

A Pilgrimage

(12th-25th April 1999, with Dom Placid Meylinck & the church of Christ the King, Cockfosters)

History, Thoughts, Prayers

Day 1: (travelling): Pilgrims

Remember **pilgrims of all times**: their enthusiasm, piety, loyalty, curiosity, and courage: all their genuine faith and joy.

The good intentions of those who urged them on. Pity and sorrow for what went wrong: for those who died or were killed on the way; the distortion of faith to intolerance, enthusiasm mis-guided to mob violence.

The need for forgiveness for ignorant killers; for our share (the share in it we might have had if we were there) in the slaughter of innocents;

and pity for the suffering which we also share (because we might have had to share it), of all who were injured in war, or by malice, or by chance.

Remember all those of good will in all faiths, through all past times; and those who still gain strength of spirit from the past, from holy places, from other pilgrims in the past, from shared beliefs and companionship.

Think of the inspiration for good from relics and symbols: sacred objects, sacred images, sacred places. Things that help to focus the imagination; to help different imaginations to share experience.

Remember that these symbols, however inspired, are *our* creation, that the mind has many roads to God. Let us respect and love the traditions we have inherited, but not despise other inspirations, or what to us may seem strange or childish. Keep minds and hearts open, to what could be good in all things.

Help us to concentrate, to be aware of what's around us, to be ready to learn, to remember to remember; to allow the spirit to reach us. Let us feel part of all humanity, of all history; let us accept that mankind is imperfect; let us not let our faith be shaken by cruelty or frivolity or strangeness; let us not lose sight of our human destiny, which is to grow in understanding.

Day 2: Tiberias; Sea of Galilee; villages, hills and lake. Christ calling the apostles; teaching; feeding the crowds.

Think of the **humanity of Christ**, and his message in everyday life: that transformation (transfiguration) of anything is possible.

Not to be surprised, to be ready for anything. Not to let one good thing (family, work) stand in the way of a greater good (a call to follow him).

Let us *lift up our eyes to the hills*, accepting beauty, and danger, in **nature** (sunrise and also earthquakes), as part of our own destiny on earth.

Remember the **battles** between conflicting powers that have taken place in this land, and around this lake; and the suffering this brought to ordinary people in its towns and villages, before and since the time of Christ. (Jews vs. Canaanites, Assyrians vs. Israelites, Jews vs. Romans, Crusaders vs. Muslims, British vs. Turks, Jews vs. Arabs -- these are only some, and not counting civil wars...)

May we not let the darkness in history put out the light on our minds. May what is good in humankind -- compassion, unselfishness, imagination, respect for work -- overcome human-made barriers and hatred. May the Spirit work in us, in the human race, to help us work together.

Remembering Christ's teaching in **parables**, human stories with more than human meanings, help us to see human behaviour as a means to good, and to understanding what goodness is.

May people's struggles to survive and to live together, their social conventions, their commercial dealings, and their pleasures, all lead to good in their own ways.

Day 3: Galilee to Nazareth; Cana (the first miracle); Mount Tabor (the Transfiguration)

Think of **Christ in history**: his background, family, Jewishness; how he fitted in and what he rejected. How he dealt with secular life ("render unto Caesar"). How clear he was about priorities (even home town and family less important than the soul).

Think of the historic landscape he came from: events around Mount Tabor told in the Bible: Deborah; Saul & David; prophets. **A holy land.** Mary's life, Joseph's life in this land, here.

The complexity of **his own times**: the wars and massacres then within recent memory, the violent rule of Herod; the mixed populations and languages; a different culture imposed by Roman rule (Sepphoris, a Roman city, so near to Nazareth).

Think of how he studied **the Law** (Torah) and saw his mission to fulfil it. The **Transfiguration**, when he is seen in company with the Prophets.

Let us see him both in his time and outside it. Recognise the complexities he knew, and the strong tradition he was born in: the "letter" of the laws of that tradition, and how he added to and transformed it.

Be grateful for scholars, theologians, interpreters, archaeologists, in the Jewish and Christian traditions and in others; in Christ's time and since, who help us to understand.

May we be able to see the priorities, to recognise new forms of the spirit; to recognise visionaries, visions, vision, when we read them or see them, and when they come to us in our own experience.

Day 4: Caesarea (a Roman town), the first Gentile converts; Acre (the Crusader kingdom)

The old world: its change and decay and upheavals; exiles, immigration, invasions, colonialists. The cruelty, ignorance, and dishonesty; the narrow outlooks, unthinking obedience and irresponsible rebellions. The human suffering all this has meant, and which continues in our time.

