the presence of the believers would be put on hold, that Saint Peter's Square would become a ghost town, and that the Vatican museums and courts would shut their doors on the eve of Lent.¹⁹

The most striking image in my mind was watching His Holiness on 17 March 2020 as he walked alone through St. Peter's Basilica in a special prayer for Almighty God to save humanity from this virus. How painful it was for millions to watch the Holy Week prayers in the Vatican with empty chairs as His Holiness led the mass and liturgies on Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, alone with only his minimal entourage. The spiritual words of the Holy Father continue to inspire the faithful. In his Easter Sunday message, Pope Francis as head of the Catholic church fully endorsed the call of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a ceasefire in all hot spots, to open safety corridors for those who suffer in the conflicts and to use diplomatic tracks to solve disputes.²⁰ Within this context, the Holy Father called upon Israelis and Palestinians to grasp the opportunity and resume talks to achieve a comprehensive and durable peace in the Middle East.²¹ President Mahmoud Abbas sent an Easter greeting message to the Holy Father echoing the Pope's efforts for a unified international stand to defeat the pandemic.²²

In further solidarity with the Third World and states in financial debt, His Holiness asked that international financial organizations and states either cancel these debts or at least re-schedule them to allow poor countries to better confront this international health emergency.²³ Thus, he issued a strong and bold appeal.



Photo courtesy of euronews

Such an appeal in these circumstances should be received positively. As the Holy Father put it: “*We have realized that we are on the same boat... all of us called to row together*”.²⁴ In these few words, the Vatican defined the challenge faced by humanity. Furthermore, the Pope added: “*We are one human community*”.²⁵ The Holy Father is seeking a collective and united effort by the international community as the path for the survival of humanity, a path based on justice, peace and fairness of wealth distribution. There is no doubt that the Catholic church is doing its utmost to ensure its presence to every person afflicted by Covid-19, including researchers searching for a remedy for this disease. The Holy See, like others, considers that the world order has been affected by this crisis, which is expected to last for some time with further deaths and suffering leading to socio-economic disequilibrium and further inequalities. In other words, the Catholic church joins with other churches in expressing their serious concern for the *day after* we vanquish the virus. As laboratories have not found an effective vaccine, the crisis will deepen globally. Disagreements about reviving the economy or saving lives will be the main issue the church will face in different countries and diocese.

As normal daily life gradually returns under the continued spread of the virus, the question of the churches opening their doors to the public will emerge. This is a liability, given that many of the faithful are sick or elderly. In this context, and as the priesthood is for preaching the Gospel and serving people, I should note here that in Italy, Spain and in other areas, more than eighty priests have passed away. They died from the virus while serving the sick and the elderly in care homes for the elderly. The mission of the priesthood involves preaching about the importance of spiritual self-reflection, revisiting the meaning of the sacred family and reviving, if not strengthening, family bonds at a time when everyone is confined to their homes.

In parallel with the aforementioned efforts conducted by Vatican City, Pope Francis has contributed financially on different occasions to hospitals dealing with COVID-19 or to purchase medical equipment to close gaps within the health sector. At a later stage, as the disease reached its peak in various countries, especially Italy, and Spain, the Holy Father decided to establish an emergency fund at the Pontifical Mission Societies to assist people and communities tragically impacted by the spread of the virus.²⁶ The fund will be directed to ‘mission countries’ through the church’s ‘structures and institution’ for those suffering from the consequences of the epidemic. The Holy Father launched the fund with US \$750,000 and appealed to all “church entities” and others to contribute to the fund. In less than a few days, the Fund reached more than EUR 200 million.

