



St. John in Montana Congregational Novitiate Ein Kerem, Jerusalem

Date: April 2014

Moving

By: Alejandra

We were waiting for this great moment days and days ago!! On Monday 31th of March we got up early because it was the day to move into our new house, so exciting!!!!!!It was amazing because all of us, we started to pack and unpack with the smallest and finish with the biggest things, (dishes, night tables, beds and so on). We were lucky because Luciano and Mark's generosity (associates of Sion) encouraged and helped us to move our stuff more quickly by taking the car. At the end of the day we were tired but at the same time so happy and grateful to the Lord, to the Congregation because we were able to have our marvelous home.

The second day, it was cleaning day; just imagine how dusty was our home! But we were ready to start. We began with, the floor, furniture, windows, and so on. Can you imagine us? We were working like the ants but wearing a mask to protect ourselves, we lived through many happy feelings. Our schedule changed completely during those days.



On Thursday third of April we were so excited, it was our first night in our home, some of us said "if we hear some noise or scream it is because we are welcoming all the sisters and Father Mary Alphonse." After we finished our cleaning, we went to bed and we slept and slept and nobody heard any noise. We started to cook only after Easter. On Easter Monday we experienced finally the Resurrection of Jesus because little by little we settled into our house.

We are very thankful for everything we have received from the sisters because we know they gave us strength through their prayers and love.

“TESHUVA”

By: Clara

The root of the word *Teshuva*, “*Shuv*”, means: “To return, to come back to a place where we come from”. The *teshuva* as conversion (of the heart) is part of a dynamic process which includes:

To place ourselves in the light of God and acknowledging our sinfulness;

Then return to God who is full of compassion;

And receive the forgiveness of God.

The word *Torah*, comes from a root which means to aim at a goal, to show the way or to teach. When we sin we take the wrong way and the *Torah* is there to teach us how to come back to the Lord.

According to Jewish tradition, *Torah* and *Teshuva* were created before the creation of the world. Why? Because God intended to give the *Torah* to show us the way toward him. Knowing that we will sometimes take

the wrong direction He foresaw the *teshuva*, meaning the way to return to Him. (cf Babylon Talmud Pesahim 54/a)

“Rabbi Pinhas interprets those words: **Good and upright is the Lord** (Ps. 25,8): Why is he good? Because He is upright. And why is He upright? Because He is good. It is why he teaches to the sinner the way. If one asks **Wisdom**: What is the punishment of the sinner? She will answer: “Evil will pursue the sinner”. (Prov. 13,21). And if one asks **Prophecy**: “What is the punishment of the sinner?” “She will answer:” The sinner will perish (Ez.18,20). If one asks **the Holy One Blessed be He**: What is the punishment of the sinner” He will answer: “Let him return to the Lord and He will forgive him”. It is why **“He teaches the sinner the way”** (Ps. 25,8) to return to Him. Jerusalem Talmud, Makkot 2, 7.

The Lord does not depend on Wisdom and on Prophecy to act as he likes to do: to forgive and we are also lucky to have a God who can transform anger into mercy: In Ex.32, we see that the Lord wanted to exterminate his people after the golden calf, but at the prayer of Moses he was able to change his mind.



Holy Week

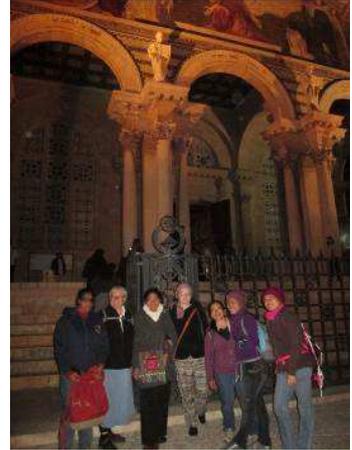
By: Joey

For almost 25 years of my existence, finally I am one of the luckiest persons having a chance to celebrate my Holy week here in the Holy Land. We were deeply touched by all the traditional celebrations that we attended during the Holy week. We spent our Holy Thursday evening visiting the historical sites, the place where Jesus spent His last day

with His disciples. We walked from Gethsemane going through the Kidron Valley, Peter in Gallicantu and Mt. Zion.