And their opposites. Good pagans (Cornelius the Roman, welcomed by Peter.). Honest politicians. Hardworking agents for change, secular and religious, and for the relief of suffering. The **endurance** of the saints:

St Paul (2 years under house-arrest in Caesarea) using the system, writing his inspired letters, inventing a new world. His faith, patience, intelligence, inspiration, use of words.

St Peter (his vision in Caesarea, "God is no respecter of persons") accepting change (to include Gentiles), keeping alive the Christ he knew, understanding what the Spirit told him. His humanity in the Gospels, simplicity, directness, his shouldering of (perhaps unwelcome) responsibility.

The Crusaders: ask forgiveness, yes, for their cruelty and ignorance. But also allow respect: for their military virtues (as in Jews & Muslims too); their faith and loyalty, their enthusiasm, their ideals of service.

We need understanding of human failings, human nature, its tendency to violence and confusions (in the Middle Ages as now).

Remember the wise and selfless among them (as among other colonialists since), with sympathy for the difficulties of control, of compromise, of common sense, in times of ignorance and simple passions, group devotion *and* group hysteria.

Have pity for ideals with fatal flaws, bound to fail; for people needing to learn the hard way. Remember Christ forgiving (and not forgiving).

Day 5: Caesarea Philippi, mountains, castles; the river Jordan (baptism site)

Worldly power. Frontiers, minorities, prisoners of war, martyrs (the slaves; the captives killed in the Roman theatre at Philippi). War, destruction, deportations, over 4000 years.

No complacency. No doing evil in a supposed good cause. No thinking injustice will be forgotten, nor loss of homelands. All these are our responsibility too ("there but for the grace of God go I...").

But we who make troubles also can repair damage. May we not despair, not think it is not worth trying.

Remember the promise after the Flood, the value of all life to God (who does not forget either). That it is never too late for rebirth.

The **river Jordan**, symbol of crossing from one kind of life to a new one: of rebirth in baptism.

John the Baptist, the forerunner: his doubts, perhaps despair, shut in a dungeon in a fortress, falling foul of the Old World.

Think of life *in extremis*, under fire, in terrible conditions, *and* of courage and hope. Christ can have had no illusions that life was easy (even if "his yoke was light").

Day 6 free (the church of the Beatitudes; churches by the shore --Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Greek Orthodox)

Day 7: Megiddo ("Armageddon"); Abu Ghosh (near where the Ark of the Covenant was kept); Emmaus.

Travel. Places of **symbols**, "**stations**" on journeys.

Metaphors, poetry, prophecy. Rites & symbolic acts: the power of words and images. "Holy Writ".

Armageddon -- the end of Time. **The Ark of the Covenant** -- God planning the world. The **Emmaus** story -- tradition explained and a new tradition born.

Teach us to distinguish different kinds of words and knowledge.

Not taking man-made symbols too literally (which is a distortion of categories); but recognising the power of imagination, visions, stories and images, the accumulations of time; and the ways they can be helpful to us.

Let us understand how it's in human nature to create (and combine) stories and legends (like the "Christian apocrypha" story of the Christ-child making sparrows out of clay; or St George and the Dragon, the Devil as a dragon).

Learn to understand, even when this seems destructive (turning the Greek gods to demons).

Megiddo / Armageddon / the Apocalypse: Mysteries, magic numbers, folklore, esoteric visions -- don't let these beguile or terrify us, only remember how this kind of language comes about, and when, and what it is trying to describe.

Give thanks for the archaeologists and **interpreters** dispelling false mysteries; and for **poets** expressing -- and translating -- the true ones, in prophecies and psalms and dramas.

Help us to keep the categories clear, to understand the reasons for what seem foolish, over-simplified, even dangerous ideas; to oppose them without scorn or hatred.

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Emmaus (or Abu Ghosh): on the road to Jerusalem; on the pilgrim's road "going up" (*aliyah*) to a holy place. An ancient, continuing, symbol: this one perhaps the one most widely shared, and for longest, in the world. The **Ark of the Covenant**: a man-made object representing the faith of a whole people (lost, found and lost again, but its meaning enduring).

Think of how both old and new symbols, new dogmas, came from both from West and East. Think how Christianity has used them, and evolved. **Angels, Mary, the Eucharist.....** With new language, new church buildings...

Don't let us be time-snobs, finding truth and beauty only in the old (*or* only in the new).

Let new symbols, new language, new buildings, teach us humility (at their inadequacy -- the best we can do); respect (at their good faith); and confidence (at their power to help).

Nor any kind of snob... Remember **King David** not standing on dignity, dancing as the Ark was carried up: the same man who composes Psalms.

"I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the Lord: our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem..."

