



The Holy Land Pilgrimage

I would like to share with you some thoughts regarding my recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was a tour I will always remember as it stirred up so many thoughts regarding my own faith. Places I had heard of all my life (e.g. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Cana, the Jordan River) seemed to come alive as our group visited them and recalled the events that took place there. Many people who have visited the Holy Land told me that when they returned home and heard the Scriptures being proclaimed at Mass or were reading the Bible at home and came across the name of a city or village they immediately were able to form a picture in their mind of that place. This mental image allowed the person to then develop an even deeper sense of prayer.

There can be a tendency when visiting places of historical significance to limit the experience to a reflection on what happened in the past. In visiting religious shrines in the Holy Land, one must not give in to this temptation, but look to the present (never forgetting the past and giving it its due recognition) and ask what is the significance of the place/event today. What is important for me to know regarding where Jesus lived and what He said and did so long ago? How can I apply it to my own life of faith today?

I asked myself these questions as I visited the churches and spots where so many important events took place so long ago. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem reminds me that God came to dwell among human beings, not just those living at that time, but for all generations. The Transfiguration took place so that Peter, James, John and the rest of us would also have our faith strengthened during challenging times in our lives. The Passion of our Lord took place long ago, but we continue to participate in the dying experience as we offer our sufferings to the Lord and ask for His help. The resurrection of Jesus indeed took place long ago, but it reminds us that Jesus is alive among His people, not to be found in a dark tomb.

The Holy Land is indeed Holy as there are churches built on every spot where something was known about Jesus' life taking place there. No where else can we find this, since the Holy Land is the actual place where these events took place. Christianity originated there, but spread to the rest of the world. It is important to understand and honor the origins of our faith, but it is equally important to know and rejoice in the fact that our Lord continues to dwell with His people, wherever we are and whatever generation we belong to. Jesus is for all people and for all time!

I thank you for your prayers for me during the pilgrimage and know that all of you were prayed for during the Masses I celebrated there. All of the petitions given me were brought to the altar as well. May God continue to bless us as we continue our Lenten journey.

Father David