

Journey of Pilgrim

Fr. Richard Au

The first day that I stepped foot on the Promised Land, i.e., Israel was in October 1991. Our family has done sufficient travel from India to Hong Kong and visiting various countries along our way. I also have been travelling for business before I entered the Seminary of Christ the King, where I began studying for the Holy Priesthood in 1988. Our family has been blessed to have known the world with all its beauty, but also, its defects. However, nothing could have prepared the day that I saw the massive walls of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is no longer just a name in the bible, but in front of me, I see the mighty hand of God.

How often we think of the Bible, its names and places, as some museum pieces. Most likely, those biblical places belong to the human past. But, in reality, they are real and God really had touched upon these places. Jesus, our Lord and God, had walked on the Holy Land 2,000 years ago, but He is still in a unique way can be discovered there. We know that we can see the mighty hand of God in His magnificent creation in nature which He has created. By extraordinary gift of faith, we also realize that He remains in His Holy Catholic Church, especially, in the Tabernacle. But, most people who had gone on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land also felt the Holy Presence of Jesus by following His footsteps, i.e., walking in the Holy Land.

Most of the people have their favorite place where they were touched by the Presence of Jesus in an extraordinary way, provided you have a good tour guide and Chaplain. Of course, we don't go to the Holy Land as some thrilled seeking experience or even gluttonous for spiritual experiences. That should not be a goal. Nonetheless, many pilgrims will bring memories home with them that they can treasure for a life time.

But, what are pilgrims? Pilgrims are those searching for God in this life, but in fact, it is really God seeking for us. Pilgrims are those who have faith. They realize that we are not here on this earth randomly, but we know we are here for a purpose. Our ultimate goal is to get to heaven. In joy and in sadness, we try to see the face of Jesus to help us to fix our eyes on the goal toward our true home. Over the centuries, Catholics realize that we are all on a journey toward heaven. They looked for means that can help them. Of course, Jesus gave us the most wonderful Sacraments to assist us. But, living out our faith is not always so easy since we are more focus on the physical than the spiritual, after the Fall. To aid their search for God and to keep focus on heaven, many people have started walking and visiting the Holy Sites where God has

touched our fallen world, i.e., where Jesus had walked and performed many miracles. Of course, pilgrims visit the sites where Jesus was born, died, and rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Pilgrims are not meant to journey alone. Some has gone by themselves. Yet, pilgrimage is usually done in a group to signify the dimension of the Church together as the Body of Christ sharing our faith together. Is it easy to stay together as a group for 10 to 14 days. No, of course not. But, here in the group of pilgrims is where we learn to exercise charity and patience. Knowing charity is not good enough. By our virtuous actions as a group, we show the great love in the world is what Jesus did for us. Inspired by Jesus' holy examples, we are willing to bear the cross of Christ, especially, with those whom we may not get along. Pilgrimage is a journey, a sharing of faith, a test, and above all, an encounter with Jesus as His People.

Many people have said that we don't need to go so far to see Jesus because we can just go to our local parish Church where Jesus is always found in the Tabernacle. True. It is not for everyone. At the same time, it doesn't mean that God does not call some to go to the places where He has left his footprints.

How often I thought of the immense privilege of bringing a group of pilgrims to the Holy Land. Among billions of people in the world, our group of 50 pilgrims has the unique blessings to share the road which Jesus had walked. I am always overwhelmed with God's goodness to let our pilgrims to be intermediaries to pray for our loved ones, our world, esp. for our homeland.

In the final document from the World Congress of the Pastoral Care of Pilgrimages and Shrines on September 30, 2010 by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerants, the Vatican mentioned the following in line with Pope Benedict XVI: "In the pilgrimage to a shrine and in the life's journey, pilgrims uncover their frailty. As a paradox, by welcoming God's grace and action in their limitations, persons achieve their perfection. In this journey, the pilgrim needs to be accompanied. The accompaniment that is a peculiar feature of a pilgrim can be offered at the beginning of the journey, during its course or at the arrival at the shrine. In this manner, it begins a process of passing from "walking" to "recognising" that God is waiting for him/her there. Thus, the shrine manifests itself as a privileged time and place to discover something God has already given us, as one of the ways He uses to come to meet us."

