Jerusalem: 70 years of pastoral ministry for Hebrew-speaking Catholics

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05 May 2026 - The Saint James Vicariate for Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel is marking the 70th anniversary of its founding.

The jubilee, celebrated on May 2 at the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem, brought together around 350 parishioners and guests. The Mass for the feast of St. James the Apostle was presided over by Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

A Church in Hebrew

The Saint James Vicariate is a distinctive sign of the Church's presence in Israel: it speaks the language of daily life and of the heart—Hebrew—while remaining firmly rooted in the universality of the Catholic Church.

The anniversary offered an opportunity to express gratitude for the priests, consecrated persons, and lay faithful who have built up the Vicariate community over the years.

The celebrations had a dual dimension. Alongside the solemn Eucharist, an afternoon gathering featured music, personal testimonies, and the premiere of a documentary film produced by the Christian Media Center, the portal catholic.co.il reports.

One body

Cardinal Pizzaballa, who served as vicar of the Saint James Vicariate from 2005 to 2008, stressed the importance of "understanding [the people of Israel]" and of "recognizing the responsibility of communities to help the Church understand and look ahead." He noted that this relationship "is more important today than ever." The Patriarch added that what has enabled the Vicariate to endure "was not a Church strategy, but one foundation: Jesus."

As highlighted during the jubilee, the Vicariate lives out its mission daily: translating, accompanying, listening, and serving. Its purpose is not to build a separate Church, but to serve the one Church of Jesus from within. Amid a diversity that is both a gift and a challenge, it was also emphasized that the Church is not a collection of islands, but one body.

Gift and responsibility

The Vicariate gathers Catholics living within Israel's Hebrew-speaking society: faithful of Jewish and non-Jewish origin, local Christians, migrants, and Russian-speaking groups. Its communities are active in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv–Jaffa, Haifa, Be'er Sheva, and Tiberias.

"Seventy years is a gift. It is also a responsibility," said Fr. Piotr ?elazko, vicar of Saint James since 2021. He added that the task of the communities is "to remain faithful, attentive and courageous—to listen to the signs of the times, care for the next generation, and continue building bridges of faith, dialogue and compassion."

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