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Peace and Joy!

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Dear Sisters All over the Priory and Overseas

So let me continue with my Jerusalem diary. After one and half days of working hard, our guide said that since we could not see the City of David in our last outing, it is imperative that we make time in the afternoon to see it because the City of David was the Jerusalem in Jesus' time. So right after lunch, we went off to the City of David. Of course again we walked and walked. This time we went down on the other side of the Mount of Olives and stopped at Bethpage. As you know this was where the Palm Sunday procession started. We went into the small Church and there is a big rock inside enclosed in grills which was supposed to be the spot where Jesus rode on a donkey and proceeded to Jerusalem with all the people waving their palms. It seems there are thousands of people who go on this Palm Sunday procession every year. Then we went down, down, down and crossed the highway until we came to the valley of Kedron which is actually just a patch of meadow not even two hectares in area. As we proceeded, we were blocked by a HYUNDAI backhoe filling up some construction site. Oh, I have to tell this to Fe Agudo, I thought. Then we walked down still more until we reached the spring of Gihon which seemed was and is still is the source of water in the City of David. When the guide was showing us two tunnels, they were filled with basura—Oh my goodness, I thought so much basura in the City of David. Further on we reached the pool of Siloh, (here written as Silwah) There are two pools, one a very big but dry one and a little ahead a smaller one with water which is supposed to be the pool where Jesus cured the lame man. In my first visit here in 1974, I remember we were up the hill in a Church which was supposed to be where Peter denied Jesus and where the maid recognized Peter. We read the Gospel there and the guide pointed out where Peter was, where the maid was and where Jesus was when he looked at Peter after his denial. And then we went to the window and the guide said, "And down below, there is the pool of Siloe." And in this visit, I finally saw the pool of Siloe. I dipped my shawl into the water just to be able to say I touched the water of the pool of Siloe. Then we began to climb and arrived at the entrance to the City of David which is now a kind of commemorative park. This is supposed to be the palace where David lived and where he saw Bathsheba when she was going to her bath, and you know the rest of the story. There is a big harp at the entrance and inside are olive trees, flowers and benches for people to sit. From there we took Bus no. 75 to go back to the Mount of Olives.

The next day, Jan. 19 we went to Galilee. We first stopped at a look out with a panoramic view of the Judean desert. This is so beautiful, undulating hills all brown but with different shades of brown and down one can see a line of trees an oasis where there is a stream running from Jerusalem to