朝聖之旅

歐健明神父

在1991年10月當我第一天踏足聖地 - 現在的以色列，耶路撒冷、白冷及其他城市就不單是聖經上的地方名字，在我眼前，我看見天主教在歷史上全能的塵跡。在入修院之前，我們一家人有不少的旅遊經歷，如由印度去香港時順道遊覽不少國家和出差公幹，因而看到這世界的美好，也看到欠缺的一面。然而這也不能減少當我親眼看到耶路撒冷宏偉城垣時的讚歎。

通常看到聖經上人名或地名，我們會聯想到一些博物館展品或是屬於過去的歷史遺跡。其實，這都是可觸摸到的，並有天主當時臨在的痕跡。耶穌 - 我們的主基督 - 曾踏遍了聖地，卻仍存留著蛛絲馬跡讓我們追尋。天主無處不在，如目睹這宏偉的大自然，我們就看到天主的大能；在教堂的聖體櫃中，我們知道主耶穌基督天天跟我們在一起；而到聖地朝聖，隨著基督的足印漫遊聖地，更可領略到祂親臨同行的感受。

倘若有好的導遊和神師帶領，每個朝聖者都有可能在不同的地方接觸到天主。當然，我們不可期望增取一些人生或特別的體驗或靈性上重大的收獲而去聖地。然而，很多朝聖者也會帶著個人的意願同去。

誰是朝聖者？他們是要尋找生命中的天主，事實上是天主教在尋找他們。朝聖者是有信德的。他們明白到人並不是隨意地生在世，卻是有目的的。我們的終向是天國。無論是開心或悲傷的時刻，我們應盡力去朝向基督，目光專注著真正的家鄉。耶穌已賜給我們奇妙的聖事來幫助我們達到目的。但要活出信德的生活並不容易，因為人都注重物質多於靈性 - 特別在人類有原罪之後。為幫助尋找天主和去天國的道路，很多人開始了朝

聖之旅 - 走耶穌走過和行神跡的地方，也到訪坐在聖父右邊的主耶穌的出生、犧牲、復活及升天的地方。

有些人喜歡個人的性質去朝聖。朝聖最好是一組人同去才可表現出教會的團結，作為基督的支體，一起分享我們的信仰。一組人一起相處十多日是否很容易？當然不易！但這是很好的機會去實踐分享和忍耐。在這短暫的相處中，可增進人與人的關係，融洽和團友的生活，互相代禱，從而增強福傳的力量。朝聖是一個旅程、信德的分享、考驗和最重要的是面對耶穌。

或許有人認為不必那麼遠去才見到耶穌，因為祂就在我們教堂的聖體櫃內。誠然，這是因人而異。與此同時，這不表示天主沒有召叫一些人去走祂留下的足跡！可帶領朝聖團到聖地是何等的恩賜！在全球十億的華人中，天主召選了這四十多位朝聖者，帶著獨特的恩寵踏上耶穌走過的路。我非常慶幸能藉天主的恩典去令我們的朝聖者作中保去為我們所愛的人、世界和「家鄉」祈禱。

*「在去朝聖和人生之旅中，朝聖者會顯露了他們的脆弱。然而在局限時接受到天主的恩寵可令人達至完美。在旅程中，朝聖者應互相扶持。這朝聖者獨有的特色會在旅程開始時、過程中或到達聖地時顯示出來。從而開始由『同行』進而『認同』到是天主教在等待著我們。因此，朝聖是特別的時間地點去尋找天主已賜給我們的恩寵。」

*(翻譯自 the final document from the World Congress of the Pastoral Care of Pilgrimages and Shrines on September 30, 2010 by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerants)