Conclusion



During the Easter Vigil, Pope Francis quoted Jesus on the resurrection: “Do not be afraid, do not yield to fear”.²⁷ This is a message of hope. To echo this message, the heads of churches issued a statement during Holy Week²⁸ to tell the faithful: “The mighty power and grace of the Resurrection offer us hope, healing, and victory over this pandemic and all dark situations”. They concluded by announcing boldly that: “The Church is the Body of Christ, our Risen Lord, and we are the people of his pasture”.²⁹ With this statement, the church’s biggest challenge in facing COVID-19 is to maintain the light of hope at a time when the faithful everywhere look to the church for salvation and to help humanity to overcome death from the virus. The image remains in our minds of Pope Francis *solo* holding a special mass in the deserted Basilica of St. Peter’s Square.

Reflecting on that same image, the world saw the live streaming of the celebration of the ancient Holy Fire from the Holy Tomb of Jesus Christ on Saturday 18 April 2020. The vast space in the church is a stark contrast to the church being overcrowded from every angle.

The connection between the two images in St. Peter’s Square and in the Holy Sepulcher could be a divine message and a wake-up call for humanity before this bitter reality is reversed and the faithful flock back to the two basilicas. Thus, the triumph of the church is to defeat COVID-19.

As the rapid spread of COVID-19 took the church by surprise and imposed challenges, it might be the right moment for the church to re-visit its structures and prepare itself for the *day after*. This would enable it to tackle the challenges ahead with the deep awareness that specific teachings could be relevant, to work for closer unity on other vital issues for the survival of the church, and to keep the house of God alive in a stronger and triumphant manner. The church should not remain static but should become dynamic. It does not seem logical for Holy Week to be celebrated twice in the same week and to witness the resurrection of the Lord twice in a row. The Gospel teaches us differently.



