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"They only see a friend they love"

Jorge Barroso was born in Barcelona 28 years ago. He studied classical philology. He lives in Jerusalem, a city he moved to three years ago to pursue a master's in ancient Greek. We asked him to talk about his experience of the current situation of armed conflict in the Holy Land.

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Can you introduce yourself, Jorge?

I am a young man born in Barcelona in 1995. I studied at La Farga school in Sant Cugat del Vallés and began classical philology in Barcelona. After two years at the University of Barcelona, I moved to Santiago de Compostela to complete my studies. There, I lived in Colegio Mayor la Estila, where I spent nearly five great years.

A couple of years after finishing my degree, I had the opportunity to study a master's in ancient Greek at the Polis Institute, an academic institution in Jerusalem that focuses on teaching ancient languages as living languages. Thanks be to God, I've been able to stay a few years longer. This is my third year in Jerusalem.

Can you tell us about your arrival in Jerusalem?

I arrived in Jerusalem on 3 October 2021, a Sunday. At that time, there

were still COVID restrictions, so I stayed indoors until I received the email from the Israeli Health confirming that my PCR test at the airport was negative. It was quite fast, and I was able to go to Mass the same evening. That was my first experience outside my home in Jerusalem.

What do you do professionally?

Right now I'm a professor of ancient Greek and a graphic designer at the institute where I studied, the Polis Institute. Basically, I teach Greek and design the language books we publish. I really enjoy it, especially teaching Greek. The special thing about this institute is that we teach ancient Greek as if it were a modern language, meaning that we speak in ancient Greek in class and sometimes in the hallways.

You have a YouTube channel where you share book

recommendations. Does your passion for reading help you in this time of war?

Yes, absolutely, although it's not my only help. I believe that books have a power equal to or greater than any other form of entertainment, and the greatest thing is that they make us better people in every way. When we read books, in addition to improving our vocabulary and gaining linguistic skills, we gain discipline, patience (much needed today), concentration skills, and, of course, cognitive ability, wisdom, social skills, and much more. Reading teaches us, and on top of that it's entertaining! I started "Frases&Libros" on 1 October, before the war began, and it also kept me mentally busy those first days.

What can you tell us about living out the message of St. Josemaría in

the Holy Land, where Christians, Jews, and Muslims live together?

St. Josemaría spoke a lot about love for freedom, embracing everyone without distinctions. That's something deeply rooted in the Gospel, of course. At home, I live with people who came here 30 years ago, and I can see how organically they've integrated into this society, making both Jewish and Arab friends. I've been here for a shorter time, so I have less experience, but I've witnessed some beautiful celebrations with people of other religions. Thanks to a soccer group I'm part of, I can see with my own eyes Jews and Arabs playing together without any problems.

When one truly loves, they stop seeing a Jew or an Arab in the other person: they only see a friend who they love. One factor in living together is something St. Josemaria

and the current prelate of Opus Dei have spoken a lot about: true friendship, selfless love for all kinds of people. In my opinion – though I may be wrong – friendship is one of the most powerful forces that exist. Love conquers all. So, forgive me for the play on words, but we need a “crusade” of friendship, and we need it all over the world, not just here.

How do you take care of the faithful of Opus Dei in these moments? Perhaps there are displaced people or in conflict zones... How do you convey the affection of the family of Opus Dei in such difficult situations?

We try to care for everyone as normally as possible, but it is true that some Arab faithful of Opus Dei did not want to leave their homes at the beginning of the war due to fear. So we have accompanied them by

phone or other means of communication.

We don't have a center in the northern part of the country, so we usually take care of everyone from Jerusalem. Every weekend, a priest and often a layperson travel to Haifa or Nazareth by car to visit families and friends. Even during the war? Yes, even on the first weekend of the war, they went to them. The truth is, I admire those who traveled to the north. But they said they were used to living like this, and they would be okay. And, thank God, they were.

And, of course, we are quite attentive to their safety from bombings, the well-being of their relatives, etc.

At home we try not to talk much about the topic because we want the time we spend together to be pleasant, especially for those who are less accustomed to the situation or who have friends involved in the

war. We try to be positive and to see things with supernatural vision (as the Prelate encouraged us to do), and thanks to your prayers, we are managing.

At the beginning of the war, one of the residents of the house who is not in Opus Dei said, "I'm glad to be living with you in this house and not somewhere else." It shows that the family atmosphere, full of love, is the best for our mental, spiritual, and physical health.

Can you tell us about the Saxum Visitor Center promoted by faithful, cooperators, and friends of Opus Dei in the Holy Land? Is there any activity there now?

Planned pilgrim activities until the end of the year have been canceled. The next ones will depend on the evolution of the conflict and when foreign airlines resume flights. The Saxum Visitor Center was closed

temporarily because there weren't any pilgrims, but it just reopened. It is a center where dialogue and interest in Christianity, even by non-Christians, are palpable. You can see that many people want to coexist in peace.

We are constantly seeing broadcasts about the conflict, but experiencing it on the ground is very different. What message would you give to those who see the conflict from a screen?

I would say many things... First, labeling one side or the other does not contribute to the peace of any conflict in general. I get the impression that nowadays, "labeling" is synonymous with "pitting one against the other," and it is difficult to resolve conflicts that way. And second, we have to trust in God: we are his beloved children. May we drown evil in an abundance of good,

filling the day with acts of reparation, consoling God with our personal holiness! Maybe this is “street theology,” but the heart of God the Father must suffer (even more than ours do) when He sees his children destroy each other.

Can you give us a reason for hope for peace and a beautiful, positive value of the Holy Land so that we don't see the area only as a hotspot of violence?

Of course! The Holy Land is a place where faith is palpable, especially in Jerusalem. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people travel to meet the living Jesus. Only God knows how many people have come face to face with Jesus – I have witnessed some myself – or how many people have returned to the Father like the prodigal son. And many more will come.

A lot of people travel to the Holy Land, people from all over the world. I have had many opportunities to attend Mass at Calvary and to join groups of pilgrims celebrating Mass in their own languages. I am moved to attend these Masses in different languages and see such different people embracing the same love for God. I have “gotten used to” attending Mass at Calvary, and sometimes I discreetly look at the people around me, and you really see how the Lord is working in them. “The arm of God has not been shortened,” as St. Josemaría used to say, quoting a passage from the Bible, and there are miracles even today; there are still miracles in his land.

Finally, the people who inhabit this area, ordinary people here, hold impressive values, which we can learn a lot from: love and devotion to family, and the value of both individual and communal honor.

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