News 18 November 2026 | English article

Latest: Cardinal Gugerotti Prays at Holy Sepulchre as Pope Leo XIV Envoy to Holy Land Christians

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Lord, you were here physically. Lord, give hope to the world."

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti prayed at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Tuesday 17 November 2026, kneeling before the Holy Edicule - the shrine Christians believe marks the place where Jesus was buried and rose again - and over the Stone of Unction. The cardinal, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, is in the Holy Land as the personal envoy of Pope Leo XIV, on a six-day pastoral visit to the Christians of Israel and Palestine that runs through 21 November. His prayer, spoken aloud in the ancient church, was simple: "Lord, you were here physically. Lord, give hope to the world."

The visit began on Monday 16 November. Gugerotti's programme takes him to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Galilee, visiting Catholic communities of six rites and meeting the faithful in places most pilgrims never see.

The procession into the Holy Sepulchre on Tuesday was a scene from another century. Bagpipers led the way through the Old City's stone alleyways, followed by rows of Franciscan friars and a large cross carried high. Leaders of other Christian denominations listened intently as the cardinal prayed. The church, built over the site of the crucifixion and the empty tomb, has seen emperors and pilgrims for seventeen centuries. On Tuesday, it saw a cardinal kneeling in candlelight, praying for hope for a community that feels itself shrinking.

That community is small, and getting smaller. About 185,000 Christians with Israeli citizenship live in Israel - just 1.9 Percent of the population - of whom about 140,000 are Catholic. About 45,000 Catholics live in the West Bank. In Gaza, the Christian presence has fallen to roughly 500 faithful, only part of them Catholic. These are the numbers the Vatican's Dicastery for the Eastern Churches itself cites, and they are the reason Gugerotti came.

Most of Israel's Christians are Palestinians. Harassment of clergy and the faithful is rising, and a rare violent attack on a religious sister in April 2026 occured, sending shock waves across the country. Many Christians feel vulnerable - a tiny minority, caught between larger forces, watching their young people leave and wondering whether anyone will be left to keep the churches open.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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