- 1 At various periods of time, we have witnessed clergymen from different denominations defending their cause. Patriarch Michel Sabbah was the first Palestinian patriarch of the Latin Patriarchate (1987-2008) who defended justice and peace; Rev. Fr. Ibrahim Ayyad (1911-2005), member of the Palestinian National Council and member of the Palestinian Central Council, is another example; Rev. Mitri Al-Raheb, member of the Central Council of the PLO and member of the Revolutionary Council.
- 2 There are 13 recognized churches in the Holy Land composed of the Orthodox family churches, the Catholic family churches, and the Anglican and Lutheran churches.
- 3 On 5 March 2020, President Mahmoud Abbas issued a presidential decree declaring a state of emergency in Palestine for one month in an effort to contain the virus.
- 4 Israeli military forces besieged the Nativity Church (2 April – 10 May 2002), requesting that Palestinian activists who had taken shelter inside the Church surrender. A settlement was reached which ended the siege by 10 May 2002.
- 5 In Al-Quds daily newspaper of 24 March 2020, Fr. Ibrahim Faltas, Franciscan board advisor of the Custody of the Holy Land, expressed the intention to leave the Holy Sepulcher Church open at this holy time of the year.
- 6 For more details see the article on *The Jerusalem Post*, accessible on URL: <<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/jerusalem-church-of-the-holy-sepulchre-closes-amid-coronavirus-fears-622370>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 7 Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in the Holy Land, *Easter Message*, Jerusalem on 9 April 2020, accessible on URL: <<https://www.lpi.org/posts/easter-2020-message-of-patriarchs-and-heads-of-churches-of-jerusalem.htm>> (consulted on 20/04/2020).
- 8 Greek Orthodox, Franciscans and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchs and Custos, *Letter to the Israeli President and Prime Minister on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Easter prayers - Emergency regulations closure – Covid-19*, Jerusalem on 30 March 2020.
- 9 *Letter to the Heads of the Three Communities to whom is entrusted the duty of guarding the Holy Sepulcher Church in response to the Holy Sepulcher Church Closure - Covid-19*, Ramallah on 3 April 2020.
- 10 Statement by the Patriarchates and Heads of the Holy Land Churches on Israeli Unilateral Annexation Plans, 7 May 2020, on URL: https://www.lpi.org/posts/holy-land-heads-of-churches-voice-concern-about-israels-planned-annexation-of-west-bank-land.html?s_cat=1102
- 11 Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, *Homily of Easter 2020*, Jerusalem on 12 April 2020; the full text is accessible on URL: <<https://www.lpi.org/posts/homily-of-archbishop-pierbattista-pizzaballa-for-easter-2020.html>> (consulted on 20/04/2020).
- 12 The usual mission of the Franciscan Custody is to ensure the steadfastness and resilience of the faithful by providing houses, employment, education and social support. Such efforts continue in the Holy Land during the times of the coronavirus.
- 13 Congregation for the Oriental Churches, *Collection for the Holy Land 2020*, Vatican City on 2 April 2020; the official communiqué accessible on URL: <<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/04/02/200402b.html>> (consulted on 20/04/2020).
- 14 One of the school principals whispered in my ears lately, that no tuition fees had been paid since the beginning of the second semester, i.e. since after Christmas. He added “It would be undiplomatic of us to pressure the parents to pay their dues at a time when the coronavirus is confining us at home and many parents have already lost their salaries or their work, especially those who work in tourism, and donations have dropped drastically”.
- 15 There are 32 Catholic schools within the 1967 borders, cfr. Secretariat of Solidarity for Catholic Schools and Institutions in the Holy Land, *Statistical Data for Catholic Schools, Holy Land*, 2018 – 2019.
- 16 For more on the initiative: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/jordan-king-waiver-rent-waif-properties-jerusalem.html>
- 17 See the official statement on the Patriarchate’s website, accessible on URL: <<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/blog/2020/03/28/in-response-to-coronavirus-epidemic-patriarch-theophilus-iii-exempts-tenants-of-the-old-city-of-jerusalem-from-rent-for-the-year-2020>> (consulted on 20/04/2020).
- 18 The Patriarchate considers itself as the Mother of all Churches and made a large donation to the Emergency Fund established by President Mahmoud Abbas to encourage the private sector, civil society, Palestinians in the Diaspora, and individuals to contribute financially to the fight against the pandemic. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem donated half a million shekels to this special fund set up for this purpose. See the official statement on the Patriarchate’s website, accessible on URL: <<https://ar.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2020/04/11/65241>> (consulted on 20/04/2020).
- 19 Cf. Holy See Press Office, *Comunique*, Vatican City 8 March 2020; see the official communiqué, accessible on URL: <<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/08/200308b.html>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 20 Pope Francis, *the Pope’s words at the Angelus prayer - After the Angelus*, Saint Peter’s Square on 29th March 2020, accessible on URL: <<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/29/200329a.html>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 21 Pope Francis, *Easter Message and “Urbi et Orbi” Blessing*, Vatican City on 12 April 2020, accessible on URL: <<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/04/12/200412b.html>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 22 President Mahmoud Abbas, *Easter Greetings - Letter*, Ramallah on 10 April 2020, published news accessible on URL: <<http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=BPzmka115748392848aBPzmjk>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 23 *Idem*.
- 24 Pope Francis, *Homily of the Extraordinary Moment of Prayer in Time of Epidemic, Sagrato* of St Peter’s Basilica on 27th March 2020, accessible on URL: <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200327_omelia-epidemia.html> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 25 Cf. Vatican News, *Pope: COVID-19 teaches us we are one human community*, published on 20 March 2020, accessible on URL: <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/pope-coronavirus-teaches-one-human-community.html>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 26 Cf. Vatican News, *Covid-19: Pope establishes emergency fund*, published on 6 April 2020, accessible on URL: <<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-04/coronavirus-pope-emergency-fund-pontifical-mission-societies.html>> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 27 Pope Francis, *Homily of Easter Vigil*, St. Peter’s Basilica on 11 April 2020, accessible on URL: <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200411_omelia-vegliafrasquale.html> (consulted on 21/04/2020).
- 28 Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in the Holy Land, *Easter Message*, Jerusalem on 9 April 2020, accessible on URL: <<https://www.lpi.org/posts/easter-2020-message-of-patriarchs-and-heads-of-churches-of-jerusalem.htm>> (consulted on 20/04/2020).
- 29 *Idem*.