Remember Christ not despising any company, going along with traditions, patiently explaining, talking, weeping, telling stories, making jokes, eating and drinking.

Day 8: (Mount of Olives): Jerusalem: outside the walls (the "Upper Room"); the old city (Wailing Wall, Temple Mount); Bethlehem].

Holy places: the **Mount of Olives** facing both ways, overlooking city and desert.

Christ lamenting, looking across to the **Temple Mount**, seeing its fate (30 yrs after); and then the Jews lamenting, and later the Muslims, and Christians in turn -- all the dispossessed, seeing their holy places usurped or destroyed.

This hill has seen it all. Roman siege engines, Crusader towers, Turkish guns, the British army. Brigands and guerrillas. Everyone's graveyards and funerals.

Travellers of all times are exalted by the view, by the morning and evening light. Christ went there often, walked across and over from Bethany; looked down on Herod's vast temple, shining white marble and gold.

Jerusalem: so many layers, such long history, so much human experience. Rivalries, intolerance, but also devotion and pity.

Think of those who occupied it, and who lost it, became minorities, became outsiders: Jebusites, Jews, Eastern Christians, Muslims, Latins... and all who lost their homes in modern times. Remember them all: all children of God...

Mount Zion: the name that became a symbol for all time, for the city and the country, the "City of God", the state of the soul. A *sublimation* of history.

A symbol we created from sacred myths, of the eternal meeting the human in one place: Paradise and Calvary; Adam, Abraham, Solomon, Christ; Eve and Mary.

Think of the power to move us of these fusions of ideas; (and their danger if mis-used).

The Upper Room: think of **memory**, how it accumulates and selects and multiplies.

Think of it as another way through the jungle of history; "true or false" (the facts) being less true (in terms of human experience) than the truth in our minds of what *could* have happened, or could still happen (all the possibilities);

Truth that contains what has been believed in the past, and is still believed;

and things made in homage to what has been imagined ("**David's Tomb**").

Understand too why it's suitable to have a holocaust reminder on this site: the opposite, the negative pole, of the love and illumination that were born in this place.

The Old City: walls, gates, buildings... Think of the physical power of stones that have been given significance (the Wailing Wall, the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock, the Sepulchre), for the human need to see and touch.

(Day 8)

Bethlehem: another sort of pilgrimage, to *people*. David son of Jesse, the Holy Family, the Magi, the Shepherds in the field. Martha and Mary not far away at Bethany. The mothers whose children Herod killed. The scholar St Jerome. A place of stories about different kinds of people in contact with the sacred. (Perhaps what's actually preserved has even less importance here.)

Day 9: *Ein Kerem (the Visitation; John the Baptist); Yad Vashem (the holocaust memorial)*]

Elizabeth and Mary: women together; mothers.

John the Baptist: a heroic but in some ways a shadowy figure, once his great task was done; knowing perhaps despair before his horrible end; loved and mourned by Christ.

The Holocaust: *PECCATA MUNDI*.

The special case of the exterminated Jews: the worst sin on record. The most atrocious because a perversion, a negation, of civilized life (of the cities, our cities in Europe which many Jews shared; we being -- or we who could have been -- the privileged citizens who had every reason to know what we were doing).

Think of the gifts from the **Jewish tradition:** how much we all inherit from it, and owe to it: in laws, morality, public life, music, art, literature, above all in the Christian religion.

Did Christ foresee it all? the separation, the persecutions, the horror? He was *there too*.

Pray to be saved from fatal human tendencies: belligerence, cruelty, selfishness, inertia, lack of imagination.

That Christianity may be strong enough to detect and combat these in itself.

And that its branches may not forget their root in this land.

May religion (all religion) not betray itself, learn from the secular, learn tolerance, not forget its roots in common humanity.

Day 10 : Judaea, the desert (Dead Sea, Masada); Jericho

The background to Christ's drama. Wilderness, danger, extremes of geography and of human minds: violence in nature and in people. (Joshua slaughtering Jericho; the victim helped by the Good Samaritan; the atrocities of the Roman-Jewish war; the Masada siege; ascetics in Qumran and the Byzantine monasteries. Persian massacres, Bedouin bandits...) Extremes: "beyond the pale" of "civilized" life -- beyond humanity.

"Lest we forget" who's in charge -- remember Job and the Voice from the Whirlwind ("Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" "Be still then and know that I am God.")

The Temptation in the Wilderness -- huge simplicities, hugely simple answers (*"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.."*)

Think of civilizations (like ancient **Jericho**) that are outside "our time" -- their immense antiquity -- mysteries in the past and for the future. Let us be awed but not cast down by immensity. Remember how small we are, yet how (through Christ, through shared humanity) we see more than scientific measurements and the processes of history.

