

## Introductory Talk #2

# A City of Prayer: Jerusalem



## For Personal Reflection & Prayer

- What would I most like to see and do in Jerusalem, if I were able to go now in person?
- What makes the city of Jerusalem attractive to me?
- What am I looking for as a virtual pilgrim this Lent? What do I desire to change, leave behind, grow in?

*Take these considerations to the Lord in prayer, asking for light and strength.*

## Offer a prayer inspired by the words of Scripture:

*I rejoiced, when they said to me:*

*Let us go to the House of the Lord!*

*And now our feet are standing*

*Within your gates, Jerusalem!*

*Psalm 122*

## Why Make a Pilgrimage to Jerusalem?

**By Franciscan Friar, Fr. Artimeo Vitores, OFM**

Jerusalem is the heart of the Holy Land, the synthesis of the action of God for the good of the whole of humanity. John Paul II expressed this in very moving words: “How many memories and images and how much passion and great mystery surround the word Jerusalem! For us as Christians, it represents the geographical point of union between God and men, between eternity and history.”



In antiquity, especially in the Holy Land, the pilgrimage had mostly a penitential function, also due in part to the difficulties that such a mission involved: long and difficult journeys, discomfort, political problems... Pilgrims were animated by very deep faith and were even ready to die, which sometimes happened in the course of their journey. The pilgrimage was also an opportunity to expiate their sins, which was shown symbolically when they replaced their ordinary clothes by those of the pilgrim, the expression of their wishes...

The most important thing of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem is the interior decision to answer the call of the Spirit in a personal way, like a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, the pilgrimage is also **“a path of conversion”**: the pilgrim has the chance to live out the experience of the prodigal son, he who knows sin, the harshness of the ordeal and repentance and the sacrifice of the journey, but who also knows the embrace of the merciful Father who leads him back to life (cf. Luke 15,24). In this process of “life change” to be oriented towards God, participation in the sacrament of reconciliation will be required, where the pilgrim realizes his sin, confesses his faults and receives the grace and pity of the Lord...

**Listening to the Lord from Jerusalem.** A fundamental experience of the pilgrim must also be listening, because “the word of the Lord [shall go forth] from Jerusalem” (Is 2:3). The Holy Land is an integral part of the process of understanding the historic word of God, who impressed his tent in Jacob and took the inheritance of Israel, which became established in Zion, putting down roots in the midst of a glorious nation. This word was converted into the Jewish flesh of Jesus and became Gospel, destined to spread, “starting from Jerusalem”, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). All the territories of the Holy Land form the **“geography of salvation”** where God, through his son Jesus, made its history. The Holy Land is, according to the expression coined by Renan, the Fifth Gospel.

In the Holy Land, the pilgrim is in a privileged position to listen to the word of God, as these are the places where the word took shape. Paul VI said that the Holy Places are “the school where understanding the life of Jesus begin, or the school of the Gospel”, because they let the Christian make direct contact with the environment where, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). **In the Holy Land the Gospel itself has a different echo.**

**The words of the “Russian pilgrim”** fit both ancient and modern pilgrims: he said, “by the Grace of God I am a man and a Christian, by my deeds a great sinner, by condition the humblest of pilgrims, a homeless person who wanders from place to place. My only property is a bag slung over my shoulder with a little dry bread, and under my shirt I carry the Holy Bible. I have no other belongings” (Diary of a Russian pilgrim)...





**The Bible thus has to be every pilgrim's principal guide.** On his return home, the pilgrim becomes an evangelizer, a spokesman of the "Gospel of the Holy Land"— as Jesus and his disciples did when they travelled down the roads of Palestine announcing the gospel of salvation – he will be an "itinerant messenger of Christ", repeating like Peter and John "It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4,20)...

**The pilgrim is ready to meet Christ in his brothers.** Like the disciples of Emmaus who, thanks to their charitable insistence, received the gift of seeing Christ risen: "As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. " (Luke 24: 28-29), the pilgrim will also obtain the fruits of his journey only if it is animated by charity.

Charity is revealed first of all as God's love: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another." (I John 4: 11) Charity must therefore be put into practice during the journey, helping those in need, sharing food, time and hope. Charity is also practiced in offerings to the poor and in helping invalid pilgrims. The primitive Christian community had "only heart" and St. Paul helped "the poor of Jerusalem" making a collection for them.

It is only with these attitudes of the soul that the pilgrim will have the chance to meet Christ in the Holy City. This encounter is the very reason of the journey to Jerusalem, as well as the dream of every Christian...

<https://www.custodia.org/en/why-pilgrimage>

