

Archbishop Smith: Ending on a High

Well, it just cannot get better than this.

Our final day of the pilgrimage began early – really, really early. We left the hotel at 4:30 AM and made our way into the Old City of Jerusalem to walk the Way of the Cross. The absence of light in the streets underscored rather dramatically the dark night of sin through which Christ walked and endured his passion for the sake of our salvation. In the silence of those early morning hours, we sang quietly “Behold the Wood of the Cross” as we moved from station to station. The hymn was well chosen. Not only by the prayerful re-tracing of our Saviour’s steps along the Via Dolorosa, but also by the faithful itinerary of conviction that marks the remainder of our lives, we lift up the Cross for all to behold as the instrument – once terrible, now glorious – of the world’s redemption.



Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Following this sacred route brought us to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the stations ended. Contained within the church are the sites of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Upon entering this extraordinary site, we mounted the stone of Golgotha in order to touch the rock and so venerate the place where Christ gave his life on the Cross. We descended from there to the tomb, the emptiness of which proclaims the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. There, we celebrated solemn High Mass in the company of Franciscan priests, who offered the chants of the mass in Latin. When mass was completed, our group was able to enter the tomb individually to venerate the place where Jesus was buried and from which he rose again. Following a tour of other sections of the church, we walked back to our hotel for a very welcome breakfast.

The final visit of the morning and of the pilgrimage was to the Israel Museum. We saw some of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran and were given an explanation of an enormous scale model of Jerusalem as it would have been at the time of Jesus. This is enormously helpful for placing all the sites in the Old City into proper historical perspective.

Now, our task, once we return home, is to keep all of the experiences we have had here in their proper spiritual perspective. It has been a very brief and highly concentrated itinerary of conviction, one that must now extend through the months and years ahead. We have been blessed – wondrously so – by an encounter with Jesus Christ in the land where he himself once lived. Henceforth, we must continue to seek the encounter in the land where we live.

The encounter is not only possible but also desired, both by ourselves and by the Lord. He is risen, and he is with us daily. Only through a deep personal encounter with Jesus Christ can we understand and live the Christian life; only through knowledge of and communion with him can we know the fullness of joy he came to give. Something of that joy inhabited us as we journeyed in the Holy Land. By God's grace, may we find ways to share that joy with others, and thus point them to its source; Jesus Christ, who came to us from the heart of the Father and "pitched his tent among us" in this land made holy by his presence.

The Archbishop's complete daily blog posts from the Holy Land Pilgrimage of 2017 are available at <http://archbishopsmith.blogspot.ca>.