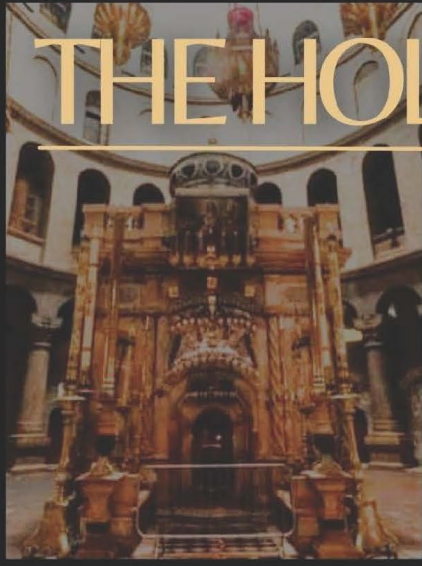


THE HOLY LAND



VIA DOLOROSA

"...HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR SINS,
CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITY.
HE BORE THE PUNISHMENT THAT MAKES US
WHOLE,
BY HIS WOUNDS WE WERE HEALED".
(ISAIAH 53:5)

09.29.2023

VIA DOLOROSA. CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER.

My dear fellow Pilgrims,

We - the pilgrims from the Holy Land - have come back safely home. However, our digital journey will still continue for about several more days. I have had to pause the daily reflection because our days were packed with so many meaningful visits (too much to take in!), and getting a wifi coverage was a little bit of a challenge.

We continue the reflection of our journey...

We walked the Via Dolorosa early in the morning of Tuesday, at 530AM. Meditating and walking the "Sorrowful Way" or the Way of the Cross united us with the suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and with all the sufferings of the world.

We begin to follow the pilgrimage by listening with our hearts the voice of our shepherd Saint John Paul II, in his reflection on the *Way of the Cross at the Colosseum*, 2000:

We are here

because we are convinced that the Way of the Cross of the Son of God was not simply a journey to the place of execution. We believe that every step of the Condemned Christ, every action and every word, as well as everything felt and done by those who took part in this tragic drama, continues to speak to us. In his Suffering and Death, too, Christ reveals to us the truth about God and man...

We want to concentrate on the full meaning of that event, so that what happened may speak with new power to our minds and hearts, and become the source of the grace of a real sharing in it.

To share means to have a part.

What does it mean to have a part in the Cross of Christ? It means to experience, in the Holy Spirit, the love hidden within the Cross of Christ. It means to recognize, in the light of his love, our own cross.

It means to take up that cross once more and, strengthened by this love, to continue our journey...

To journey through life, in imitation of the one who endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

What was personally significant in the way of the Cross was what I felt when we reached Calvary. Upon reaching the chapel where the Rock of Calvary was situated, I felt a certain heaviness in my heart that I still - looking back - cannot describe. For me it was definitely a gift - albeit bitter, not a pleasant one; it was a taking part in His sorrowful way. There, I recognized in the heaviness of the effects of His love for us - the dimmed "light of His (suffering) love" that St John Paul II writes to us about. In this place, I recognize the light of His love in the sufferings and pain of our own personal crosses. At that moment, I was given the gift "to take up that cross once more..." so as to continue with a foretaste of His suffering love on this spiritual journey set before me.

The Rock of Golgotha. "Here is the culmination of all our Ways of the Cross. Here, Mary is represented, her heart pierced by a sword. Here, we meditate on the seven words of Christ from the cross. Here, emotion often overwhelms. The pilgrim kneels at the foot of the Crucified. The pilgrim is grieved to touch the stone where Jesus' Body once lay, to place all suffering and sorrow at the feet of the Lord, to beg forgiveness for all the suffering one has caused. Here, Jesus gave his life for us, spilled his blood, the blood and water that flowed from his pierced side. (Magnificat, Golgotha: The Memorial of the Passion, p. 265).

Another gift was the celebration of the Holy Mass at the very tomb - the empty tomb of our Lord! It wasn't emptiness, but the fulness of joy and hope that I felt celebrating with my priests. Jesus rose from the dead - He lives!

Your pilgrim priest,
Fr. JC Merino