Reflections on the Trip to the Holy Land – June 14\textsuperscript{th}-25\textsuperscript{th}, 2014

Psalm 87
\textit{A psalm of the Korahites. A song.}

\textit{His foundation is on holy mountains,}
\textit{The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than any dwelling in Jacob.}

\textit{Glorious things are said of you, O city of God!}

\textit{Rahab and Babylon I count among those who know me.}
\textit{See, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia, “This one was born there.”}

* \textit{And of Zion it will be said: “Each one was born in it.” The Most High will establish it;}

\textit{the LORD notes in the register of the peoples: “This one was born there.”}

\textit{So singers and dancers: “All my springs are in you.”}
June 15th Arrival in Tel Aviv and Bus to Tiberias in Gallilee

We arrive in Tel Aviv and take a bus to Tiberias. On the way, we have our first mass in the Holy Land, at St. Anthony’s Church in the ancient port city of Joppa. Joppa is the place where St. Peter raised Tabitha from the dead and where Saint Peter had a dream indicating that no creature (particularly food) created by God is unclean. While this pertained immediately to food, in reality, as the events that follow this dream indicate, Joppa was the beginning of a series of events that leads to the acceptance of the Gentiles into the faith, beginning with Peter baptizing Cornelius in Caesarea. The broadening of the narrow focus of the law was concomitant with a broadening of the scope of the Gospel...not just to the Jews, but also to all men and women. In Joppa, we discover the beginnings of the Church's worldwide evangelization efforts.

Joppa is also the port from which Jonah sailed running from the will of the Lord, afraid to go to Nineveh. Joppa is the port from which St. Peter sailed to visit the many Gentile communities founded by Paul and others. Jonah ran from our Lord's will. Peter ran right to it...even to his eventual death by Crucifixion in Caligula's circus.

We were challenged in the mass at St. Anthony’s to consider the different paths that Jonah and St. Peter took and to plan our journeys accordingly

After mass, we went to our hotel (Caesars) on the Sea of Galilee, which had beautiful sunrises over the mountains each day. What a blessing.

June 16th - Sea of Galilee, Site of the Beatitudes, Church of the Primacy of St. Peter, Capernaum
On the Sea of Galilee
We started the day by taking a boat ride from our hotel on the Sea of Galilee and our reflection was Matthew 14: 24-31:

*Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. “It is a ghost,” they said, and they cried out in fear. At once [Jesus] spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” Peter said to him in reply, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how [strong] the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

The fourth watch of the night was the last of the night, when the night would have been darkest but with a hint of the dawn. The Apostles would have been tired. Christ comes to them when they needed him the most. And, as long as St. Peter keeps his eyes on Christ, he is fine. However, when he becomes distracted, when he fears and when he no longer keeps his eyes on Christ, he begins to sink. But his reaction is not to go back to the boat and safety, but to call to Christ in his need. And Christ, in his mercy, saves him.

On the boat, we saw the place where Jesus drove the demons out of Legion (Mark 5: 1-20) into the swine, which then ran down the hill and into the water. We also saw the site of the Beatitudes, where Jesus preached the proclamation.
The Primacy of Peter in Capernaum

Do you love me more than these?

On the 16th, we also visited the place of St. Peter’s primacy in Capernaum. Capernaum is mentioned 19 times in the Gospels. This was the spot that, after denying Christ three times, that Peter saw Christ on the shore and swam to him. Three times Christ asks Peter if he loves him: “Do you love me more than these?” Christ starts by asking Peter if he loves he loves (agape) Him. This is the highest form of love, an unselfish love which doesn’t require a reciprocal love. And Peter cannot agree to this. Peter’s love is “phileo” love – the love as between friends or brothers.

John 21:15-19

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter* “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He then said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” [Jesus] said to him, “Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.”

I was struck by “do you love me more than these.” There is so much in my life – so much stuff that I put before Christ. So many idols. And Christ tells Peter and us that we must love him more than anything else.

We had mass outside under the trees next to the church that marks the spot where Jesus had his charcoal fire on the beach.
“for thou art Peter and upon this Rock I will build my church”

Also in Capernaum was the site of a 4th century synagogue, which stands on the site of a synagogue where Jesus gave the Bread of Life discourse.
Capernaum was also the house of Simon Peter, where his mother in law was cured of her fever and where the four men lowered the paralytic through the roof.

Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum
The Jordan River at Caesarea Philippi

Who do you say that I am?

