

Easter's joy; Good Friday's Passion all in one day

By Christopher Gunty The Catholic Review

If you're following the blog, you already know the group of pilgrim priest from Baltimore spent part of Friday in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, with a visit to the Western Wall. The day was also as liturgically out of season as the day before, when we celebrated Christmas in the middle of October, because on this Friday, Oct. 15, we commemorated Good Friday and Easter, but in reverse order. The day began with a very early morning Mass inside the edicule, the structure within the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher that contains the tomb of Christ, and the slab on which he was laid for three days before his resurrection. The edicule area includes a small pedestal that contains a piece of the stone that the angels rolled away from the mouth of the tomb. [slideshow] Only about four people at a time can fit in the tomb chamber itself, so during the Mass priests from the group took turns rotating into the chamber, while the rest filled the edicule. Only a few groups each day can reserve the tomb for Mass, but it is a rare privilege, and the Masses must be brief - with no singing - so as to accommodate the next group waiting. Public access to the tomb begins at 8 a.m., so all the half-hour Masses must be complete by then. Other Masses are celebrated at other altars in the basilica - including the one next to the site of Calvary, where Christ was crucified - by various groups in other languages throughout the day, also at a vigorous clip to accommodate all the pilgrims who wish to celebrate the Eucharist so close to events in the Paschal mystery. Father Jim Profitt, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Severna Park, proclaimed the Gospel during the Mass, and said his preaching of the Scriptures during Holy Week will be forever changed by the experience. "To be surrounded by the pilgrims, and even though it was a bit distracting with all the competing prayers going on, it didn't seem to take away from the holiness of the place. I'm sure 2,000 years ago it was not the quietest place when Jesus' was going through the whole ordeal. "To have a sense of the places and where it happened, I don't even know if there are words to describe it - just being there - the places are no longer confined to imagination," he said. Father Stephen Hook, pastor of St. James Parish in Boonsboro, proclaimed a

portion of the eucharistic prayer, standing before an altar placed directly over the stone where Jesus was laid in the tomb. He said he could hardly find words to describe the experience even to be in the place where Jesus laid after his crucifixion. He said he felt in a sense the way Mary Magdalene might have felt, wanting to stay there forever. But when Jesus rose, "He said, 'don't wait here, catch up with me later.' Just to be compelled to go forth from the tomb and proclaim the Good News is a very moving experience, " Father Hook said. After the Mass, the pilgrim priests visited the site of Calvary, which while it once was on a hill, is now within the footprint of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher. Just below the Calvary chapel is a room that contains a piece of rock with a fissure in it, which was formed in the earthquake that occurred when Jesus breathed his last.

"But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, 'Truly, this was the Son of God!'" (Mt 27:50-54; cf. Mk 15:38, Lk 23:44-45)

Reflecting on the resurrection, which took place in the very tomb in which they stood, Bishop Denis J. Madden said they were in the most sacred place they could be, and that Christ had invited them there, to reflect on the theme of forgiveness. "It's crucial for us that we ... come out from this tomb resurrected, with new life. It gives us the opportunity to forgive all who have in any way offended us or been a burden for us. "And our forgiveness is not the forgiveness that we have any great emotional response; it's the forgiveness of the heart. It's the forgiveness of true love, the forgiveness of the mind. We forgive; we may not feel anything different in our heart, but if we honestly forgive, it is finished," he said. "This is the day of forgiveness for us. This is the day of new life." The Baltimore pilgrims celebrated the Mass of Resurrection from Easter morning, which includes the Psalm refrain: "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad." And yet, later in the day, they went back to Holy Week and the Passion of Christ, with a walk along the Via

Dolorosa (Way of Suffering or Way of Grief) to pray the Way of the Cross. Bishop Madden, auxiliary of Baltimore and the trip's spiritual leader, led the devotion with a set of readings and reflections based on the Stations of the Cross used by Pope John Paul II in 1991. As the priests moved along the streets and alleyways of Jerusalem, stopping at various points corresponding to the location of the event in each Station (perhaps historically, but more likely by tradition, since the Stations along the Via Dolorosa have changed several times over the centuries), the hubbub of life continued as shopkeepers and vendors plied their wares.

Even as the pilgrims sang, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord," they were entreated to buy rosaries, bookmarks and other goods. As they sang, "Jesus Remember Me, When You Come into Your Kingdom," they were pressed on all sides by the life of a busy city, and it was sometimes difficult to focus on the prayers. But such was no different from Jesus' time. Even as he was led down this path, normal city life continued. Some may have ignored this latest criminal heading to Golgotha - what's one more thief or murderer? - and some, encouraged by the soldiers, may have actively jeered or spat at him. Having already been inside the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, the location of the last five Stations, the group completed Stations 10 through 14 in a small room near the Coptic church, before heading for the Jewish quarter and the Western Wall. A little later in the day, we went back in time some more, to Holy Thursday, visiting the church of St. Peter in Gallicantu (cock-crow), the site where it is believed that Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed, as the Lord predicted. The reason the church is believed to be the site is that evidence suggests it was the home of Caiaphas and his father-in-law Anais, who would have been the ones to arrest Jesus and hold him overnight before turning him over to Pontius Pilate. Dungeons beneath the church preserved from the time of Christ give some hint to what the conditions would have been for prisoners there. The pilgrims took time for evening prayer in a side yard there, with a rooster ornament on the dome of the church overlooking their assembly, and a statue depicting St. Peter's denial nearby. -