



Missionary Benedictine Sisters
ST. SCHOLASTICA'S PRIORY
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MALATE, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

Common letter 201

Jerusalem series no. 3

Peace and joy !

January 24, 2012

Dear Sisters All Over the Priory and Overseas.

This will be the last letter I will send you from the Holy Land. God is so good that we had all beautiful sunny days when we went around. Now it is cloudy, raining and real cold. Anyway, yesterday was our last programmed tour. Our destination was Abu Ghosh. This is one of three places claiming to be the Emmaus in the Bible where two disciples were going home after the death of Christ, very disappointed because they thought their expectations were not fulfilled. Then Jesus appeared and walked with them along the way and explained to them all about the scriptures and finally they recognized him when he broke the bread while they were taking their meal and their eyes were opened.

We visited the Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary Of the Resurrection situated in this Muslim village of Abu Ghosh. When I asked about the meaning of the name, a gentleman who attended the Mass told me that the family Abo Ghosh used to dominate the village and every one had to pay taxes to them. (By the way, the young wife of this gentleman, whose name is Claire told me that she spent 6 months as volunteer in Cebu with the St. John Sisters and knows about SSA Tabunok.) In the course of time the word Ghosh somehow got the meaning of "thief". In 1143 the Crusaders (Hospitaller Order of St. John now the Order of Malta) identified the site with the village of Emmaus and built the Church on the foundation of the Roman reservoir. It was occupied by the Muslims and they erased the faces of the figures painted on the walls. In 1900 a monastery was built by Benedictine monks of Subiaco congregation but they left in 1953. The present monastery is actually a double monastery of Olivetan Benedictine monks and Benedictine nuns from Normandy. There are about 12 nuns and about the same number of monks. There are 2 nuns from Ghana who retain their African habits. The monks and nuns meet at Mass and Vespers but otherwise live independently from each other.

We attended their High Mass, very solemn with the nuns wearing white full length veils that gracefully fell to the ground. They entered the church in solemn statio. I was ecstatic being able to sing with them the Gregorian chant for the proper as well as the common parts of the Mass. Before meals, the nuns have a very beautiful ritual for their guests. At the door of the refectory, the Prioress (who has been in office for 35 years since the convents' foundation) assisted by another sister washed our hands one by one, dried them and kissed the palm—somewhat like the Mandatum, while the other Sisters were chanting in their places in the refectory. The meal was eaten in silence but with a reading of the

Holy Rule on tape. (By the way, talking about meals, I have never eaten so much cheese and olives as in these 10 days!) Then they took us on a tour of the monastery—the workplace where candles are made, the sewing room, the icon writing room, the oratory, and we ended in the monastery shop where we could buy souvenirs. After that we went to a cosy room with a real fireplace and had our sharing with the community. The majority of the nuns (8) are French. There were two from Congo, and a German. The German nun, Sr. Madeline is the youngest and imagine she also studied in Muenster where I studied but 20 years after me. And another curious thing was that in the course of our conversation, she mentioned that her brother Thomas led a youth exposure trip in the Philippines. And I remembered that he actually visited the Priory and met Jun Lozada and even asked me to accompany him to visit Jun and his family in Pasig. Small world indeed. They asked all the 6 members of the Administrative council about their communities and we also got to know each other better. Sr. Judith Ann Heble, our Moderator comes from Lyle Monastery near Chicago, Mere Therese Marie Dupagne comes from Belgium, Sr. Matilde comes from Tamilnadu, India, Mother Zoe comes from Turkey monastery in England, Mother Magdalena is the Mother General of the Oshikuko Sisters and she acknowledged the Tutzinger Sisters as their mentor. With us is the CIB secretary, Sr. Mary Jane who is from Erie Monastery, where Sr. Joan Chittister belongs. I told them all about our Priory and our apostolate and advocacies and they were all very interested especially about smokey mountain. Somehow as in all the communities we visited, we come to the complicated situation in the country. Not only between the Israelis and the Palestinians but also with the Moslems since this village is a Moslem village. They said that their main mission is to work for unity and harmony.