(From Father Josh) Caesarea Philippi is a little ruin at the beginning of one of the sources of the Jordan River. It served as a temple area for many pagan gods, particularly Pan. In the Golan, the mixture of religions was such that Jesus felt comfortable taking his followers there after the martyrdom of his cousin and forerunner John the Baptist.

Pope Benedict makes the argument (or at least restates it) that Jesus was at Caesarea Philippi on the feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement...the most holy day on the Jewish calendar.

In the middle of pagan monuments, surrounded by Gentiles, Jesus asks this question to his disciples: who do you say I am?

On Yom Kippur in the Temple, the High Priest would enter and, just for this one time in the year, speak the name of God. While this event is occurring--the name of God being pronounced in the Holy of Holies, Jesus, in a most unholy place surrounded by the statues of false gods demands the assent of faith from Peter. You are the Christ, the Son of God.

It is thus that the founding of the Church is announced: not in the midst of the Temple priests, but to some ruddy fishermen surrounded by pagans: You are Peter, and on the Rock I will build my Church. Not the rocks of false idols, not the stones on the Temple Mount, but living stones.

June 17th – Mount Tabor, Cana and Nazareth

Mount Tabor
(From Father Josh) Considered since at least the 4th century to be the site of the Transfiguration. Mentioned in the book of Judges in the story of Deborah and Barak and the defeat of the Canaanites, Tabor is the only mountain "set apart" in the region.

The Transfiguration marks the center of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. If you read those Gospels, considering the Transfiguration as the hinge of the story, we can see a serious shift in the demeanor and message of Jesus. Jesus is now entirely focused on Jerusalem, ready to consummate the will of the Father.

The Transfiguration is a mystery: Jesus becomes on Earth, for a moment, as he is in heaven, effusive of light and goodness. Peter, recognizing the wonder and goodness that has been placed before him is something worth preserving, and so he offers to make booths or tents for Jesus and Moses and Elijah. Peter's natural
instinct is to preserve on this earth the things of heaven, but in fact, the Transfiguration marks the definitive moment in which it becomes clear that heaven will dwell on earth, but so that we can dwell in heaven. There were in fact three "booths" on that mountain, but they were not made by human hands. The "here" "booths" in which God wished to dwell? Peter, James, and John.

In Matthew chapter 17, at the Transfiguration, God says we should "listen to Him". Jesus' first words after this are *Rise and do not be afraid*.

It was more than a little overwhelming to see the size of the mountain. This was not a small hill!

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**The Church of The Transfiguration at the top of Mount Tabor**

**Cana – Jesus’ first miracle**
Father Josh presided at the renewal of the wedding vows of roughly 15 couples at the church in Cana. George, our guide, spoke of the fact that each miracle that Jesus does contains two parts – the physical and the spiritual. In the case of the turning of water into wine, the physical is simple. The spiritual, however, can take many forms, for the miracle saved the family from the embarrassment of running out of wine. The first miracle also provides us with Mary as our intercessor and we see again the faith that she puts in Jesus when she says, “do whatever he tells you”. Father Josh discussed with us the sacramental nature of marriage
Nazareth - The Church of the Annunciation

After Cana, we drove to Nazareth and the church of the Annunciation. Father Josh celebrated mass in the upper chapel and we heard of the Word of God made flesh. So much here: Mary’s fiat and Jesus’ incarnation with the flesh of Mary. We hear in John chapter 1 that the Word was made flesh ("Verbum caro factum est"), but this church states, “the Word was made flesh here.”

Mary’s Well

Last on our stops for the day was Mary’s well. This is the spot that Mary would have gone to get water from and still runs today. There is a Greek Orthodox Church built on the spot. The Greek Orthodox Church also believes that the annunciation took place here at the well.
Mary's well on the outside of the church and the spot itself

*Duc in Altum...put out into the deep.*

This was our last stop in Galilee. Galilee was so very important to Jesus' life and ministry.

(From Father Josh) The Sea of Galilee is not a big place. About seven miles at its widest and about 14 miles at its longest. The ancient road, the Via Maris, cuts through the Iron Valley from the Mediterranean to run along the western shore of the sea before cutting through the Golan Heights to Damascus.

But it is the only lake in the area. The only one. The Dead Sea is more of a cesspool of minerals. No seas in Jordan. None on the Arabian Peninsula. None anywhere. This lake was the only one...the source of life for the region.