And think how human stories (Zacchaeus in the tree) also take place in Jericho...

Day 11: Jerusalem: different churches , the Via Dolorosa

Think of **the drama of Christ's life** transformed into **ritual worship**; and all this has led to: Art, forms of words, music, communal acts.

Think of how worship evolves: the power of repetition; the importance and difficulty of keeping alive the meaning, inventing new forms *and* keeping old forms in their places, respecting the value of both.

Give thanks for art, skill, man-made beauty, *and* for simple enthusiasm: for highly complicated art (like sculpture and choir singing), and easy art (like familiar hymn-tunes, Christmas cribs). Things made to reach single souls *and* people united.

Think of how art and ritual, drama and reality, add to each other in the Gospels:

Gethsemane: Christ seen at his most human, dreading what was coming; meeting his arrest heroically, fulfilling the prophecies..

Via Dolorosa: the horrific human experience, and (as it were by chance, representing all of us) the different kinds of people who witnessed it, and their actions: the lamenting women, Veronica's kindness, Simon of Cyrene roped in to help, the Roman soldiers, the thieves. Joseph of Arimathea, seeing it from inside the Establishment.

Think of what happened at the **Sepulchre**, and afterwards: the mixture of **supernatural and natural**. The body disappearing without disturbing the graveclothes, passing through doors; and allowing itself to be touched, asking for something to eat.

Think of **churches** (all churches), their buildings and their rituals. Their helpfulness, their unhelpfulness. Their beauty, their lack of beauty, their ugliness.

How they represent all the forms organised religion can take (in all religions): puritans, ritualists; simple faith, intellectual visions.

How they fit in with society, or take brave stands against the tide of society.

Remember the tendencies that we all share, with our different temperaments, to quarrel, to separate, to cling blindly to old customs and resist co-operation, to become obsessed by details.

Sympathise with the **ancient churches** now diminished, clinging to old rites, preserving an antique language, feeling threatened and sensitive of their rights to share in the holy places. Respect their special gifts which we could learn from. Respect their belief in the literal truth of holy sites and relics.

Pray for all **clergy** and people dedicated to a life of religion, especially here.

May they (and may we) respect both: the power and beauty of old traditions, *and* the necessity (for peace, and human solidarity, and for the glory of God) of being generous and offering to share.

And remember the **church of Rome**, its long history, often so rich, so powerful in the world, so tempted to worldliness. Pray for change, and unchangingness, at the right times.

Day12: free day (museums: the Dead Sea scrolls; delicate plasterwork from Islamic times, the "Garden Tomb"; the city walls, markets, different churches surviving ,traces from different powers and occupations)

Day13: Jaffa, Tel Aviv

Jaffa: the old Joppa of **Acts:** think of saintly people setting out to make a new world. Paul, Barnabas, all the missionaries. Whatever it may have seemed then, it is they who eventually made our lives what they are; we come from this land too.

Tel Aviv: modern life (modern Israel). We need tolerance and non-tolerance. *A time to fight, to build, to love, to dance... & to refrain from these.* (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs... **Jewish wisdom.**)

We need a guide in the new wilderness of **modern life**, with its assaults of triviality and malice and thoughtlessness. Dangers from manipulation and from random accidents. Politicization, polarization, depersonalization. The inhumanity of systems and of anarchy.

The opportunities and the troubles of **cities:** art, comfort, education, co-operation; and conflicts, loneliness, ignorance, deprivation, poisoning of nature.

Let us learn from our mistakes. May the world survive; may souls survive and grow.

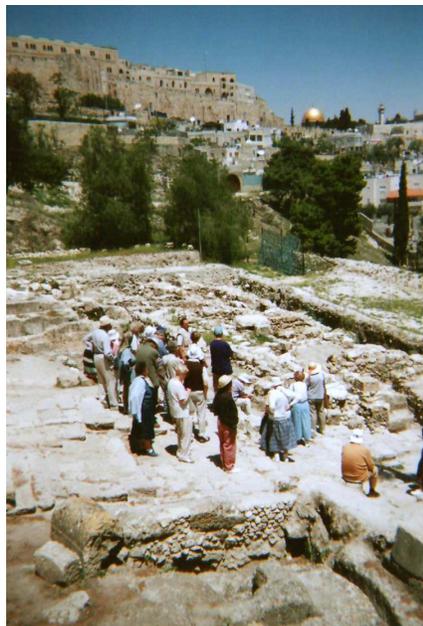
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April 1999- December 2009



The Sea of Galilee



The Garden of Gethsemane



At Jerusalem (showing the Dome of the Rock)