The next day we were only three left—Sr. Mary Jane, Sr. Matilde and I. So we decided to go to the old city by ourselves. We took the bus no. 75 in front of the shrine of the Our Father and I gave 10 shekels to the driver explaining: 1 under 60 and 2 over 60 - The fare is 5 shekels for people under 60 (1 \$=3.7 shekels) and 2.5 for senior citizens. We went down at the gate of Damascus and followed the via dolorosa to do some shopping. I had a taste of local haggling. I wanted to buy” I love Jerusalem t-shirt” The seller showed a sign which said 59 shekels . But for you, he said since you are my first customer, I will put it down to 25 shekels . And because you are a sister I will go down to 20 shekels. Ok, I will think about it I said and we went on to another shop. There the man went down to 17 shekels so we bought the T-shirts there. Then we went to the market which is up the steps passing the 5th and the 7th stations. We bought dates, pistachio and some sweets. Then Sr. Mary Jane said let us try Turkish coffee. So we looked for a café shop and we found a rather dingy one around the corner. Inside men were smoking , I think hashish—you know with that long pipe . So we just sat outside. We ordered Turkish coffee. I thought it would be bitter like espresso but it was not. It had some cardamon in it and is cooked in a special way in a special pot. We went back to the Damascus gate and went out to the bus terminal. We took the bus home to Mt. Olives very proud of our adventure and feeling like residents and not tourists.

My last day was a memorable one. Everyone had gone and I had a whole day by myself because my flight will be at 10:00 P.M. tonight. Sr. Benedict of the community accompanied me to the Holy Places around the Mt. of Olives. We went first to the Mosque which has the little church of the Ascension. This is where Jesus was seen to have ascended into heaven. But you have to pay 5 shekels

to get in. Then down the street actually just in front of our convent is the Carmelite monastery that houses the Mount of the Our Father. Here Jesus was supposed to have taught the Our Father. Everywhere there are frames of the Our Father in all languages including Tagalog, Pampango, and Cebuano. Inside the crypt which houses the rock where Jesus must have sat, I prayed the Our Father in Tagalog and English. Then we went still further down to go to the Dominus Flevit—the Church located on the spot where Jesus looked down on Jerusalem and wept. There we met an American Franciscan Brother who explained the place to us. The altar 's background is the Golden Mosque in Jerusalem which was the Temple at that time. In front of the altar is a hen with chicks recalling Jesus' words saying that He would have wanted to gather the Jews like the hen gathers her chicks under its wings. Then another carving showed Christ predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and that no stone will be left upon a stone. And opposite it shows a carving where the Romans were razing the temple down to the ground—the fulfilment of Christ's prophecy. The whole small Church is shaped like a tear. From there we went further down to Gethsemani. On the way we passed the Orthodox church of the Gethsemani with its beautiful golden domes where a monastery of Orthodox nuns live. But we went on to the Catholic Church. The whole Church is dark and is very conducive to prayer. I kissed the rock where Jesus was supposed to have shed sweat of blood. As I sat in front of it, I was filled with such depth of feeling and such feeling of peace and unction that I stayed seated for sometime just being aware of the sensation. We passed by the gnarled olive trees in the garden that are about 2,000 years old. On the opposite side of the garden there is another small church which commemorates the arrest of Jesus and where Judas betrayed him with a kiss. In all these places I joined the sufferings and agony of our people especially the victims of typhoons, extrajudicial killings, unwanted disappearances etc. to the tears and agony of Christ. The last place we visited was the tomb of Mary which is not really a tomb because her body was assumed into heaven. But her body was placed here for three days. My guide told me that on the way here from the place where she "slept" which is now the Dormition abbey, a cripple touched her bier and was cured. Another thing that Sr. Benedict told me was that all these places from the Dormition Abbey, Bethany up to the Mount of Olives including where their convent stands used to be owned by Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary who was a very rich man. It was also here that Nicodemus went secretly to Jesus. So this Mount of Olives is really full of holy places and is the venue of many historical events of Christianity. I consider it a great grace that for 10 days I stayed here.

I have to go to lunch now and will prepare my luggage for my flight this evening. See you soon.

Lovingly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Mary John Mananzan OSB". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB