

Tantur Ecumenical Institute Newsletter

Abu Gosh: A Benedictine Treasure
by
The Revd. Canon Dr. John Armson

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Abu Gosh – A Benedictine Treasure



Music, prayer, art, liturgy, architecture, history, ecumenism; if any of these interests you, read on.

The monastery of Abu Gosh sits just off the main Jerusalem – Tel Aviv road, about 7 miles south of the capital. It sits on one of the possible sites where the risen Jesus is described by St. Luke as appearing to two of his disciples as they were going to a village named Emmaus' (24:13 ff).

It seems a church has been on this site for many centuries. The present building includes elements, such as wall paintings, dating from the Byzantine period, though most of the surviving fabric is from the time of the Crusaders and was restored in 1907. It has the simple form of a small Romanesque church: a central nave with two side aisles, each with its eastern apse and barrel vault. Since 1976 the church has been the home of a monastery. The first to restore it to a living worship were three Benedictine monks from the monastery of Beo-Hellouin in France. They were followed a year later by three Benedictine Sisters of St. Joseph from Qiriath Yearim. These two new communities, larger now, were firmly established in 1981 with their own novitiates and sit, cheek by jowl, in their respective monasteries, worshipping together in the church for Lauds, Mass and Vespers. The remaining offices, Matins, None and Compline, they celebrate in their respective houses. As in any other Benedictine house, their life centers around prayer, personal formation, manual work and welcoming.

Good liturgy like good drama, is what it says, and says what it is. Here, inside the church the Christian liturgy is performed at a gentle pace and with great decorum – but no sense of fussiness; with shared singing, usually in French, and always with, above all, deep reverence. It's hard to believe that it has not been lovingly rehearsed. (Perhaps it has? Or perhaps just love is the secret?). Although the pace of the prayer is gentle, there is no sense of it being 'slow'. (In earth-time, the Sunday Eucharist takes about an hour and a half. (In eternity, there is no time). Sometimes a musical instrument adds its contribution to the prayer.

Ecumenism is deeply understood here: all three ancient biblical faiths are honoured since the site has Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity in its story. The village mosque stands close by the church, and King David is reputed to have known the place and carried from here to Jerusalem the Ark of the Covenant. Many Jewish groups visit – including Israeli soldiers. The community offers hospitality to Jewish and Muslim groups as they visit part of *their* heritage. Some of the monastic offices are sung in Hebrew and/or Arabic as well as French and Latin.

Here is a place where prayer has been valid (T.S Eliot) – and still is. To someone like myself, who can get to Abu Gosh but rarely, it is always the most moving and fulfilling experience. 'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now' said Shakespeare's Mark Anthony. At Abu Gosh they may well be tears of joy, of praise, or peace of coming home to God.

See: Abu Gosh de l'Emmaus des Croises au Monastere de la Resurrection; Editions du Gulf Stram 1995 : ISBN 2-909421-10-4

From Snow to Sand and Saints
by
Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie

Ancient fishing traditions in modern times still exist today on the sacred Sea of Galilee



Man's inhumanity is immediately identifiable by the serpentine wall which snakes around the Palestinian homeland



.....And here is where man's humanity and their refusal to hate can be seen at the Tent of Nations, where all humans are considered equal. Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie to right of picture with Daoud from the Tent of Nations



Taking a six week course at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute allowed me to trade a month of winter snow in Canada for sand and desert in the Near East, as well as exposure to the lives of many saints.

The decision to go a week early proved to be fortuitous. After three days in the Old City, I headed north to Galilee and stayed with the St John the Baptist Community in Tiberias. I biked around the Sea of Galilee in about seven hours, including a very sore behind at the end of the day and an attempt to swim in the sea at a resort on the East side. I was surprised to find the water so cold that I managed only a few minutes. The next day I tried hitchhiking, which led me to connect for half a day with another group of priests on a renewal course that included Capernaum and the house of Peter, Magdala and the archaeological dig, and the Mount of the Beatitudes.

The course at Tantur proved to be a wonderful balance of input by various presenters and field trips to many Holy Sites. We were able to go into the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, to which most tourists do not have access. We spent five days in Galilee, going as far north as the Lebanon border, Tel Dan and Caesarea Philippi. We also went to Nazareth and Mt. Gerazim, where a Samaritan priest shared his thoughts on their religion and where and how they do their animal sacrifices to this day.

After touring some monasteries, wetting our feet in the Jordan baptismal site, and floating in the Dead Sea, we went on another major outing through the Judean desert to the Negev and to St. Catherine's monastery in Egypt, where we climbed Mt. Sinai at night, arriving in time for sunrise and a camel ride down.

I would say that highlights were Masada; Caesarea Maritima where St Paul was imprisoned and sailed to Rome, Caesarea Philippi and the Holy Sepulcher, and meals with both Jewish and Palestinian families. It was awesome to be walking on the ground that Jesus and so many saints walked (St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Jerome, St. Helena, St. Catherine, Mary Magdalene, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, to name a few.)

The exposure to the plight of the Palestinians was also very eye-opening. Checkpoints and the Wall that snakes its way across the land place a stifling control on the Palestinians, who can cross into Israeli held territory only with permits. The Israeli government may say publically that it is committed to a two State solution, but the continuous building of settlements in defiance of UN resolutions is actually making that less and less possible weekly.

Thankfully, on the last few days, we were able to witness some signs of hope. The Tent of the Nations is a family struggling to keep the settlers from taking away their hilltop farm. They have been successful so far due to the presence of international volunteers who are there to help out, to observe and to learn. Daoud and his family are committed to a non-violent struggle for peace and justice in a very prophetic way, as is Neve Shalom, a near-by community where Jews and Arabs live together, modeling what could be the solution for the country, one state where both Jews and Arabs can live in peace.

The time to return home came all too soon. However, I now have a life-time of memories and experience to integrate and work into whatever ministry the Lord has in store for me. I would certainly recommend coming to the Holy Land to see and experience for yourself, both the course at Tantur, and this land of sand and saints.

**Following in the Footsteps of Jesus –
“Palm Sunday Procession, Jerusalem
Style”**

*by
Sr. Joseph, Elzbieta, Maria Mazur*

On Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, Christians celebrate the triumphal entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus enters Jerusalem humbly, riding on a donkey, acclaimed by the people. There is a great sense of joy among all who accompany the Lord. The people wave palms and olive branches in acclamation. They lay their cloaks on the ground before Jesus and remember his miracles. The Gospels relate this joy and expectation as the people shout, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Lk 19:38). On Palm Sunday, as a participant in the Easter Experience Programme, I joined in the celebration of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. With the community from Tantur, and sisters from my religious Congregation, I joined thousands of other Christians walking from Bethpage to Jerusalem.

I am a sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth and my sisters came from my communities in Haifa and Nazareth. I was delighted to be with my sisters and the group from Tantur as we waved our palms and olive branches. We sang together and walked towards Jerusalem. We welcomed Jesus as a friend, a brother, and also as a King. The atmosphere of the day was jubilant.

The Palm Sunday procession from Bethpage is a very international and ecumenical experience. It reflected my experience at Tantur. Originally from Poland, I am missioned as a member of my religious community in Perth, Western Australia. Other participants in this Easter Programme at Tantur come from the United States, Australia, India and Ireland – also representing different denominations of the Christian faith.

On Palm Sunday we heard languages from every part of the world. Christians together celebrated the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. They sang hymns, prayed and walked together. They waved their palms and shared an experience of friendship and joy. As we walked the weather got warmer and the crowd increased. Christians from all over the world walked in procession – giving witness in their own language, hymns and prayers. But in walking to Jerusalem all were one.

It was a particular joy for me to join with other sisters from my religious community who live and work in the Holy Land. I walked with them and the community from Tantur. Together we all shared the joy of the day. Together with my sisters, the community from Tantur, and all those walking from Bethpage, I shared the joy of walking with the Lord. We, companions on a journey, together welcomed and praised the Lord Jesus as we walked to Jerusalem. It was a moment to celebrate our Christian faith as friends and disciples of Jesus. As Pope Francis said in his homily on Palm Sunday, “This is Jesus. This is his heart which looks to all of us, to our sicknesses, to our sins. The love of Jesus is great. And thus he enters Jerusalem, with this love, and looks at us. It is a beautiful scene, full of light - the light of the love of Jesus, the love of his heart - of joy, of celebration”.

We ended our procession with prayers led by the Latin Patriarch at St. Anne’s in Jerusalem. The air was cool and refreshing there. It was a joyful time to pray with my religious sisters and friends from Tantur – to know also that the Lord Jesus accompanies us all on our journey. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Some of Sr. Joseph’s friends from the Easter Program and Tantur. From left to right, Rae Cook (Australia), Sr. Pauline Dundon (Australia), Gerard Tonti-Filippini (Australia) and Ian Knowles, Iconographer, (UK)



Palm Sunday Procession – Jerusalem Style



Sr. Joseph with the sun glasses meets other Sisters from her order. Amongst them is Sr. Krystyna also from Poland (to her left) who also attended a Tantur Program in 2012



A Reflection for April 2013 by Fr. John Paul S.J.

The Love

Like so many other Tantur alums, how can I not love experiencing and being at so many holy sites with guides who add so much meaning and insight. Of seeing such a fascinating diversity of terrains. Of experiencing friendships that develop by living and sharing common experiences with others in the group. I really miss being with the others in the 6 Week Group and the camaraderie that developed over meals, bus rides or prayer services. I miss the residents and the staff. Like Peter on Mount Tabor, there is that part of me that has experienced wanting to “put up a tent so we can stay here.” Indeed there was so much in this program to love.

The Hate

As one whose Arab blood flows through my veins how can I not hate the experience of seeing that ridiculous “Wall” and knowing the impact that it has on so many people and the Palestinian state. How can I not hate the images of fencing and chicken wire that shop vendors in Hebron put up over the streets of their shops to prevent rocks and other debris from being flung upon them, urine included. How can I not hate and resent the Arab buses being detained on the streets while its passengers must display identification. How can I not hate the overall situation that gives rise to “security first and foremost”? Perhaps “hate is too strong of a word for situations that are so complex and yet in need of God’s grace to work through. I “hate” the messiness of life and the feeling of helplessness in responding effectively to that messiness!

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