



Spirituality and the Catenian Pilgrimage

By Mike Campbell, Sheffield Hallamshire Circle

I have always thought of the Catenians as being more religious than spiritual. Actually going to the Holy Land with the Catenians, however, changed both me and my attitude towards the Catenians. St Jerome, a fourth century biblical scholar, who lived in Bethlehem said that the Holy Land itself is the fifth gospel. There are four written texts of the gospels but there is also the good news about Jesus revealed to us by the places which mark the events of his life. The gospel of the land can fill out the written gospels with tangible reality. This is what I found.

Daily Mass was the centre of the pilgrimage, but also very important were the Gospel readings by lay people, often on the actual place when the events described took place.

Mass at Beit Jala Parish on Sunday 18th April 2010

This is a quote from one of the choir members (pictured below) when she was chatting with the Catenian Group after Mass; she was describing the impact that our visit, and participation at the Mass with them, had had on her: 'I don't know what I was feeling but at Mass I was smiling all the time and my singing came from the depth of my heart'.



Jerusalem

A number of Masses stand out, starting with Mass with the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem. The Patriarch was very welcoming, and stressed how important it was for us to come and show solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land. This is at the heart of Catenianism; support for



Mass at the Primacy of Peter Church beside the Sea of Galilee

fellow brothers and sisters by actually being with them.

We were really privileged to be able to have Mass actually in the chapel which surrounds the Tomb in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. This was so small that only four people and a celebrant could occupy it at any one time. Aably marshalled by Michael Whelan we rotated from the outer chapel. We were there at the consecration and as our Deacon knelt down he was looking directly at the Tomb. Never have the words 'Dying He destroyed our death, rising He restored our life' had such a profound meaning.

Bethlehem

We then proceeded to Bethlehem. It was shocking to have to go through the checkpoints and one could imagine that the Palestinians of today feel like the Jews 2000 years ago; an occupied people. It is so significant that the first people to hear the Good News were shepherds, the lowest in society. The Grotto, where tradition says Jesus was born, was so small that there was a limit to how many people could have Mass there. In best Catenian tradition we had a raffle which our coach won. Despite the fact that the Grotto looked like a steam age railway tunnel, with the smoke from nearly two millennia of candles on the roof, there was a palpable sense of the history of the place.

On Sunday we joined a parish Mass in Bethlehem and met the local people. It seemed so similar to Parishes back home and it was wonderful to feel part of a local community and not just a tourist.

We literally descended to Jericho, a drop of over 3,000 feet. Jericho was a

cursed town and the home of Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector. The fact that he was wealthy meant he was corrupt and took a cut of the takings. Thus both geography and sociology underlined how Jesus approached those not normally considered spiritual.

Galilee

We followed the river Jordan up to Galilee. My favourite Mass was in the open air at the Primacy of Peter on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. In a semi-circular amphitheatre all groups gathered. It was here that Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved Him, perhaps reflecting the three times Peter had denied Him. Our guide pointed out that Peter would have been quite a wealthy man, since he was able to return to his fishing after the Resurrection and so must have owned his own boat. Perhaps he would have enjoyed the Catenians!

Farewell Mass

Finally we had a whole group farewell Mass in Capernaum (actually Kafar Nahum meaning Nahum's village). This was a beautiful church literally suspended over the ruins of the old town. There was a strong sense of a journey ending, ironically close to where Jesus began his ministry, in Cana.

Our spiritual Directors, Bishop John, Fr Joe, Fr John, Fr Martin and Fr Gus, and Deacon Philip, all gave inspiring talks that helped make what happened in these places 2000 years ago relevant to today.

Like Thomas, I needed to see and feel things to truly believe. Jesus, now, seems so much more real, a living presence to me.