

**Archimandrite Roman (Krassovsky): “We Will Live! There Have Been Harder Times.”
Interview with the Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem (Russian
Orthodox Church Outside of Russia) on the current situation.**

By Dimitry Zlodarev

The Ecclesiastical Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in Jerusalem (ROCOR) is now a frontline territory. Sometime in the future, I would like to talk to its head, Archimandrite Roman (Krassovsky), about the spiritual side of life in the Holy Land, about its holy sites, about Father Antonin (Kapustin), who collected these holy sites for the Russian Church. God willing, this will happen in the near future.

But for now, I have to ask Father Roman how the mission is doing right now, when a real war between Israel and Hamas is going in close proximity.



Archimandrite Roman (Krassovsky)

– Father Roman, the first and most important question is: are the members of the mission and parishioners safe now? And what is the situation with our shrines in the Holy Land?

Thank God, as far as the mission is concerned, everything is quiet enough. The same applies to our shrines. We do not own property near the Gaza Strip, where these unfortunate events are now unfolding.

In our monasteries, too, everything is quite calm. However, in the Ascension of the Savior Monastery of the Mount of Olives, where I live, we had to face certain difficulties when the police dispersed protests nearby. After all, we are in a predominantly Palestinian territory.

– Do I understand correctly that the surroundings around the monastery are relatively calm now?

- To a fair degree, yes. Every once in a while, when there are problems outside the monastery walls, we get tear gas or something like that. We have seen that this is not so rare, and in such cases, we just try to stay indoors.

Despite the fact that everything is more or less calm for the most part, people try to spend most of their time in monasteries – in our convent, in the Convent of St Mary Magdalene in Gethsemane, in Bethany, where we also have a school for girls.

And if someone goes out into the city, then we try to stay in groups of two or three people: it may not be safe to walk alone, since the Israelis are now very active and problems may arise.

– *What do people feel and think in these difficult circumstances?*

Unfortunately, what is happening now did not come as a surprise. We all see the problems between Israel and Hamas, and this applies to many of our sisters who come from Palestine. But just like during the Intifada or the Six-Day War, they pray and hope that everything will end soon.

– *Could you describe in general what is happening in the mission itself and around it? How has the current situation affected its daily life?*

Most of all, we are affected by the complete absence of pilgrims. Since the beginning of October, when hostilities began, the flow of hostilities abruptly stopped. I would say our main obedience is to take care of those who come to us. But now these people simply do not exist here, and this affects us, including from a financial point of view. We now have no income, much of which we received from pilgrims and our generous donors.

– *Does this mean that the mission is already facing serious financial difficulties?*

–Yes. We have not yet had time to recover from the pandemic, when, again, we did not have pilgrims for two years. Only recently have pilgrimages resumed on a permanent basis. Of course, because of the situation in Ukraine, very few people came from Russia. Prices for air tickets have increased a lot, and many people cannot afford it.

– *Do you need financial help right now?*

We really need it. If people want to make a donation, they can go to the [ROCOR Synodal website](#). There is a special banner to support our mission.

-We talked to you a couple of weeks ago, when you were in the United States. And then you were sure that everyone in the mission was more or less calm. A few days later, however, they urgently changed their plans and returned to Jerusalem. As I understand, it took five days to travel there. So things aren't quite as good as they seemed?

When all these events began, I immediately realized that I had to return to the Mission, even if it was not in direct danger. As the head of the Mission, I have to be there. Even if nothing happens, it is important that our monks and nuns see that the head of the Mission is with them.

-You already mentioned the school for Palestinian girls in Bethany. How do they live in the current situation?

There are now 375 girls studying in our school, mostly Muslims. Mother Maria, the senior sister of the convent, was caught by all these events in the United States, as was I. Thank God, she has now also returned to Israel.

It's important for us to help people stay calm. Of course, passions are intense, people are very emotional. At school, we must take care of the peace of mind of the children, so that they think about their studies, not about the political situation.

-These girls are from Palestine, they are just children. They probably have parents and families in the Gaza Strip. How do they feel, how do they experience it in their children's hearts?

- I can't speak for the children. But the teachers, of course, are very worried. It is important that this fear does not spill over to children. Of course, people are worried, of course they have relatives in Gaza. Of course, this is terrible. Yes, there are various clashes and outbursts of violence in the Middle East, but there has not been such a situation in the last 50 years.

