



Missionary Benedictine Sisters
ST. SCHOLASTICA'S PRIORY
2560 LEON GUINTO ST., P.O. BOX 2734
MALATE, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

COMMON LETTER NO. 199

Jerusalem, January 17, 2012

Dear Sisters All over the Priory and Overseas:

Greetings from Jerusalem. I am here for the Administrative Council of the CIB. I arrived on January 14 in the evening by Korea Air. Sr. Cecile of the Emmanuele Sisters fetched me from the airport and brought me to the Contemplative Benedictine Sisters of the Mount of Olives. My other 6 companions arrived earlier and had already an afternoon of pilgrimage. The last time I visited the Holy Land was 37 years ago in 1974. When I finished my studies in Rome and Germany, I was allowed to go home via Greece and the Holy Land. It is interesting to compare my present visit with that first one.

On Sunday, January 15, we had our breakfast at 6:45 and at 7:30 we were ready for a walking tour of Jerusalem. Our Coordinator Sr. Judithe Ann Heble was sick with diarrhea so she could not come along. First we went down the hill, really a very steep hill and our first stop was a garden where you can see a breath taking view of the whole of Jerusalem. Our guide, Nadine who had a map showed us all the important sites that could be seen from that garden. We passed by the Gethsemani garden. We didn't enter because my companion went there already yesterday. But I did visit it in 1974. Then we continued our walk. I had to hold on to Sr. Mathilde, the councillor from India because the way was so steep you could just roll down. Then we entered Jerusalem through the Lion Gate. And when we started with the way of the cross we entered the gate of Damascus, supposedly the most beautiful gate in Jerusalem. This was the way, Christ was supposed to have taken on the way to calvary. The first and second station was at the Fortress of Antonia where Jesus was condemned to die and scourged. The third and fourth station are actually on a street full of souvenir shops (All idealistic pictures of the way of the cross happening along a countryside with a rustic setting would be shattered.) The Third Station was actually just a wall with a picture of Christ falling down from the cross. The fourth station was an Armenian Church where there is picture of Christ meeting his mother. We went inside and prayed for mothers who see their sons suffer torture and injustice. Here we interrupted our way of the cross to go to the Church of Notre Dame where we attended an English Mass. The priest, an American, gave a very good homily on corruption. I resonated with it and thought of the Impeachment of Corona, the whistle blowers, the cases against GMA, and so forth. The sacristan was a Filipino and I met 3 Filipino Teresianas accompanied by their Superior and 5 other Filipinas working in Telaviv. Then we went back to continue our way of the cross.

We went on along the shops and in one corner we saw the Fifth station where Simon of Cyrene was supposed to have helped Jesus. We turned right on that street and came to the 6th station which is just a mark on the wall. Here Veronica was supposed to have wiped the face of Jesus. The seventh and eighth stations were also along that road but on the 9th station we had to go back because there was now a solid wall where the way was supposed to continue. The 9th station was a corner with some

wooden crosses resting on the wall. From there we went inside a gate leading to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We stopped at a courtyard while our guide was telling us what to expect. We went through a narrow door and we had to stoop because it was very low. We passed by 2 small chapels. On the second chapel a woman was praying loudly. Both were of the Eastern rite. Then we passed into a big courtyard full of tourists. There our guide pointed to a tower like structure where Golgotha was supposed to be and the other stations of the cross till the 12th would be found there. We went up the staircase and we joined a queue of people who were going to kiss the foot of the cross under the altar. There was a big cross behind the very ornate altar with hanging lamps and many candle holders which obscured the view of the cross. We all stooped under the altar and kissed the spot where cross of Christ was supposed to have stood. Then we went down to the lobby where there are frescoes of the crucifixion, the bringing down of the body of Jesus and Jesus being laid in the tomb. In the middle of the room was a rectangular stone where Jesus was supposed to have been wrapped in the shroud. We turned the corner and we came to the small chapel of the Holy Sepulcher. There was a long queue of people wanting to go into the tomb, so we proceeded first to an altar on a lower level. This was supposed to be the cistern where St. Helena found the cross of Christ so at the back of the altar there is a black statue of St. Helene holding the cross. We went back to the upper level and we were lucky that there were not many people anymore. Nevertheless it took us 20 minutes before we ourselves could enter the tomb. There was an anteroom and then the room of the tomb is so small only 4 people had place. We prayed for all our loved ones and friends who have died. We kissed the tomb and the guard hurried us to go out so the other people could go in. A woman before us accompanied by a nun or a muslim woman was sobbing the whole time.

