

Healthy families, holy families

By Christopher Guntz *editor@CatholicReview.org* Today's travels centered around the Holy Family, and places where they might have lived. Many of these locations fall into the "traditional" or "legendary" designation, which means that there either is not much evidence to support the claim, or that more than one place makes a claim for the honor. For example, last week in Jerusalem we visited a church that was said to be site of the home of St. Joachim and St. Ann, parents of Mary.



Bishop Denis J. Madden and the pilgrim priests gather around the altar in the Chapel of St. Joseph in Nazareth for Mass Oct. 17. (Catholic Review photo | Christopher Guntz)

Today, one of our stops was Sepphoris, traditionally considered to be the birthplace of Mary and therefore the home of Joachim and Ann. It's not a suburb of Jerusalem. So how can this be? Our guide explained that when the Crusaders came through the Holy Land, they wanted a site that could be considered the home of Mary's parents, so they "found" one. That may be a simplistic explanation, but as people in the region around our home know, there is no shortage of "George Washington slept here" locations, and many are hard to prove. At Nazareth, we visited the church above the legendary site of the Annunciation and the nearby Chapel of St. Joseph, built in 1918. The church sits above what is believed to have been the site of the foster father of Jesus carpenter shop. If Mary was indeed born in Sepphoris, and grew up there in Ann and Joachim's home, perhaps she first encountered Joseph in the market there. Since Nazareth was a small town, the guide explained, there might have been few opportunities for Joseph to sell his wares in his hometown. But Sepphoris was a fairly wealthy town, evidenced by the mosaic floors found in the homes excavated there, rather than dirt or stone floors. A carpenter would have done well to make the journey to sell tables, chairs and other woodworks.



A statue of the Holy Family set into a wall near the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. (Catholic Review photo | Christopher Guntz)

The day's sites on our pilgrimage also included a stop at Cana, site of Jesus' first public miracle, and the start of his public ministry. On many pilgrimages, the couples in the group renew their marriage vows at the site. With a group of all priests (save this chronicler of the journey), instead Bishop Denis J. Madden, Baltimore auxiliary and spiritual leader, ended Evening Prayer in an open-air chapel in a courtyard at Cana by asking all the priests to join him the closing blessing. They invoked their blessing on my marriage (to Ann) and by proxy on all the couples they have married during their priesthood. Mostly, our day gave us a chance to reflect on families, and how to be faithful to the call of God. As Bishop Madden noted at the beginning of the Mass in the morning when he asked the priests to breathe in the spirit of Joseph and Mary, "All they knew was that something would be expected of them. ... Their life was constantly being tested in one way or another," but they answered with fidelity to their call. We all are called to do the same. We are all members of families, with all their good and bad times. We are all called to help our families holy and healthy. What have you done today to be faithful to that call, as were Joseph and Mary? - Tiberius, Israel - October 19, 2010

Blogger's Note: The pilgrimage ends tomorrow, and there may not be a way to post on Thursday without internet access en route. Keep us in your prayers as we travel home.