The silence and the cold breeze that night brought us back to the time of Jesus. When I was sitting inside the Gethsemane Church I reflected on what Jesus said to Peter and others (and to us), "Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mt. 26:41) While I was reflecting on this passage I asked myself how long am I going to stay awake? How long can I stay with Jesus? These questions still remain with me until this moment.

We did our Way of the Cross early in the morning on Good Friday with the sisters in Ecce Homo and other guests who joined us. We found it very interesting while we were on our way on the Via Dolorosa because we saw many pilgrims carrying their cross, flags and especially their strong faith in Jesus. On the other hand, we also saw Jews and Muslims walking on the same road going somewhere else. It was really amazing seeing the people of different religions walking together on the same road. They might not understand many things of each other but one thing we are sure that we can share things in common.



Silence followed and we spent our time being with Jesus on the Lithostrotus in Ecce Homo. Before lunch time we watched the official Way of the Cross led by the Franciscans. In the middle of the crowd we were also watching the commotion between the policemen and Muslims. Some angry Muslims were not allowed to pass by in the streets while the processions of Christians were still going on. We ended our meaningful day with the holy mass. Finally, we can say that our holy week in Jerusalem this year was so helpful and nourishing.

Easter Celebration in Jerusalem

By: Arlyne

Hag Sameah **הג שמחה (Happy Feast)**

We joined the celebration of Easter Vigil with the Kehilla Parish, a Hebrew speaking Community in Jerusalem. It was a wonderful celebration. The community participation was beautiful. After the mass we joined the parishioners for an agape meal. It was already midnight when we returned home to our house in Ein Karem.

As soon as we arrived home the sisters sang happy birthday for me. Because this year my birthday fell on Easter Sunday. It was indeed a joyful celebration of my life united with Jesus' resurrection. I am happy for my first Easter experience in the land of Jesus and at the same time thanking God for another year added



to my life.

On Easter Sunday morning we attended the mass in the Chapel of our contemplative sisters. The mass was in French; however it was beautiful because the readings were read in different languages.

In the afternoon we had a lovely barbecue meal in our garden together with the entire Ein Kerem community (apostolic and contemplative sisters, brothers, associates and volunteers. We enjoyed having the barbecue together, drinking good drinks, with lots of singing, laughter and sharing stories.



Finally after a festive dinner we exchanged gifts but not all the Ein Karem Community. It was only for our novitiate community. During Lent we agreed to pick a name as our friend and try to do good to her during the Lenten Season and then give a gift for Easter. So we ended our Easter Sunday by giving gifts to each other.

Shalom – Peace

By: Victoria

The first word we learned when we started learning Hebrew was the word Shalom – Peace. It is a very beautiful word – we cannot live without peace in our hearts and among us. Our prayer is always that God may grant peace on earth and among peoples.

“Shalom as a value permeates every level of existence. Not only nations but groups of all sorts need to learn to live in shalom with one another. Our job is to learn to live in shalom with others so that we help to bring about that redemption sooner.”

Learning some Hebrew is a good opportunity for us and we are getting a lot from it. We are happy because now we know how to say thank you and hello so when we meet people on the street we can greet them. But what is difficult is the writing which is different. At the same time some of us are still working on our English because each one of us has her own language so it's learning two languages, English and Hebrew.

But it's useful to give us a background of the letters of the alphabet and some words that we use all the time like, shalom, thank you, good morning, good night, etc.

Our Teacher is Sr. Michele. She has a particular way of teaching which is very interesting, not at all a traditional boring way. Sr. Michele explained to us the meaning



of the letters and she gave us some verses from the Torah and also some songs. This is a wonderful way to memorize the Hebrew words. She has patience with each one of us and is ready to answer any question. She began by showing us how to write in our notebooks from right to left, which is different from English which is left to right. We try to use some of the words with others, either in the street or the metro or with guests who come to our house.

We have begun to read and write and we are faithful in doing our homework and some study. We have one and half hours every week day, which includes different activities like learning some new songs, reading, dictations, etc. We want to thank Sr. Michele for her patience with us in teaching.

First Retreat

By: Rozini

For our first retreat in our new novitiate house, we had the joy of having a couple of days retreat in preparation for Easter. Each one of you can imagine our great joy.

Father Putman, a Jesuit, who has lived for many years in Egypt, Sudan, etc., led us into our reflection on the “death and resurrection of Jesus”. He helped us to reflect on what it means “death and resurrection of Christ”. Resurrection can happen only when we believe in Jesus. This happens every day in our lives because we are sinners. But Jesus is there to forgive our sins and to heal us. Fr. Putman invited us to reflect on the death and resurrection of Lazarus (John 11) and he spoke about the steps towards his resurrection:

1. Jesus cries
2. He forgives our sins through the sacrament of confession
3. He thanks God the father
4. Jesus calls Lazarus to come out
5. He asks people to untie Lazarus
6. He asks them to let him go.

We then reflected on grief and joy in John 16, 20 to 24.

In the midst of human suffering, we can also experience joy because of our faith in Jesus and our commitment to follow him. We cannot close our eyes to the reality of suffering around us, caused by the abuse of freedom, given to us by God. We offer to God the pain of many brothers and sisters that are victims of violence and abuse.

We also reflected on the vocation of Peter. Peter is the symbol of contradiction. During his life with Jesus and the other apostles, he makes beautiful declarations of faith, recognizing Jesus as the messiah, but at one point, he also denies him out of fear. Sometimes it is frightening and at other times it is encouraging, watching his relationship with Jesus. With our sinfulness, we also fail like Peter out of fear. Many times we do not believe in the power of God to forgive our sins. Fr. Putman encouraged



us not to be afraid because of our failures, and not to hesitate to express our love to Jesus. We need to love and to feel being loved by Christ, trusting in his grace and forgiveness that is given to us through the sacrament of *confession*.

In the Desert

By: Arlyne

To be in the desert is part of our canonical year in order to be alone with God. To encounter God in ourselves and in others. In the desert moment we take a half day silence every Saturday. Each month has a different theme for us to reflect and pray. For the month of April we used the topic of discipleship, "Come follow me". During this time we reflected on our vocation, motivation, mission and our response to God who calls us to be part of God's action in human history. Sr. Juliana suggested some biblical readings about call and discipleship. The passages are the call of Abraham (Genesis 12), Moses (Exodus 3:1-12), Levi (Mark 2:13-17) and Sarah (Genesis 17, 21).



The text that speaks more about my call and desert experience was the call of Moses. Because it conveys an insight that our religious experience will enable us to be socially involved in society. According to Richard Rohr in the *Cloud of Witness* our "spiritual encounters invariably lead to social encounters of the most risky kind." In the same vein God became fully present and visible in us, through us and in humanity's historical realm.

In the call of Moses God was presented as the God of Israel who intervenes in history, delivers the Israelites from slavery and established a covenant with them on Sinai.¹ YHWH intervened in history, demanding justice and establishing a covenantal relationship with the Israelites. Indeed, the biblical text informs us that YHWH is never neutral in relation to the reality of injustice: something that is evident not only in the book of Exodus but throughout Scripture. The Bible is filled with narratives that show God establishing social justice and siding with the oppressed and powerless.² According to Jose Miranda, "YHWH intervenes in human history in demand for justice, but this demand becomes much stronger and more irresistible if he makes it as a creator of heaven and earth, for then the power of this God who intervenes to achieve justice is immense."³ Scripture tells us that YHWH's intervention in history is made manifest through "many human mediations."⁴ In the liberation of the Israelites from slavery, Moses played a significant role as "envoy of God, envoy of his people."⁵ Moses' call as an emissary

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 53-66.

² See the book of Herman Hendrickx, *Social Justice in the Bible* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1985) for a more comprehensive account on how God act in bringing about social justice. In addition Hendrickx book shows the importance of social justice founded in Scriptures.

³ Jose Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of oppression* (New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 77.

⁴ Croatto, *Exodus: Hermeneutics of Freedom*, 1981: 27.

⁵ See the book of Lichtenstien entitle *Moses: Envoy of God, Envoy of His People*.

enables YHWH's liberating action in the historical realm to be seen.

Finally to be in the desert invites me to reflect on what it means to be "an envoy of God, an envoy of God's people" today. And how to be a witness of God's love, mercy and justice in a world torn by oppression, violence, injustice and hatred. Lastly the desert is not only a barren and empty ground. It is also a sacred space where I can be alone with God and others in the most intimate moment of my journey here on earth.