We went back to the Notre Dame and ate lunch in their restaurant. The Head waiter greeted me with : Kumusta ka? He said his wife is Ilongga and proudly showed us the picture of his exotic looking wife. He asked me to pray so they could have a child

After lunch, we went to the Cenaculum or the place of the last supper. It was just a small hall with some pillars and an altar. No mass is said there except when the Pope came. The Franciscans are negotiating that they take care of the place and have a daily Mass said there which is fitting enough since it was the place where the first Holy Eucharist was celebrated. Then we went to the Dormition Church where a German Priest explained to us the origin of the Church which actually was perhaps the 3rd or 4th Church built on that spot because Churches were built and destroyed throughout the centuries. His name is Fr. Elias and he knows Sr. Irene. So I promised to give his greetings to Mo. Irene. He said something about the instruction of Jesus in looking for the room for the last supper which I find interesting. Jesus said, look for a man carrying water. Why was that significant? Because usually men do not fetch water. That was women's work. The fact that a man is carrying water showed that the area was probably among the community of the Essenes who were not allowed to touch women. So they fetched their own water. And so the man carrying water was the one who will show them the room where the last supper would take place. After the explanations we went down to the crypta where the statue of Mary lying down was at the center of the circular room with side altars. This is not the tomb of Mary which is somewhere in the Mount of Olives. This is only where she died. Of course there is another version where Mary lived with St. John in Ephesus (I actually saw the house which is now a small

chapel with just one arm). In this version Mary died there. But of course those in Jerusalem insist that Mary and John actually lived with the disciples in Jerusalem and Mary died on this spot where the Dormition Church was built.


From there we visited our last stop which was the wailing wall. It was beside the original temple of Jerusalem which is now a mosque. The belief is that here there is the abiding presence of God, There are two parts of the wall, the right side where the women prayed and put their petitions and the left side for the women. At this point we must have walked at least 10 kilometers and so we went home with the bus no.175.

It is now January 16. We went to Mass with the Sisters. This contemplative community have only 6 remaining sisters from different countries. The mass was of the Byzantine rite and although it was a weekday mass, it lasted for an hour because there are three sets of litany of petitions , one in the beginning, one before the Consecration and one after communion. At communion, the priest asked us our names and addressed us personally while giving us a piece of consecrated bread dipped in wine. After the mass, he gave us a bigger piece of bread which we ate at our pew.

At 9:00 AM we proceeded with the day's pilgrimage. Our first stop was at Bethpage where Jesus started with the Palm Sunday procession to Jerusalem. There is a big stone in the Church where Jesus was supposed to have started. We walked a long to go to Bethany to Martha and Mary's house. Interestingly, the town is now named after Lazarus. We had to pass the sentry because this was going to the Palestinian part. We went on passing through the town center and then we saw the entrance to Lazarus house. There was a camel in front of it. It is the greenest part we had seen so far. Its garden was full of trees, green grass and flowers which we did not see anywhere else. The Church is called the tomb of Lazarus although the actual tomb is actually in another part. I was just thinking how come it is all about Lazarus? What happened to Martha and Mary? In the Church we read the Gospel about Jesus raising Lazarus to life. It was an awesome experience to be listening to the Gospel event where it actually happened. Then we went some 20 steps up to the tomb of Lazarus where you had to go down also twenty stops to go the tomb proper which was just a small empty chamber. This must be the level at Jesus' time because I cannot imagine that when Jesus said: Lazarus come forth, he would have had to climb 20 steps all wrapped like a mummy. Mercifully we went home by bus. When we were about to cross the Israel part, all Palestinians had to go down but we had our passport inspected by Israeli soldiers in the bus.

We worked all afternoon giving our impressions of the West Africa conference and planning for the next symposium in 2014, We joined the Nuns for Vespers. Tomorrow and the next day will be working days so I might as well send this letter. I prayed for all of you in all the Holy Places we visited.

Lovingly yours,


Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB