



Carmelite News

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In the Footsteps of Carmel

Our postulant, Celia Ashton, had planned to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with her family, and was scheduled to travel not long after her entrance day. At almost the last minute, another place on the pilgrimage became available and was given to the community as a gift. Sister Judy Murray was able to travel with Celia and has written these reflections on her experience. A highlight was a visit to Mount Carmel, the place where our Order was founded in the 13th Century and where the first Chapel was dedicated to Mary under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. As we prepare to celebrate her feast on July 16, we are enriched by the well of meaning our Sisters carried home to us, which we now share with you.

To walk in the footsteps of Christ: this dynamic interpretation of *in obsequio Jesu Christi vivere* is the keynote phrase of our Carmelite Rule. This spring, postulant Celia Ashton and I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Terra Sancta, and were able literally to walk in the footsteps of Christ. It would be hard to overestimate the formative impact this experience has had on me.

Of course, I have always believed in Christ; I have staked my life on him. Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of being in all the places that Christians have carefully marked and preserved from apostolic times moved my comprehension of the gospels from a more theoretical plane to a sense-based one. It is akin to the difference between studying about the human heart in textbooks and actually holding one in your hand.

A pilgrimage is different from a simple tour. In a tour you visit the site and you may learn its history; in a pilgrimage you also pray into the significance of the place. We all renewed our baptismal vows at the Jordan River and our vows of commitment at Cana. At the Carmelite church of the Pater, we prayed the Lord's Prayer in a deeper way in the place where he taught it. The narthex of that church has portraits of two of our Carmelite holy women: Blessed Mariam Baouardy, the Lily of Palestine, on one side and St. Edith Stein, the Catholic-Jewish martyr, on the other. From the Mount of Olives, in that land torn by strife, those icons challenge us to embody the forgiveness that Jesus proclaimed.

In the Basilica of the Agony we venerated the rock where Jesus wept at Gethsemane and placed our

own trials and concerns upon it. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre we celebrated mass in the higher chapel that marks the place where Christ would have been on the cross and then venerated the place that marks where the base of the cross was set on the ground. While there we also venerated the stone on which Christ's body was placed to be prepared for burial.

But the Carmelite story is a necklace with three strands of pearls. The first is the invitation to lead a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ. The second is the invitation, like Mary, to become transformed in beauty, and this pilgrimage included visits to the holy places of Mary's life as well. The site that called me most to prayer was the Basilica of the Annunciation where I knelt at the altar rail by myself to renew my own fiat and to pray for the grace to grow deeper in my own self-donation. We stopped at the spring held to be the place where Mary refreshed herself just before getting to Elizabeth's house at Ein Karem, and we all blessed ourselves with that spring water. Then we prayed at the Basilica of the Nativity and venerated the place of Jesus' birth. Finally, we went to the church of Mary's Dormition in the foothills of the Mount of Olives.



Sister Judy Murray and postulant Celia Ashton in Jerusalem

The third string of the necklace is the invitation, like Elijah, to be inflamed with zeal for God. This prophet withdrew from public life and lived in the caves of Mount Carmel in the ninth century BCE. The band of Christian hermits who lived on Mount Carmel in the early thirteenth century CE and who are our Carmelite forebears took him as their spiritual model and claimed him as the spiritual father and founder of our Order. Early on the last morning of our pilgrimage, Celia and I took the bus to Haifa where Fathers Arne and José met us and drove us to the base of Mt. Carmel. From there we hiked up the steep wadi trail past the lower spring and then to the

upper spring of Elijah. At its source the water here is potable and I drank some to express my thirst for Carmel and Elijah's zeal. I brought some of this water back to use for the sprinkling rites for our Carmelite ceremonies, that we might all be invested with a deeper passion for the life. Then José unlocked the gate and we entered that holy place of our founders. The end of the journey was to come to the ruins of that small chapel where it all began. We had walked in the footsteps of Jesus and Mary and Elijah and now we were to return home renewed in zeal, affirmed in faith, and inspired by love.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Carmelite Monastery
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**Please join us to celebrate
Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Tuesday, July 16, 7 p.m.**

We will celebrate our Order's great titular Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel with a special evening Eucharist, Tuesday July 16, at 7 p.m.

We would be so glad if you could join us!

