

## **Journey to Jesus' Footsteps**

Edited Journal of Holy Land Pilgrimage by Janice Donahue  
Lent, 2008

### **Day three: (Day one in Israel) February 23, 2008 Saturday**

(We lost a day!) After meeting our Israeli guide, "Yossi", and Druze driver, Nedal, (who lives in the Golan Heights), we stop for fruit, fruit smoothies, pastries at a Jaffa roadside shop. We are all thrilled to be there, try local fare, meet shop people, breathe the ocean air, and press our feet against the soil. So exciting. Everyone is smiling with the joy. We are here! It is real! The smoothie is delicious and refreshing. Wonderful pastry.

On to the Church of St. Peter in Jaffa, one of the 5 Holy Land churches that does not face east toward Jerusalem. Faces west-- to spread The Way to the Gentiles. Remember the early name for The Church: "The Way". How appropriate. Jesus said He was "the Way, the Truth, and the Light..." We read Acts 10:36--43 about Peter in Joppa, (Jaffa in Biblical times), raising Tabitha from the dead, converting many, staying with Simon the Tanner.

Next, up to Caesarea, the planned Roman town built by Herod the Great. On the way, Fr. Mike reads Acts, Chapter 10, the wonderful story in Caesarea of Peter and Cornelius, the devout centurion. The drive along the coastline is spectacular! Modern, clean, bright beaches, clear blue waters, refreshing and hopeful, promising nothing but goodness on this pilgrimage. God is smiling on us through His sunshine and eternal warmth. A beautiful beginning.

Someone notes that this is Israel's 60th anniversary of statehood. More reason to rejoice!

St. Paul spent 2 years in Caesarea, which was also the permanent home of the Roman governor of this land. Pontius Pilate's palace was here. He only traveled to Jerusalem when duty dictated. Fr. Mike reads to us about Paul in this city, starting with Acts 23:12. It is an interesting story concluding with Paul's departure for Rome (Ch 27)

Today's Caesarea is a modern beach town----Santa Barbara of The Middle East--- very attractive, inviting, expensive homes, wildflowers, and sandy soil. We arrive at the actual remains of ancient Caesarea. Astonishing! A spectacular job, excavating the area. I see the drawings of the intact city of Herod in my mind as we trace the remains, so visible and beautiful in their span and majesty. Their sun drenched stones expertly placed. We step into the amphitheatre, a source of pride and still in use by important musical artists in Israel today. The acoustics are demonstrated several times. Wow. No need for microphones or electronics. Refreshing. The original marble floor was green. We see some deep green stones, but among the remains are sparkling gray and black granite, gorgeous pink and black granite, pink and gray composite stones and white and gray marble. We see and touch with our own hands the sparkling white remains of

actual marble statues of the time, columns, column bases and capitals, some detailing from Herodian times to as late as the Byzantine period. Imagine! How skilled the craftsmen! Also, there is an exact replica of a most amazing archeological find: a stylus with the carved proclamation "In honor of Tiberius (Caesar) in time of Pontius Pilatus". Wow! I am in awe, in awe to see this with my own eyes. We all move through the area in quiet amazement and respect for the antiquity. The confirmation. The reality. To live to see and feel and realize such things in this life---it is a wonderful dream.

Back on the bus, we follow the coast north as we head to Mt. Carmel. I think of St. Therese, The Little Flower, and how she'd mystically speak of her desire for "her desert, her Carmel". What do we see as we drive along the coast?

Mustard seed bushes, many fields of cultivated rice, rows and rows of green houses and protected acres of banana palms, coastal hills, housing developments. Still surprisingly similar to Southern California.

Haifa is straight ahead, along the coastline, a bright, white high-rise city on the coast, shiny as a polished pearl. Sparkles like a diamond. This is the Israeli Silicon Valley, Yossi explains. Big signs: Microsoft, Google, Sony, Intel... This is Israel's third largest city. It appears to be a very pleasant place to live and work.

The weather is spectacular! At least 70 degrees F on the coast. Better than imagined. Big blue skies with wonderful fluffy clouds. From Haifa, the coast curves to the northwest so across the calm Mediterranean waters we can see Accra from Haifa. Accra was the site of the 4th Crusade.

Mt. Carmel is different than in my mind's eye. It is actually a cluster of hills between valley to the northeast and the coastal plain to the west. It appears, as we drive towards it, as a peninsula that extends into the sea. We are going to Mass with the Carmelites, Yossi tells us. This day is growing more exciting all the time. We drive to the top of a vantage point to view Mt. Carmel, the shrine, the port below. It is breathtaking!

We drive east now, towards Nazareth and The Galilee, It is soon green, hilly, with winding mountain roads, tons of evergreens! That's a surprise. We pass many groves of olive trees, a large herd of goats foraging on rocky ground amidst shrubs and trees and grasses. My heart rejoices. Each moment brings new discovery. Some chat a great deal. Guess they can keep up. I cannot. Too focused on all the new sights, old lessons read, putting it all together every moment. Don't want to miss the miracle of this hallowed land God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is enthralling.

