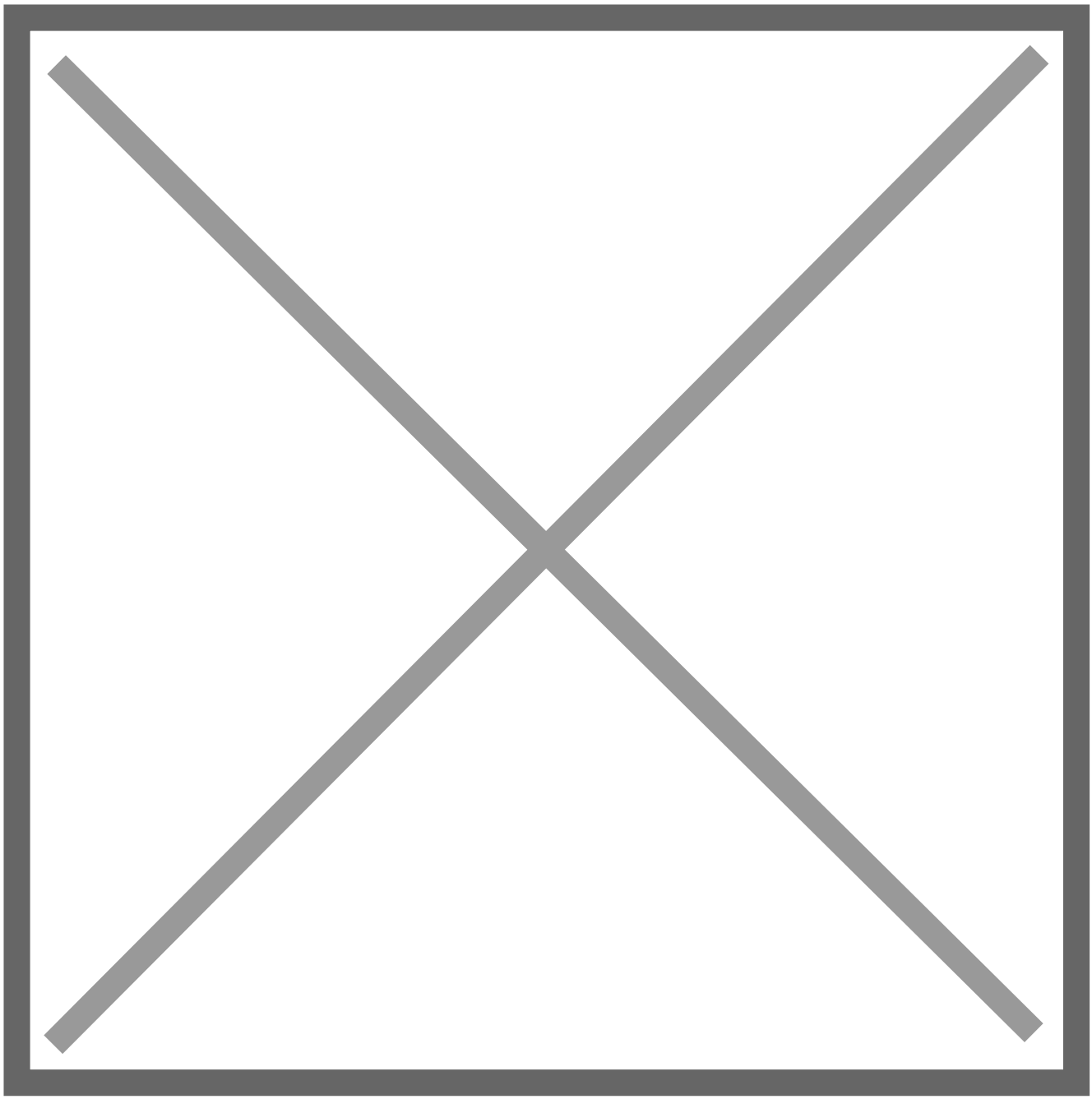
News



Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, delivers the homily as he celebrates Christmas Eve Mass at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank, Dec. 24, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Ammar Awad)

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Jerusalem — March 29, 2026

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Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, and Fr. Francesco Ielpo, the custos of the Holy Land, were prevented from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulcher by Israeli police on Palm Sunday, the Latin patriarchate said.

In a statement published March 29, the Latin Patriarchate said that although abiding by restrictions due to the Israeli-U.S.-led war in Iran, "the two were stopped en route, while proceeding privately and without any characteristics of a procession or ceremonial act, and were compelled to turn back."

"As a result, and for the first time in centuries, the Heads of the Church were prevented from celebrating the Palm Sunday Mass" at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the patriarchate said.

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"This incident is a grave precedent, and disregards the sensibilities of billions of people around the world who, during this week, look to Jerusalem," it said.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was among several holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall and the Temple Mount, that were closed since Feb. 28, after Israel and the U.S. launched their joint attack against Iran.

The Custody of the Holy Land said in a statement March 21 it was in dialogue with authorities and was awaiting "clear indications" regarding Holy Week celebrations.

In the joint statement March 29, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate said that since the start of the war, it had complied with "with all imposed restrictions," including cancelling public gatherings and making arrangements for Holy Week celebrations to be broadcast.

However, the Israeli authorities' actions in preventing the entrance of Pizzaballa and Ielpo, "who bear the highest ecclesiastical responsibility for the Catholic Church and the Holy Places, constitutes a manifestly unreasonable and grossly disproportionate measure," the statement read.

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"This hasty and fundamentally flawed decision, tainted by improper considerations, represents an extreme departure from basic principles of reasonableness, freedom of worship, and respect for the status quo," it said.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Custody of the Holy Land expressed its "profound sorrow" to Christians around the world, noting that prayers "on one of the most sacred days of the Christian calendar have thus been prevented."

Pope Leo XIV echoed those sentiments before praying the Angelus prayer with the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square to celebrate Palm Sunday.

The pope offered prayers for the Christians of the Middle East "who are suffering the consequences of a brutal conflict and, in many cases, are unable to observe fully the liturgies of these holy days."

"Just as the Church contemplates the mystery of the Lord's Passion, we cannot forget those who today are truly sharing in his suffering. Their ordeal challenges all our consciences," the pope said.

"Let us raise our prayer to the Prince of Peace that he may sustain the peoples wounded by war and open concrete paths to reconciliation and peace," he said.