

Dearest Dom Bernardus,

I try to write you something about what we are experiencing.

We are well, and we are peaceful. We talk together about the situation, and we try to deal with it a little bit from all points of view, and this is good for us. We are supported by the prayer, closeness, and faith of so many people, and this is a great gift.

Of course, it is with a great sadness in our hearts that we see collapsing in a week what has been fought for ten, eleven years, what so many Syrians have given their lives for. There is also-I will not hide it-a bit of anger, a feeling of helplessness, to see our West propagating all this as the supposed liberation of Syria. I have a question: can I take our bus today, and go to Aleppo to meet with friends from the monastery, can I invite them to come for a few days retreat with us as was the case until a week ago? Can I purchase from Aleppo what we need for the work of our workers? No, not anymore. Well, then I must say that I have another idea of freedom. Can people in the villages around me today go and buy food for their families? Yes, but with prices doubled from a week ago, so they will go home with their bags half full than before. Nice freedom. Yes, but you must understand: we are at war. Why, who wanted it?

After all, we have known for years now that the situation in Syria is the result of tentative political interests and balances that have nothing to do with the Syrian people. I am not going to sit here and tell you and the sisters and brothers of the Order about all the intricate geopolitical issues that are going on; there are many independent information sources that explain very well and with much more expertise than we could. Of course we need to evaluate the sources well, because in addition to the war with weapons there is an incredible media war being fought, and unfortunately lies are daily bread. Suffice it to say that at the international level one has had the courage to listen as representatives of Syria to the White Helmets, that is, pure jihadists!

As I told you, we are fine for now, we are waiting to see what will happen in the coming days. There is an old political design, to divide Syria into various confessional parts (just the “divide and rule”), who knows if they will still conduct this project. We are supposed to be in the part of Syria that will remain linked to the coastal belt, Tartous and Latakia, which is supposed to remain outside the Islamic State. Everything is conditional, because in the meantime the jihadists are advancing on Hama and perhaps shortly Homs, and we cannot forget the situation in Palestine and Lebanon, the Greater Israel project, and its bombing on Syrian soil (which has never stopped in recent years).

Meanwhile, we continue our daily life. The construction site continues, the field work continues, the preparation of the liturgy and the sale of our soap continues...Our vow of stability (which actually at Azer we have not yet done! There are eight of us now, and all stable elsewhere!), a vow made, however, in the heart and believed in life, is deeply rooted in the mystery of Incarnation. Here and now, it is the God with us!

The words of the Advent liturgy resonate so powerfully, right now! God is so close, in the beauty of his Word made flesh, coming to dwell among us!

Are we afraid? Well, yes, a little, I guess. To have faith - to try to have faith - is not to be unconscious. But perhaps living all this together, seeking its deep meaning, and then simply and more realistically the gift of God's grace that accompanies us, allows us to live with serenity.

And then certainly our brothers in Tibhirine are watching over us...!

Of course, each sister is free to make her own choice, without any judgment on that. We are in contact with the Italian ambassador, who is very solicitous and present...But above all, we hear your prayers! And we ask for more, especially during the celebration of the Eucharist, for us. And for all our people!

Prayer can do everything...

And we take this opportunity to say to you and to you all as of now Merry Christmas. With joy. Beyond everything, indeed right "within" everything, the Lord comes....

He has already come, always comes, and still will come....

In communion in Christ...

Marta Luisa and all of us