This water witnessed the miracles of Jesus. It gave up fish for him in miraculous catches...assisting Jesus in promising the disciples that a different catch was in store for them. This is the sea upon which Jesus walked, and into which Peter sank when he began to doubt the power of Jesus and focus instead on the obstacles. The photos below are of a boat found recently from the same era as Jesus and the disciples...not much of a vessel. Humble beginnings.
Most of Christ's public ministry involved a couple of little towns in the northwest corner of the lake.

Why Galilee? Though it was important for the immediate region, Galilee had nothing to offer the world really...except the Via Maris...the most easily and heavily traveled trade route in the Mediterranean. Start spreading a message here, and it will stretch far and wide in caravans and convoys.

And spread it did..

**June 18th – Magdala, Caesarea and Bethlehem**

**Magdala** is the site of some stunning architectural finds. The Legionnaires have a church there. Initially, the Legionnaires were going to build a religious center in Magdala for all religions, but God had other plans. When they started construction, they unearthed a first century synagogue.

From an article dated April 25, 2014:

*MAGDALA, Israel -- Discoveries from a new archaeological dig are creating excitement in the area where Jesus began his ministry. The village is called Magdala (Migdal in Hebrew), and it's the home of Mary Magdalene.*

"She lived here and she met Jesus here and she continued with Him. Yes, it's that place," senior Israeli archaeologist Arfan Najar, who oversees the excavation at Magdala, told CBN News.

Najar said the city lay hidden all this time by just a small layer of dirt. "Some place almost you touch the surface and you have the wall, waiting for us for 2,000 years to when we are coming," he said.

*The most important discovery in Magdala has been a synagogue dating back to the time of Jesus. According to archaeologists, it's the first one discovered in the Galilee.*

"An expression that appears many times in several places of the Gospel, 'Jesus went around Galilee preaching in their synagogues,' Father Solana, general director at the Magdala Center, explained. "So this is the closest synagogue to Capernaum where He lived. So it was likely He was here many times."

*In the synagogue, the team discovered a 2,000-year-old treasure. They call it the Magdala Stone, and some archaeologists say it's the most important discovery in decades.*

*CBN News first reported on the stone just after it was uncovered in 2009. Father Kelly, of the Catholic order Legionaries of Christ, showed CBN News a replica*
while overlooking the Temple Mount.

"This particular Magdala Stone is the most important discovery ever made in relation to the Second Temple, the temple at the time of Jesus, which Herod redid. So that's quite the statement," Father Kelly said.

The Menorah (six-lamp candelabrum) on the stone is one of a kind, the first one discovered before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. The Legionnaires of Christ own the land and are building an entire center at Magdala with an archaeological park, hotel and spiritual center.

Father Solana dreamed up the project and wants it to be a center for all. "I'm pretty sure it's a gift for the world, for culture, for religions, for Israel of course," he said.

Visitors to the center see the Bible come to life. "The altar is in the shape of a boat, a fisherman's boat," said Monica, a Christian pilgrim from Australia. "You're reminded of Jesus standing in the boat and preaching to the people on the shore."

Jane, another Christian from Australia, said "...the whole Gospel story has come alive for me here. It will never mean the same ever again."

Father Solana sees the motto of the center, "Duc in Altum," Latin for "go into the deep," as a message for today.

"Somehow Jesus tells to all of us, 'Go into the deep, try again, you can. Go, go, go!'" he said. "So I think this a beautiful message that the world needs in this moment. Financial crisis, problems with jobs, many situations and we need to try again. God is on our side."

Father Josh and Father Eamon Kelly said mass here. It was a lovely mass, but may have been one of the hottest in my entire life since the air conditioning was out, so no one remembers much of the homily....
Caesarea
Caesarea was built by Herod to entertain the Romans. He built a palace on the Mediterranean Sea and an amphitheater where Paul may have been questioned. Underneath the palace was a prison where Paul was held. It was at Caesarea where Paul requested judgment in Rome.

