Columns
Spirituality



Palestinians receive food from a charity kitchen in Gaza City July 28, 2025, amid a hunger crisis. Jennifer Poidatz, acting representative for Catholic Relief Services in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, told OSV News July 31 that Gaza-based CRS staff are working to bring high-calorie, high-protein food to residents amid destroyed agricultural lands, fuel and energy deficits, high prices, danger and disease. (OSV News/Reuters/Khamis Al-Rifi)



by Magda Bennásar

Contributor

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

August 13, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Dear Pope Leo,

I write to you again today, moved by the unbearable cry rising from Gaza. A friend of mine — someone deeply committed to the Gospel — asked me to send you this letter. The weight of this tragedy is overwhelming and cries out to heaven. It felt like a nudge from the Spirit.

I wrote you my first letter when you were elected. At the time, I spoke from the heart about the urgent need to restore women to their rightful place in the church — a place that has been denied to us since the earliest days of Christianity. Today, with that same love for the church, I write to plead for a bold, radical, and profoundly Gospel-centered response.

Every hour in Gaza, children and adults are dying — many more from hunger than from weapons. Thousands of trucks are waiting, full of food and clean water. They ask only to enter and deliver what could mean life for hundreds of thousands of malnourished, innocent people. But they are not being allowed in.

As one doctor said, this is no longer just about hunger. It's about the long-term impact on the physical and mental health of an entire generation. These are bodies and minds that — even if they survive — will never fully recover from the trauma.

> 'I ask you, dear Pope Leo: What would Jesus do today? Jesus, the Palestinian Jew — he would stand in the hunger line. I'm sure of it. Where should we stand, as his followers?': Sr. Magda Bennásar
>
> Tweet this



Palestinians carry humanitarian aid supplies that entered Gaza by truck through Israel, in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip July 29, 2025. Despite enormous difficulties, Catholic Relief Services and its on-the-ground partners have managed to deliver aid to 1.7 million people in Gaza since 2023, according to new data. (OSV News/Reuters/Dawoud Abu Alkas)

And now, as if that weren't enough, our brothers and sisters are being killed while standing in line for food. Can there be anything more cruel?

This isn't just about blocking aid. The little food that's left has become a deadly trap — people are risking their children's lives just to eat. That trap was designed to kill more quickly, and on a larger scale.

The same hunger haunts the few doctors still holding on, and those who come to help. Journalists suffer it too — those who, more prophetically and faithfully than our churches, have been telling us what's really happening. They do so at great personal risk because they refuse to be silent.

So, I ask you, dear Pope Leo: What would Jesus do today? Jesus, the Palestinian Jew — he would stand in the hunger line. I'm sure of it. Where should we stand, as his followers?

You already know the answer. Jesus gave it to us in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). It was the Samaritan who stopped, cared for the injured man on the roadside, carried him to safety, and paid for his care out of his own pocket.

Our brothers and sisters in Gaza are the body of Christ, Your Holiness. They are the broken body lying at the side of the road — the one that priests and clerics should no longer pass by. Not when so much is at stake. Not when an entire people's lives are hanging in the balance.

That's why I'm daring to ask you — and the other cardinals, robed in red — to stand in the hunger line in Gaza. To protect, with the power of your visible presence and the courage of your lives, those who have been forgotten. This is a people that some are trying to erase from the map — just as others have tried to do throughout history.

Please don't let them become victims of egos that will divide our history into a "before" and an "after."

Could you — those of you wearing the red of martyrdom — stand visibly, physically, on behalf of all of us who cannot go?

Brother Leo, a strong prophetic gesture — like the church making itself visible and vulnerable in Gaza — could bring many back to the Christian community. It would shake consciences. It would restore faith in those called to lay down their lives for love of their neighbors.

It would restore hope in the Church of Jesus for me and for millions of others.

Advertisement

Sermons, statements and protests are no longer enough. The time has come for radical action.

I remember how Gandhi's hunger strike helped lead to India's independence. It was a nonviolent act of civil disobedience — simple, but deeply transformative.

I am surrounded, Brother Leo, by people who are fasting, protesting, writing and praying. We do it in the hope of stopping what can only be called a genocide.

Just this evening, on the island of Mallorca, Spain — in every city, town, harbor and village—people will take to the streets from 8 to 10 p.m. A massive show of mourning and of urgent hope for a ceasefire.

Yesterday, I prayed with a video from the U.K., in which an entire town takes turns — through the night and without interruption — reading the names of Gaza's murdered children. Name after name, through tears and clenched throats, they read. They grieve for an entire generation that has been wiped out.

The children of Gaza's future are no longer here. They've been wiped out from existence. Their mothers — if they survive — stand at the foot of a cross, raised by hate, watching as hunger, thirst and abandonment continue to crucify our brothers and sisters.

It breaks me to hear their cries to Allah. What could be a song of praise has become, for far too long, a lament. A sound of pain, suffocated by weakness, starvation and utter helplessness.

That land, which some want to destroy and turn into a seaside resort on the shores where Jesus and Mary Magdalene once walked, is holy ground. It's the place where so many first heard the call to follow him.

Can we really say there is nothing more we can do for Gaza, brother Leo?

We may not be able to go ourselves. But you can go in the name of the whole church. That gesture would be Gospel in action.

Right now, our brothers and sisters' survival — and their hope — depends on radical action from us.

Thank you again for embracing your ministry. These are decisive times. And they demand all the courage and love the Gospel has to offer.

Sincerely,

Magda Bennásar