Jericho. When the Sisters hear say we are having desert days, they literally are in the desert. From this look out, our guide pointed to the East and said: Over there is Jericho, and over there is Jordan, and on that mountain Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. We then proceeded to Nazareth. We noticed how the landscape gradually changed from brown to green, from barren hills to plantations of palm trees, vegetables and other vegetation. Nazareth which was in 1974 only a village is now a modern city. In fact the first thing we saw on entering the city was a huge Macdonald sign. I recalled on my first visit that the Mary's house I was shown was really a house and I still remember seeing a naked little boy playing in the mud and I recalled writing home that I imagined Jesus doing the same thing at his time. I didn't recognize the big Church which is built supposedly on top of the former house of Mary and Joseph. In the courtyard there on a wall besides others was a mosaic of Our Lady of the Annunciation and below it was written : PHILIPPINES. Beside the Church there are more excavations and a small museum. Then we went up to the Church of St. Joseph. In the crypta, there is a stained glass window of the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Then we proceeded to Tabgha run by the Benedictine Fathers of the Dormition Abbey, assisted by 5 Filipina BSEK Sisters . In the Basilica there is the mosaic picture of loaves and fishes on the floor in front of the altar beside a rock where Jesus was supposed to have laid down the loaves and fishes brought by the little boy. In the basket only 4 loaves are visible. So there are several explanations: one was eaten already by the apostles or it is actually beneath the other loaves. The more profound explanation is that the 5<sup>th</sup> loaf is actually the one consecrated on the altar during Mass. A Benedictine Father showed us around the new construction of their future cloister and then we had the joy of eating lunch with the Filipina Sisters in their house. They are Sr. Resurrection, the Superior, Sr. Felicity, Sr. Salve, Sr. Leah and Sr. Gaudette Marie. Sr. Judith talked a bit about the CIB while we enjoyed pancit, fried chicken and tilapia. And siyempre, picture-picture after lunch. They have been there for 17 years already of course with changing community members. They take charge of the Basilica , the pilgrim house , the souvenir store and they work a lot with Filipino migrant workers in Tel Aviv. The Sisters wanted me to stay but we still had some things to do in the Council. Further down the hill, we proceeded to the Church commemorating the episode when Jesus asked Peter three times: Do you love me. There is a beautiful iron statue commemorating this. Of course we went down to the shore of the Sea of Tiberias where the incident happened. We read the Gospel narration which really had a deeper meaning because we were supposed to be on the spot where it happened. We gathered some shells, had our pictures taken and simply enjoyed looking at the calm sea and beyond it the Golan Heights . We then went to Capharnaum (here written as Kefar Nahum) where Jesus worked a lot of miracles. There we saw the Church built on top of the house of Peter where Jesus cured Peter's mother in law. There are many excavations around it showing the neighboring houses. I could imagine that Peter was president of their Homeowners association there. In the middle of the house ruins was the Synagogue where Christ preached before he cured Peter's mother in law. We still had time to go to the Church of the Beatitudes where we prayed Vespers looking down at the sea of Tiberias. We went back to Jerusalem and to Mt. Olives tired but happy.

Today, January 20, we went to Ain Karem (written En Kerem), the village of Elizabeth and where Mary went to visit her. Having gone to Nazareth, I realized how far Mary walked to visit Elizabeth. They say it took her 5 days to reach Ain Karem. We first climbed the hill to the Church of the Visitation. At the entrance I met a Franciscan Priest from Austria, Fr. Gottlieb. We talked for a while. Then we went into

the small Church where there are pictures of the Visitation. There is actually an upper Church which is a little bit bigger and where we prayed to Our Lady. I remembered all of you there, house by house beginning from the Priory House. At the garden in front of the Church there is a wall where the Magnificat was written in many languages, also in Tagalog. Then we went down the hill to go to the Church of St. John the Baptist. This was supposed to be the site of the temple where Zachary was visited by the angel and announced that Elizabeth was about to conceive a child. Then we walked over to the convent of the Sisters of Zion. They were founded by Alfonse von Ratisbonne, who was converted from Judaism when he was asked to wear the miraculous medal. Our Lady appeared to him and he founded the congregation of the Sisters of Zion. In the cemetery where he is buried there is a statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal which is visited even by the Jews. From there we went to Yad Vashem a museum of the Holocaust. It occupies hectares and hectares of land with different points of interest. We visited the place of remembrance of the 1 million 5 hundred thousand children who perished in the concentration camps of the Nazis. This is a very moving place, all dark inside and in the middle there are many flickering points of light like small stars. We went around it not seeing anything except this points of light while holding on to a rail and a voice announcing the names of the children who died in the Holocaust, for example: Jacob, 6 years old from Chekoslovakia, etc., Merdochai, 16 years old from Poland, etc. etc. We also went inside the hall where an eternal flame was burning and on the marble floor were etched the names of all the concentration camps where the Jews were interned and finally killed in gas chambers. Then we entered the historical museum which is very well organized and has so many rooms it would take months to visit it completely. It started with the origins of Anti-Semitism then the rise of Hitler. There are movies from the past and my hair just stood up listening to Hitler's demagoguery, his voice and words hard and harsh accompanied by violent gestures and every 3 or 4 sentences, the crowd ( all men) would clap and shout: Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil! As we went from room to room, we were horrified by the brutality, the inhumanity human beings can do to other human beings. There were the emaciated pictures of the prisoners in their striped prisoners' garb. We followed how the Nazis conquered country after country in Europe Checkoslovakia, Poland, even France, Netherlands, etc—all the time ferreting out the Jews and putting them in concentration camps where most of them never came out alive. But again there was heroism all throughout and the exhibits showed people even young people ( like Anne Frank although I did not see her picture there)who wrote about their experiences for the generations to come even in danger of death if caught, the beginning of the liberation movements in many places, etc. It was a sad but enlightening experience strengthening my commitment to work for the oppressed and persecuted.