Acts 25: 1-12

Three days after his arrival in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem where the chief priests and Jewish leaders presented him their formal charges against Paul. They asked him as a favor to have him sent to Jerusalem, for they were plotting to kill him along the way. Festus replied that Paul was being held in custody in Caesarea and that he himself would be returning there shortly. He said, “Let your authorities come down with me, and if this man has done something improper, let them accuse him.” After spending no more than eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the following day took his seat on the tribunal and ordered that Paul be brought in. When he appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem surrounded him and brought many serious charges against him, which they were unable to prove. In defending himself Paul said, “I have committed no crime either against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.” Then Festus, wishing to ingratiate himself with the Jews, said to Paul in reply, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there stand trial before me on these charges?” Paul answered, “I am standing before the tribunal of Caesar; this is where I should be tried. I have committed no crime against the Jews, as you very well know. If I have committed a crime or done anything deserving death, I do not seek to escape the death penalty; but if there is no substance to the charges they are bringing against me, then no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then Festus, after conferring with his council, replied, “You have appealed
to Caesar. To Caesar you will go.”

June 19th Bethlehem – Church of the Nativity, Family Hospital, the Creche Orphanage and the Shepherds Field

Bethlehem – our first visit to the West Bank
We had arrived in Bethlehem the night before and stayed at the Casa Nova Pilgrim House. Bethlehem, like all of the areas we saw, has a stark beauty to it, which was heightened by the sunset.

The hotel had a Muslim church behind it and we heard the Muezzin’s call at 3:45 AM. That was our wakeup call.
In the morning, we had mass at the Church of the Nativity, where they have Midnight Mass celebrated every day of the year. The church, like several that we visited during the pilgrimage, was founded by Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine. During the mass, Father Josh noted how the angel came to the Shepherds, who were unclean because they worked with animals and that simply didn’t matter. Christ came for all of us, clean or unclean.

Following the mass, we went to the Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem, which is 800 yards from the Church of the Nativity. And the Crèche of Bethlehem, an orphanage that is over 100 years old. The hospital, which is run primarily from donations from the Knights of Malta and the Sisters of Charity, serves the poorest of the poor in the West Bank area of Bethlehem. The orphanage is home to 110-120 children up to the age of six.

The term “West Bank” covers 5,640 square kilometers inside of Israel and is home to just over 2.5 million inhabitants, of which 2.1 million are Palestinian Arab. The area within the West Bank was captured by Israel in the Six Day War in 1967 and is referred to by the Israelis as Judea and Samaria Area.
The West Bank area is primarily Muslim and there is Sharia law that covers the Muslims in this area. Unfortunately, most of the women served by the Family Hospital are victims of rape or incest and compounding this horror is the fact that Muslim children cannot be adopted by non-Muslims. Needless to say, the visits to the Family Hospital and the Crèche were a stark reminder of the need of Christians to follow the teaching of Christ in Matthew 25: 35-40:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous’ will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Additionally, the juxtaposition of the hospital and orphanage on the day where we celebrated mass in the Church of the Nativity was especially poignant.

Shepherd’s Field – We visited a church in Shepherd’s Field and were reminded of both Christ’s birth into poverty and that the first people to see Him were the Shepherd’s in their field, unclean and common, but would form the image of the Great Shepherd. After this, we headed to Jerusalem.
Friday June 20th – Jerusalem, Notre Dame Center, Saint Anne’s church and the Upper Room

We arrived in Jerusalem the night of the 19th but didn’t have anything planned for the evening. The hotel we were staying at, the Notre Dame Center is just outside of the city walls of Jerusalem and has two awesome features: a chapel, which is larger than some churches:

And a rooftop wine bar that had the best views of the city of Jerusalem (OK, and the wine and cheese were pretty good, too):
The giant gold dome is the Dome of the Rock, which is built on the Temple Mount. (From Father Josh) The Temple Mount is a series of four retaining walls that create a flat surface some 30 acres in area. On the Temple Mount, one today finds the Dome on the Rock, a Muslim shrine that became a crusader church that became a Muslim shrine built on the rock of Mount Moriah where Abraham took his son Isaac to sacrifice him. This Church became a mosque when the crusaders were repelled.

The Western (Wailing) Wall, is a small section of the Western retaining wall. It has no particular significance on its own, but Jews go there to pray for the restoration of the Temple, and it is the holiest site in their religious tradition.

The Temple is the site of numerous stories from the Bible. One of Jesus' temptations occurred on the corner picture below. Satan takes him to the top of the temple and tells him to jump because Angels will save him. The parapet of the Temple was where Jewish priests would announce new things...whether it be new laws or taxes or policies. Inadvertently, Satan was announcing Jesus by taking him to that point of the Temple.

The Presentation happened here: The finding of Jesus in the Temple, the overturning of the money-changers tables, teachings about the end of time. Many, many chapters of the Gospels happen here.

