

Archbishop Smith: Welcoming with Thanks the Unexpected

Things today did not go according to plan. Well, at least not according to our plans; God's plan, perhaps, since the day unfolded in a way far better than we had imagined.

It began with one of the buses running into a mechanical failure that necessitated bringing in a substitute. Needless to say, that meant a delay, and we were not sure when it would arrive. What to do? What else to do but to spend more time on the shore of the Sea of Galilee?! An unexpected gift that we welcomed with great thanks. A common experience when one arrives at the Holy Land for the first time is to wish one had more time at the sites for prayer and contemplation. Well, that's exactly what we were given, and we lapped up every moment.



As it turned out, we left about an hour and a half behind schedule. The plan had been to celebrate mass at a small parish church in Jericho prior to proceeding to the site nearby of Jesus's baptism to renew our baptismal promises. Our delayed departure meant that mass at the church at the pre-arranged time would not be possible, given the tight bookings for mass there by other groups for the rest of the day. What to do? The guides knew there was an outdoor altar area next to the baptismal site, and it was available! The decision to celebrate mass there was an easy one to make. What a gift to be able to celebrate the Eucharist while gazing upon the Jordan river, where we had just renewed our baptismal commitment and thus recalled the sacrament through which we were initiated into the Christian life! This reminds us that it is a good idea generally in life, and not just during a pilgrimage, to stay connected with Heaven's travel agency. Allow God to do the planning, and life

will be filled with joy-filled surprises.



The moment of renewal of baptismal promises is of immense importance. We do it annually at the solemn mass of Easter Sunday, and we recognized with gratitude the special blessing we were given to do so here at the Jordan river itself. In the background of our minds was the call of our Holy Father, Francis, to take with utmost seriousness our baptismal identity. This sacrament makes us disciples of Jesus Christ, an identity we are called to live daily with integrity.

To help us appreciate what this means, we made an analogy with our passports. We are accustomed to showing this document of citizenship at border crossings, where an agent will compare the picture in the passport to the real person presenting it, in order verify that the picture and person match. Our “document of citizenship”, is our baptismal certificate, since by Baptism we are “registered” as citizens of heaven, even if in an anticipatory manner. The picture ID is the Creed.

From this arises the question: if people were to compare the profession of faith with the daily life of the one making the profession, would they see that picture and person match? By a regular and heartfelt renewal of the promises made at baptism to utterly reject Satan and to live entirely for our Triune God, we can see where our lives need reform, where we need to return to the integrity of life to which Baptism calls us. Following the renewal, we were blessed with water taken from the Jordan itself.

After this, we made our way down to the southern end of the Dead Sea, where we will spend the night. Many of us wasted no time getting down to the water for the famous floating on the Dead Sea. In case you’re wondering, yours truly was not among them. There is also a strange attraction to the mud around these parts. I know, I know, I’ve been told many times that this mud is good for the skin. Yet, mud soap remains for me an oxymoron. The logic of it all escapes me. I guess I’ll just have to live with the wrinkles.

Lots happening tomorrow, so this brief respite is very welcome. Yet another gift to top off a blessed day.