After supper we had a friendly meeting with the community of 7 in this Monastery of Our Lady of Mt. Olives. There are 3 French, 1 Polish, 1 Russian, 1 German Junior Sister and one Hermit who is also an artist and who showed us her Icon workshop. She said although icon writing is supposed to be just copying, she makes original icons especially ordered by people. For example in the Synod of the military she was asked to make icons of the centurion, the soldier who pierced the side of Christ, the soldiers at the tomb etc. She has no models for these so she simply made them from her imagination. The Sisters also sew vestments.

Today, January 21, Saturday, we went to Bethlehem. We had to pass through a sentry but they don't check you when you go out. The strict checking is when you come back to Jerusalem. We lost our way and so we had an unplanned tour of Bethlehem. I now feel like singing not "O little town of Bethlehem" but "O big city of Bethlehem," We finally found the house of the Sisters of Emmanuel which is just beside the newly built wall. There are 8 Sisters also of different convents except for the 3 founders who are the elders of the community and the two young novices who are in their late 20's. The 3 founders came from Algeria from the same village where the Trappist monks of Cherge had their monastery in the movie *Of Gods and Men* which we watched, do you remember? An Austrian will make her perpetual vows in Pentecost. The youngest novice who is from France actually biked all the way to Bethlehem from her hometown in Rheims. It took her 4 months to do so. That was her way of saying goodbye to the world, she said. Isn't that something? We had a wonderful sharing with them. And from their stories we got insights into the complicated situation here between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There is always an underlying tension and the Sisters live in uncertainty all the time not knowing when violence can erupt at any provocation.

After lunch they brought us to Beit Sahour or to the Shepherd's field where the shepherds were supposed to be watching over their flock when the angels announced to them the birth of Jesus. Again my memory of my first visit to this place was to a real cave, rustic and unadorned. What we saw now is a Church with paintings of the shepherds. Then we went to the Church of the Nativity which is the most unchurch like structure I have seen here. This is because there is the first Church built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, then there was the second Church built by Constantine, and then the Church built by the Crusaders. The three levels of entrances show this. What is interesting was the last entrance made by the crusaders which is so low you have to bend in order to enter it. Our guide, Brother Stephan who is a gentle giant explained that the Muslims at the time of the Crusades tended to bring their horses into the Church desecrating it. So the crusaders covered up the entrance and left only a small entrance to prevent horses to be brought in. There used also to be paintings of Saints of both western and eastern rites on the pillars by the crusaders which were all erased by the Muslims. The interesting thing is the last pillar is the painting of a woman and under the picture is written: Santa Incognita. (unknown saint) We had to queue to see the grotto. The grotto which is at the crypt has the place where Jesus was born, and the manger where he was put after he was born marked by a glass star on top. The place is occupied by three communities: the Armenians, the Greek Orthodox, and the Franciscans. They live peacefully together and share the grotto but have their own Churches of the Nativity.

Going back to Jerusalem we had to pass the strict sentry. We had to put all our bags and belongings on trays and let them pass through x-ray like in airports. We then had to show our passports in two places. For us it was simple enough. Palestinians (Bethlehem is Palestinian territory) have in addition to all what we had to do, need to put their palm on a machine before they can enter the Israeli territory.

I better stop now. Wait for the third and last of my Jerusalem series.

Lovingly yours,

*A. Mary John Manangan MS*