It is a place torn even today by religious warring, which keeps us at a distance.
Jesus tells the woman at the well that the time for worshiping in Spirit and Truth is coming...and indeed has come. And so we pray for our brethren in Spirit and in Truth, confident in the abiding presence of God in all of the Tabernacles of the world.

We started the day (Friday) by visiting Saint Anne’s church, where we had mass, and remembering the Immaculate Conception. Tradition has it that Joachim and Anne lived just outside of the walls of Jerusalem. Joachim was a builder/laborer and, like every tradesman for 100 miles, was brought in to help with the construction of the temple. During mass, Father Josh encouraged all of us to obtain or increase our devotion to Mary: “Trust, and it will come.” This really meant a lot to me. I’ve developed a devotion to Saint Joseph, but continue to work on the devotion to Mary, so I will continue to trust.

Outside of the church is the pool of Bethesda, where the Jesus heals a lame man (John 5: 2-14):

> Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep [Gate] a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me.” Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your mat, and walk.” Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, “It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” He answered them, “The man who made me well told me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who told you, ‘Take it up and walk’?” The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there. After this Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, “Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you.”

George, our guide, explained to us that the big issue to the Jews was that, by curing the lame man and having him carry has mat on the Sabbath (which was unlawful, since it was work), Jesus was considered a bigger offender than the now cured man carrying his mat since Jesus caused him to break the law. Father Josh mentioned that Saint Augustine, commenting on the line in verse 14 (“do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you”) was an indication that the man had sinned, likely by being lazy and waiting for someone to put him in the pool, rather than doing it himself.

Next we went to the Upper Room. Again, tradition holds that the spot that we were in was the place where the Upper Room was. However, no one can be
sure. However, Pope Benedict (?) said that for any site that tradition holds as a holy site, with the prayers and masses that take place, the site indeed becomes a holy site. I had never made the connection that the Upper Room was the spot where: Jesus and his disciples had the Last Supper, where Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection and where the disciples received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. George told us that the home which contained the upper room was in a wealthy neighborhood and was in the home of a person that the disciples felt that they could trust, which could mean that it was the home of either Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. In this room, we were given the sacraments of Holy Orders, the Eucharist, reconciliation and confirmation. I was struck in the upper room by thoughts of Jesus: what must he have been thinking? Knowing what was to happen to him, how he was to be betrayed by Peter and Judas and that his disciples would all leave him. Father Josh told us that Peter’s sin was greater than Judas. Judas had stopped believing long before the last supper. Peter, believed and denied Jesus three times.

After the upper room, we went to Caiphas’ house, which contained a prison below it where Jesus was held Thursday night before taking Him to Pilate Friday morning. In the prison, we read Psalm 88 and reflected on the darkness it describes and Christ, spending the night here in that darkness:

LORD, the God of my salvation, I call out by day; at night I cry aloud in your presence. Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry. For my soul is filled with troubles; my life draws near to Sheol. I am reckoned with those who go down to the pit; I am like a warrior without strength. My couch is among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave. You remember them no more; they are cut off from your influence. You plunge me into the bottom of the pit, into the darkness of the abyss. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, your waves crash over me.

Because of you my acquaintances shun me; you make me loathsome to them; Caged in, I cannot escape; my eyes grow dim from trouble. All day I call on you, LORD; I stretch out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades arise and praise you?

Is your mercy proclaimed in the grave, your faithfulness among those who have perished? Are your marvels declared in the darkness, your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

But I cry out to you, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why do you reject my soul, LORD, and hide your face from me? I have been mortally afflicted since youth; I have borne your terrors and I am made numb. Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. All day they surge round like a flood; from every side they encircle me. Because of you friend and neighbor shun me my only friend is darkness.
Caiphas’ house also had the courtyard, where Peter denied Jesus three times and “wept bitterly.”

In the afternoon, we visited the Western (formerly “wailing”) wall of the Temple Mount. Before 1967 and the Six Day War, Jews did not have direct access to this wall, which was why it was referred to as the Wailing Wall. Even though this is a Jewish holy site, I still put intentions in the wall and prayed to God that he consider these intentions. As noted above, the Temple Mount was the site of the Temple and this is where Jesus would have presented Christ and heard Simeon tell her that her heart would be pierced and where Jesus was found teaching after he had gone missing for three days.

**Saturday, June 21 – The Ascension, the Paternoster, Dominus Flavius, Mass at the grotto of Gethsemane and Holy Hour at the Church of all Peoples**

We visited the site of the Ascension, which is now owned by a Muslim family and touched the stone where Jesus returned to His Father. After this, we went to the Paternoster, which commemorates Luke 11: 1-4, where Jesus taught his disciples how to pray the Our Father.
He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.”

On the walls of the courtyard, the Our Father is written in 163 different languages. George recited the prayer in Aramaic, as Christ would have.

From the Paternoster, we walked to the Mount of Olives to the Church of Tears (Dominus Flavius). The church was built to commemorate Christ’s Lament over Jerusalem (Luke 13: 34-35):

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold, your house will be abandoned. [But] I tell you, you will not see me until [the time comes when] you say, ’Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

At this point, Jesus would have been standing just above the Kidron valley next to the garden of Gethsemane looking down on Jerusalem.

Mass was next in the Grotto of Gethsemane. This is where Jesus left the seven disciples when he went to pray in the garden with Peter, James and John. Mass included the readings of Peter’s denial and Jesus’ agony in the garden (Matthew 26: 31-46). Two items in the reading struck me. In Matthew 26: 46, Jesus goes to meet Judas – he isn’t passive, he doesn’t wait. He rises and goes to Judas. The second point was that when Jesus says that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”, I wondered whether he was talking about Himself (he had just finished his agony in the garden); the apostles Peter, James and John; us; or all three groups. I’m inclined to think that it’s the latter (all three). Jesus was fully human and fully divine and, although the divine was fully in line with His father’s will, the human side did have weaknesses associated with it. In a very small way, we are similar. With a well-formed conscience, we (generally) know what we are supposed to do but often times do the opposite.

In the garden, we saw an olive tree that some speculate is 2,000 years old and may have been there when Jesus was in the garden.

Later that evening, we had Holy Hour and confession in the Church of all Peoples, which is next to the garden of Gethsemane. It was beautiful and sad. Ever since Bethlehem, I had had issues with the Muslim people (yes, as a matter of fact, all of them). It seemed that every church we had been to had been destroyed by the Muslims. Their minarets were everywhere you looked. And the human impact of the Sharia law that we had seen first hand in Bethlehem was really, really bothering me. That night, in the garden and speaking with Father Josh, I started to get over the hatred. The churches that the Muslims destroyed, he told me, are just
buildings. It’s the people that make “the church”. And I have to remember that Christ came for everyone. Not just Catholics, or Christians, but everyone and that includes Muslims. Further, I may not agree with their laws or their religion (or at least some aspects of their religion) but that is not for me to judge. That’s between them and God. Afterwards, I walked outside the church and looked up at the city wall of Jerusalem. Like most spots in Jerusalem, you could see the dome of the rock. I looked at the dome and made my peace.

Sunday, June 22 – Via Doloroso, mass at the Holy Sepulcher, The Visitation at Ein Karem, and Jericho

The day began with us doing the Stations of the Cross on the Via Doloroso (“Way of grief”). Fortunately, we were there early in the day, so it wasn’t too hot and wasn’t too crowded. There are metallic disks on the wall that marks each of the stations. Father Josh said that the way we went, was much longer than when Jesus walked, do to changes in the streets since Jesus’ time.

After the stations, we had mass at the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Inside this church, you have Christ’s crucifixion, the tomb and where Mary Magdalene met Jesus after His resurrection. In the Sepulcher, you can put your hand into the hole where Jesus’ cross was and enter the tomb. There are stars on the floor that also mark where Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. Nothing short of amazing. Nothing. When we left mass, the sun was streaming in from the dome of the roof onto the floor outside of the tomb. It was simply breathtaking.
Outside of the church, George told us about the 1853 Status Quo agreement, which was created to share custodial responsibility for the Holy Sepulcher. The primary custodians of the Holy Sepulcher are the Eastern Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Roman Catholic Churches, with the Greek Orthodox Church having the lion's share. In the 19th century, the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox and the Syriac Orthodox acquired lesser responsibilities, which include shrines and other structures within and around the building. Times and places of worship for each community are strictly regulated in common areas.

Under the status quo, no part of what is designated as common territory may be so much as rearranged without consent from all communities. This often leads to the neglect of badly needed repairs when the communities cannot come to an agreement among themselves about the final shape of a project. Just such a disagreement has delayed the renovation of the edicule, where the need is now
dire, but also where any change in the structure might result in a change to the
status quo, disagreeable to one or more of the communities

A less grave sign of this state of affairs is located on a window ledge over the
church's entrance. Someone placed a wooden ladder there sometime before 1852,
when the status quo defined both the doors and the window ledges as common
ground. This ladder, the "Immovable Ladder", remains there to this day, in almost
exactly the same position it can be seen to occupy in century-old photographs and
engravings.

When I heard of this, all I could think of was John 17: 21 where Jesus says “so that
they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in
us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” It must sadden Christ to see
these types of disputes in such a holy place.

Ein Karem. The home of St. John the Baptist and the place of the Visitation.
First, we visited the Church of the Visitation in the Judean Hill Country where, after the
Annunciation, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth and proclaimed her Magnificat. We
then saw the birthplace of St. John the Baptist.
(from Father Josh) Something about the Visitation has always drawn me to it's mystery. Ein Karem, the little town in the hill country of Judea at which the Church celebrates the mystery of the Visitation, is a truly beautiful place, looking over an almost untouched valley.

Tradition says that Mary made the journey on her own from Nazareth. It is normally a five-day journey. There were two routes...one through the Jordan River Valley and one through Samaria. The Jordan route was peppered with bandits who would rob those who came alone, and Samaria was avoided by Jews because it was filled with...well...Samaritans. Samaritans were those who stayed behind during the exile and adopted the false and foreign gods of their conquerors.

But local tradition says that Mary took the Samaritan route. She, carrying this Jesus who would, in his Galilean ministry reach out to all people...Jews and Gentiles, walked through the region of Samaria, in some way preparing the way for her son's encounter with the Samaritan woman in Shechem, where Jesus announces the new covenant in the place where Joshua renewed the old. This was not the first time Samaria had welcomed its savior.

And then, that touching scene between two pregnant women. (Zechariah is nowhere to be found, presumably out getting ice cream and pickles for his wife.) The joy that must have passed between these women cannot be imagined...joy that passes from Jesus through Mary to Elizabeth to John and back again. It is a joy that overflows to us each time we contemplate these mysteries!

The second picture shows the murder of the Holy Innocents and John being hid in
We then left for Jericho, where we had lunch. Jericho is inside of the West Bank and this was certainly the first time ever in my life that I had lunch in a restaurant where one of the walls had barbed wire on it. I’m not sure if the barbed wire was meant to keep people out of the restaurant or keep us in....

Monday, June 23 – Masada, Qumram and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the River Jordan

As we drove out to Masada and Qum Ram, we passed a desert. George explained to us that the Bedouins still live in these deserts in much the same role as they had for thousands of years. The cattle that they tend, make paths in the desert and are referred to as “the righteous path” since, if you follow them, they will lead you to water.
Massada is Modern Hebrew for “fortress”. Herod the Great built palaces for himself on the mountain and fortified Masada between 37 and 31 BCE. According to Josephus, the Siege of Masada by troops of the Roman Empire towards the end of the First Jewish–Roman War ended in the mass suicide of the 960 Sicarri rebels and their families hiding there.

We also passed the Mount of Temptations, where, as Father Josh writes: Jesus was fasting in the desert, and when he had prepared himself with 40 days of this sacrifice, the devil tempted him.

He hungers. The devil misunderstands his hunger. Without question his body needed food, but he, even at the beginning of his ministry, was indicating what his real hunger is, just as we learn at the end of his ministry for what he truly thirsts: our love.

Traditionally, this temptation is thought to have happened on this mountain.

He is tempted to throw himself off of the parapet of the temple. We have covered this already. The parapet is where new things are announced to the people. Satan cannot help but be a servant. He is a disobedient servant, but even his wickedness serves the greatness of God. Satan taking our Lord to the parapet is Satan announcing something new: the good news of Jesus. God’s designs cannot be thwarted by evil.

Then Satan takes our Lord to the top of the Mount of Temptation and offers the whole world to him if only he will worship him. This is the greatest temptation, for if God worshiped a creature, he would be denying himself, and presumably the world would end. Satan hates God so much that he would prefer to be destroyed than to worship his creator.

Our Lord endured these temptations admirably, quoting scripture and ultimately commanding the devil to leave him alone. We must take refuge in the Word of God
and by fleeing from evil when we find ourselves tempted.

One disconcerting thing from this story: the holier one gets, the greater the temptation. No one was holier than our Lord, and no one had greater temptation. He has shown us the way past temptation to holiness. We need but follow.

The Monastery built on the Mount of Temptations

We then visited Qumram, which is the site of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is located on a dry plateau about a mile inland from the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, near the Israeli settlement and kibbutz of Kalya. The Hellenistic period settlement was constructed during the reign of John Hyrcanus, 134-104 BC or somewhat later, and was occupied most of the time until it was destroyed by the Romans in 68 AD or shortly after. It is best known as the settlement nearest to the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden, caves in the sheer desert cliffs and beneath, in the marl terrace.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947-1956, extensive excavations have taken place in Qumran. Nearly 900 scrolls were discovered. Most were written on parchment and some on papyrus. Cisterns, Jewish ritual baths, and cemeteries have been found, along with a dining or assembly room and debris from an upper story alleged by some to have been a scriptorium as well as pottery kilns and a tower.

Many scholars believe the location was home to a Jewish sect, probably the
Essenes. Many of the texts found in the caves appear to represent widely accepted Jewish beliefs and practices, while other texts appear to speak of divergent, unique, or minority interpretations and practices.

Finally, we hit the Jordan River and renewed our baptismal promises. Father Josh writes:

*The Jordan River*

John the Baptist was preaching in the desert. When Jesus, his cousin, approached him, the first theophany occurred in the New Testament. This was a Trinitarian theophany.

A theophany is just a manifestation of God. Here in the desert, near the source of life for people living in this inhospitable wilderness, God, the fountain of life, revealed himself as triune.

This is the spot considered to be where Israel passed from Jordan into the promised land, right down the mountain from Mt. Nebo where Moses saw the land of milk and honey before he died. This was where the Jordan turned back on its course so the Ark of the Covenant could pass through. Now God uses that water to prepare the way for his triumphal entry into the new Temple, the human soul.

With this visit, our group has seen the spots for 19 of the mysteries of the rosary. The Holy Land is truly a blessed place.
In the afternoon, we had mass at the church of Bethany ("house of the poor") which was an absolutely beautiful church. The church had several depictions of Mary and Martha, raising Lazarus from the dead and Martha meeting Jesus. The front of the church had a beautiful mural of Jesus:

The inscription reads “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Tuesday June 24th – Mass at the Holy Sepulcher, the Road to Emmaus and The Shrine of the Book

This morning, we had mass at the Nailing Chapel, which is next to Christ’s crucifixion site in the Holy Sepulcher. The homily asked us to remember two things: that Christ died for us and that we should unite our suffering with His. Our suffering can always be redemptive if we choose it to be.
We then left for the Judean Hills to the Benedictine Church at Abu Grosch. The church is one of many that commemorate the Gospel story of the Road to Emmaus. It was good to have this story near the end of our pilgrimage since “our hearts burned within us” throughout our journey. The church also had some outstanding Limon cello.

We then visited the Shrine of the book museum, which has a reproduction of some of the Dead Sea scrolls and the Aleppo Codex. Outside the museum was an amazing scale model of the city of Jerusalem, as it existed around 68 AD:
Wednesday June 25th – Mass at the Cenacle, Oskar Schindler’s grave, the Shroud of Turin and home

We had our last mass at the Cenacle, which shares a wall with the site of the Upper Room. Our gospel reading was on the last supper.

Following mass, several of us went to a nearby Catholic cemetery, which had the grave of Oskar Schindler. And how did we find his grave? Easy – anyone who has seen the movie saw how the Jews placed stones on his grave as a sign of respect.
And his was covered in stones.

That afternoon, while waiting around, I took up Seminarian Joseph Salter’s offer to tour the shroud of Turin exhibit. Wow. Where to begin? The exhibit itself is titled “Who is the man of the Shroud?” and begins with a history of the Shroud in terms of where it appears in history and where it traveled from. Scientific study began in 1898 when the cloth was photographed for the first time and the images (between positive and negative) appeared to be reversed. The Positive (the picture most see) appeared as if it were a photographic negative and vice-versa. The Shroud details the wounds in the scalp from the crown (really more like a helmet) of thorns and the wounds from the scourging can be examined. The wounds in the wrist, both the blood from the nail and the position of the hands indicating nerve damage that would occur from a nail can clearly be seen. Blood is also observed on the shroud where a lance would have opened Christ’s side. There is also a facial recognition exhibit that indicates that there are more than 30 points of similarity (the legal evidential standard) between the face on the shroud and icons from the fourth century. But most fascinating of all was the laser scan, which appears to be three dimensional, rather than the two dimensions. Utterly and completely fascinating!
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