

Notre Dame de Sion
“SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”
Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem

Ein Karem, Thursday, 26 May 2016

The month of May arrived with beautiful weather, which turned the garden into a Paradise of flowers. The vegetables that were planted and cared for by Lucia will eventually be ready for harvesting, and at this point look wonderful!

We celebrated many feasts this month: on the 1st of May the birth of Alphonse in 1814, then on the 6th of May his death in 1884; 100 years later, on that same day in 1984, the new constitution of the Congregation was approved; we also remembered the 160 years since the arrival of the first sisters of Sion in Jerusalem, in 1856.

Juliana's input during this month was based on the Constitution's chapter on prayer. Our reflection on it during our day of recollection called us to deepen our prayer life, which Theodore calls “the breath of the Soul” because religious life depends on the fidelity to prayer (Book 4, p. 136). In the supplement to his *Memoirs* (p. 56), Fr. Theodore called his sisters to give at least a half-hour to prayer before beginning their work.

Another important step was when Theodore chose the name for the Congregation. How did that happen? Under what circumstances did Fr. Theodore adopt the name “Daughters of Sion”? We learned that one day when he went to pray ... (cf. *Memoirs* p. 110).

In Jerusalem, ten days before Pentecost, the Catholic Christian community celebrated Mass at the Sanctuary of the Ascension which is on top of the Mount of Olives, to commemorate the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. On the floor of that crusader chapel, there is a slab of stone imprinted with a set of footprints, which the tradition of the place suggests may be the footprints of Christ.

One of our outings this month was to visit the Zoo. We do appreciate that the Zoo provides opportunities for people to make the acquaintance of these marvellous creatures of God's creation that we might otherwise never see in real life. However, our dominant impression was unfortunately that, though innocent of any wrong-doing, they appeared doomed by humanity to imprisonment for life. We felt sorry for these animals who are so restricted in their movements and in their natural behaviour, in this way of life behind the glass and iron bars that are required to protect the visitors who observe and at times annoy them.

During this month we studied the beginnings of the Bible, with Fr. Lionel. We looked at how translations are handed down to us today, we asked questions about who determined which books are included in the canon and which ones are not. We learned that it is the community of the faithful who first made these decisions about sixteen centuries ago.

In the last part of the month we studied Church history in relation to Judaism with Mark Walsh, who is an associate of Sion. We became more aware of what it means when the Church speaks of Judaism and Christianity as siblings, which implies having the same mother or origin. An important aspect of that relationship is the fact that the larger part of our Scriptures (the “Hebrew Scriptures” or “First Testament,” often referred to as “The Old Testament”) comes from the Jewish community, and the New Testament writings are Jewish accounts of the Messiah, whom they awaited. We learned that in the early decades of Jewish-Christian relations, believing in the Messiah did not exclude you from Judaism until you began to worship the Messiah as God.



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Our last event during this month was our “mini-chapter.” The Jerusalem community of apostolic sisters along with representatives of the contemplative sisters gathered in the Novitiate House for an afternoon and evening to study and discuss the reports prepared for the General Chapter of the Congregation which is to be held in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in June-July. The Novitiate community prepared the meal, the prayer, and the place. For our discussions, we were divided into three groups. It was a beautiful gathering; we all appreciated the quality of encounter among us and our sharing of deep spiritual insights about how we will “go forward as if we are sure of the future,” as Fr. Theodore says in one of his books.

Thanks to Brother Tiago’s continuing Hebrew lessons with us, we are now participating in the responses at the Hebrew Mass and praying the “Our Father” in Hebrew more and more easily.

Sr. Juliana

for the Community “St. John in Montana”