– The other day you addressed a rather emotional open letter to the clergy and flock of ROCOR and asked them to provide all possible help. What kind of response have you received?

- Thank God, people are responding. Many people, especially those who have been to the Holy Land, take everything that happens here to heart.

They came here and prayed here, not only at the Holy Sepulcher and other holy places, but also in our monasteries. They know how people live in our country and help us. We thank the Lord for that.

As I have already said, after the pandemic and in connection with the situation in Ukraine, we have been very tight with funds. And now, perhaps, it is even more difficult.

Thank God, both the monasteries and the Mission are holding on, but we have financial obligations that need to be fulfilled.

-In this letter, you wrote that pilgrims would not come to the Holy Land for at least a year. Is this really possible?

- Of course, I don't know how it will be. When such clashes take place – although now it is not a skirmish, but, one might say, a real war – fewer people will come. And now people will be cautious. In addition, they are not allowed in at the moment. In particular, it is very difficult to get a visa to travel to Israel in Russia, foreign airlines do not fly here, only the Israeli El Al.

By the way, this is why this time I got from America for several days: I had to change tickets three times, because different air carriers canceled their flights here.

A priest from Australia just wrote to me, he wanted to come next year on a pilgrimage, to bring 60 people. I had to tell him: "Of course, plan on it, but no one is flying to Israel yet. Let's see how long it lasts. We hope that everything will calm down, but only God knows how it will turn out."

-Donations from pilgrims are one of the main sources of income for the Mission. Now, this influx may be limited for a while. How will you all survive?

Before the pandemic, up to 500-600 pilgrims a day came to us. Now there is no one. But we live on! To live, of course! There have been worse times. Our Mission has been operating for more than 140 years and has survived both the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution. Afterwards the pilgrimages ceased altogether, and we had to do without them until the 1960s, when groups from the Russian Diaspora began to arrive.

But it was three or four, maximum five times a year. In the most difficult times, in the 1930s and 1940s, the sisters went to the city and got jobs to feed themselves. They worked as cleaners and even on the construction of roads.

– In situations like this, do you regret that you agreed to serve in the Holy Land? Maybe it would have been easier to stay in well-fed America?

[Laughing:] Today [November 8] it will be 11 years since I arrived here as the Chief of the Mission. Despite all the difficulties associated with this obedience, I am glad to live here. I don't regret it at all. Now, together with our sisters and brothers, we begin the twelfth year of our joint ministry, with our joys and our sorrows.



Convent of the Ascension of the Lord on the Mt of Olives.

- What do your prayers focus on now?

Of course, it's about peace in Gaza. Every day we say a special prayer. We also pray at every Liturgy for the end of the war in Ukraine, for Metropolitan Onouphry and for the true Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is now experiencing real persecution, as in the times of the Bolsheviks. In our monasteries on the Mount of Olives and in Gethsemane, a full circle of monastic services is celebrated daily: all the sisters pray, sing, and the priests serve the Liturgy every day.

Services are held once a week in the Church of St Alexander Nevsky, twice a week in Bethany, and twice a month in Fara, in the Lavra of St Chariton the Confessor, where we have a hermit monk.

– You mentioned St Alexander Nevsky Church in Jerusalem. What is the situation there, and is it possible to resolve the controversial issues that have arisen around it for many years?

This topic has been burning especially strongly in the last 3-4 years, various problems have arisen there. Since this temple is considered a shrine, a place of pilgrimage, all issues related to the right of ownership are considered by the Government.

The Ministerial Commission, composed of three ministers, listened to the arguments of all sides. It was supposed to come to a conclusion in November, but because of the war, the decision had to be postponed. Due to the state of emergency in Israel, all the minor things, so to speak, are

postponed. But I hope that the issue will be considered at the beginning of next year. In the meantime, we are working with the Russian Federation to find a solution that works for everyone.



St Alexander Nevsky Church in Jerusalem. Photo: ru.wikipedia.org/

– What should we all learn from the current situation?

It should teach us repentance. The Lord shows us the way: this is what is happening in the world – diseases, conflicts, the fratricidal war in Ukraine, the war in the Holy Land, people are suffering. This means only one thing: we must engage in spiritual life and repent of our personal transgressions, because this is the only way to salvation – through prayer and repentance. And we find it in the Church of Christ.

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