DAILY COMPASS
Managing Director Riccardo Cascioli
MADE FOR THE TRUTH

INTERVIEW/ FR. IELPO

Loving the Holy Land, where Christians are nailed to the cross

WORLD 25_08_2026

Elisa Gestri

Whilst Palestine is ravaged by a war that shows no sign of ending — just a few days ago, a six-year-old Palestinian boy was killed in an Israeli air raid on the Gaza Strip — the Meeting of Rimini undoubtedly merits recognition for bringing the lives and suffering of

Christians in the Holy Land to the attention of its audience.

At the session 'Loving the Holy Land', the speakers, Father Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of the Latin Church of the Holy Family in Gaza, and Father Francesco Ielpo, Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land, bore witness to the current reality of daily life in the land of Jesus. Speaking via video link from Gaza, Father Gabriel described how the humanitarian crisis faced by the people of the Strip has ‘disappeared from the headlines’ , yet it remains a very real issue for the 2.1 million people forced to live in a city that has been ‘shredded’, as if by a tsunami, and it is getting worse every day. He described how people live in tents, "although the word 'tent' seems too romantic to me", pitched on sandy ground mixed with sewage water.

'Every day, we struggle to get electricity and water, both drinkable and non-drinkable, and we pray to the Lord to grant a long life to the generator we use to pump it. Water is extremely expensive – diesel for the generator costs $10 a litre – but thank God the water found beneath our church has met the needs of four hundred families during these years of war. In Gaza, only 541 Christians remain, including Catholics and Orthodox Christians. We recorded 60 casualties in the latest conflict: 31 were killed directly by Israeli bombardments; 23 died due to a lack of medical care; and 14 elderly people died due to a lack of adequate assistance, despite having many more years to live. On 17 July 2025, our church was hit by bombardment resulting in three deaths amongst those taking refuge with us, and 12 people were injured.” Father Gabriel was also injured on that occasion. The moderator of the meeting, Alessandra Buzzetti, asked why he, the nuns, and his entire community had remained in Gaza, given the situation. “ We are here for Jesus Christ, to preserve the Eucharistic presence in the Holy Land, where God revealed himself through his Son. We are here, nailed to the cross: we pray and do what we can. The Christians in the Middle East set an incredible example of how to carry the cross, even in this valley of tears.”

In his address, Father Ielpo, Custos of the Holy Land since 2025, thanked the meeting for offering him the opportunity to speak about the Church in the Holy Land. He emphasised that it is a 'Church that is alive and continues its mission', and that 'as well as the Holy Places, for eight hundred years we Franciscans have been called to build and foster the Christian community, the very foundations'. To remain, Christians need a community, and this is where the specifically Franciscan dimension comes into play, safeguarding the vocation of Christians, beginning with the friars themselves.

Father Ielpo went on to describe how Christians in the Holy Land are being severely tested by the war, including economically — there have been no pilgrimages

for the past three years, which traditionally provide employment for the communities — and how they face new challenges and sufferings every day. When asked for his views on possible solutions to the conflict, he replied that 'the pain one feels, the sense of powerlessness one experiences, the cry for justice that rises up within one in the face of violence and injustices — now condemned by all, yet still ongoing — is very strong. We must find realistic, concrete and effective solutions to ensure that the fundamental rights of every person are respected. We cannot look the other way; we hope that concrete solutions will be found to ensure that fundamental rights are respected.'

At the end of the meeting, the *Daily Compass* approached Father Ielpo for a few brief additional comments.

Father Ielpo, why love the Holy Land?
The reason lies in the very origin of Christianity, which is the Incarnation. For an encounter to take place — such as the one we are having now, between you and me — time and place are needed. Without the Holy Land, there would have been no place for the Incarnation. This is why the Holy Land is the tangible sign of this encounter.

Is there an eschatological reason why this land seems destined to suffer and bear the weight of the world's suffering?
I do not know. It is true that we are living through a perpetual Good Friday...

Will there ever be an Easter Sunday? Will the Holy Land ever be redeemed?
There won't be, because it has already happened.

How do we break out of the impasse of violence and injustice that you mentioned, which continues to play out before the eyes of the world?
The way we break out of it depends on many factors, but what is most interesting is how we live within it.

Why do you think there is no discussion in the West about what is happening in the Holy Land?
It is not true that it is not discussed; it is discussed, but we make the mistake of believing that talking about it will change things. That is not the case.

Have you never been tempted to give up?
We must ask the Lord for the grace to love the Holy Land every day.