We visit the peak of Mt. Carmel at the Discalced Carmelite Monastery atop it. I think of St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila and their struggle to reform the order. Those holy souls represent the Discalced Carmelites and one can feel so very close to them here in this place. The quiet outside seems to bring their voices forward. Inside the monastery, we climb the steep stone steps to the top, a wide patio up high in the sky with a heart-stopping first view of the Jezre'el Valley, Megiddo, The Valley of

Armageddon, mentioned in the Book of Revelation. How flat and vast, expanding far and wide in all directions. Now covered with fertile fields, crops of all kinds, this valley is called "Israel's Breadbasket". It feeds the entire nation. Israel could not feed itself were it not for this valley. It is a marvel, how the poor Jewish settlers from all over Eastern Europe and other parts of the world returned to this land and "made the desert bloom." It is a wonder. Appreciation and deep respect.

So much History here. So many battles. So many armies. In the 9th century B.C., Elijah defeated the 450 priests of Baal under wicked King Ahab on this very spot! ( 1 Kings, Chapter 18). Elijah could look across this valley, and see Mt. Tabor, where he would later appear to Peter, James, and John, with Our Lord Jesus and Moses. Finally, I find Mt. Tabor! In the 1700's, Napoleon Bonaparte stood where we are standing, atop this mountain, and surveyed the valley below, Yossi tells us. He proclaimed that all the armies of the world could gather in this one space. Perhaps, in the 18th century, that was true. It's amazing and awesome to consider.

Back in the bus, a little too soon, we head to Nazareth. Not a long drive. I ask Yossi about all the topped--off trees. He gives us a little lesson on the trees of today's Israel: In 1517, the Turks took over this land and denuded it by chopping the tops off every tree. Since statehood, the Israelis have a mandated program to reforest the land. For 60 years, untold numbers of trees have been planted everywhere, many not native to the land, (explaining the evergreen forests), not present in Biblical times, but useful today and flourishing.

I am curious about all the picnics I see taking place everywhere and anywhere there is a patch of green grass, along roadsides, in private orchards, everywhere we pass. I see no parks, just cars parked willy--nilly, wherever they can, with blankets thrown down or plastic chairs set up in groupings and families enjoying a casual feast outdoors. It is Sabbath. Jewish families are enjoying the day off. It is a pleasant and inexpensive way, I think, to enjoy the weekly holiday with the kids, grandparents, cousins, neighbors. And as so many people live in multifamily dwellings without yards or playgrounds, with the first bloom of spring, with the first sprouting of new grasses, it is an inviting way to pass an early spring--like day. It seems like a local pastime.

Wildflowers of many varieties are everywhere; purples, yellows, pinks, magentas, and bits of blue. We see blooming pink almond trees, silver--green olive groves, trees heavy with oranges, and many acres of spiky leafed mangos. The Galilee is, indeed, in bloom, just as Frommer's Guide promised. Isn't it wonderful! Of all the times and seasons we could have come to The Promised Land, we arrive when The Galilee blooms! Again, how great is God's goodness to us? The land is alive with rebirth. How joyously it welcomes us! The heart of it sings to us this beautiful day.

We arrive in Nazareth. I am not expecting how rugged, steep, mountainous this city and surrounds are. Not how I pictured it from King of Kings, where most scenes are set in dry, flat, brown and tan landscapes. These are mountains, green though

congested with buildings, most of which are multistory but low-lined in profile. Tight busy roads weave up the hillsides amidst much honking of impatient drivers.

We are filled with excitement. Nazareth! There are great vistas from various roadsides as we climb up the hill to our hotel, **Golden Crown**. As soon as we arrive, I become aware of my exhaustion. Can't wait for a meal, a shower, and a bed. For the first time on the trip, the reality was not quite up to the expectation. We were a little dismayed at the level of cleanliness of the hotel, particularly our room, which was unwelcoming in its need for a thorough cleaning. While I remind myself I must adapt to local custom and sensibility, the cleaning of our room before we can set anything out, overcomes the initial annoyance and becomes a matter of hilarity. A bit of culture shock. There isn't a surface that lacks a sticky, dusty or slimy substance. Something red smeared on switch plates. We make good use of our tissues and wet wipes in short order and resolve to drink nothing from the bathroom glasses with curly hair inside. I adhesive tape shut the sliding glass door with broken lock and pull down the uncertain bedspreads before falling on pristine sheets in a very comfortable bed! We adapt and adjust. We are in Nazareth! All is well.

Joining the rest of the group for dinner, we find an interesting and delightful buffet filled with salads, my favorite hummus, and the most wonderful pita bread on earth, fluffy, pillowy, delicious! We are a happy little group: Fathers Mike, John, Sonny, Henry, Brother Steve, Sandy, Elizabeth, Jersey, Viola, Jim, Linda, Melinda, Gene, Ed, Marilyn, Mom (June) and me. I remember to drink tons of fresh cold water tonight and realize how much more we need to drink the next day.

Only dark spot, British Airways lost Viola's luggage. We can't believe it. Surely, it will arrive by morning.

It is the end of Day One in The Land Where Jesus walked and I am filled with wonder and joy. I can hardly sleep.