

Prayers come alive for pilgrim travelers

By Christopher Gunty *The Catholic Review*

We say some prayers so quickly, sometimes we get to the end of the prayer and think, “What did I just say?” Prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary, if the domestic church is alive and strong, we learned from our parents – or even from our siblings – and we have prayed them so often, the words roll off our tongue, but often not really through our brain. The pilgrim priests from the Archdiocese of Baltimore* had a unique opportunity today to think about the prayers we pray on our first full day hoofing it around some holy sites in Jerusalem. First stop was at the Pater Noster chapel, a church over a cave where tradition says** Jesus first taught what we know as the Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father to his disciples. Another place also holds that claim, depending on how you read the Scriptures. From Matthew:

“This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one” (Mt 6:9-13).

Luke’s version



Bishop Denis Madden leads morning prayer near the Dominus Flevit Church on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

refers to “a certain place,” and perhaps that’s where we were today:

“He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test’” (Lk 11:1-4).

And so, appropriately, Bishop Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop of Baltimore and spiritual leader for the pilgrimage, led us all in the prayer we all know:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Later, near the Church of Dominus Flevit (the Lord wept



Olives still grow on the trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. Some of these trees are more than 2,000 years old, and could have been witness to Christ

), where Jesus wept as he looked out over the city of Jerusalem, we gathered for morning prayer under the shade of a tree. The bishop and priests concelebrated Mass at the Church of the Agony at Gethsemane (where, again, tradition says, these are the olive trees at which Jesus prayed and asked his disciples to stay awake with him). How could it be that Jesus could keep coming back to find his disciples asleep, Bishop Madden asked. Why would he keep coming back to such followers? “This is the same admonition Christ gives to us, to keep trying to live the Gospel. We try as best we can to stay awake.” After a visit to Yad Vashem, the museum of the Shoah (you’ll read about that in another blog post or in The Catholic Review print edition), the group visited two sites related to St. John the Baptist, the site where tradition holds he was born, and the Church of the Visitation, located on the site of where Zechariah and Elizabeth were believed to have lived. At that site, a grotto marks the spot where Mary first visited her cousin after the Annunciation. Luke picks up the story:

“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her. During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and

blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:38-46).

There, again so appropriately, we prayed:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of death. Amen.

I prayed especially there for all the mothers in my life, especially my deceased mother Therese, and my grandmothers, and for so many other women who need Mary’s protection and guidance, love and grace. One does not have to travel to these places to make the words of the Our Father and Hail Mary come alive. Being here makes it easier. But so does reading the Scriptures. And sometimes, just slowing down as you pray, and thinking about the words. Keep us in *your* prayers as tomorrow we head to Bethlehem. -