Fourth Sunday of Lent: Do You See the Handiwork of Christ?

Many of the pilgrims who visit the Church of the Nativity cannot help but be moved by the experience of visiting the site where Jesus was born. Some have waited their whole lives to travel to this spot and experience this very real physical link to the life of Jesus. Upon entering the Church courtyard, it soon becomes evident that Jesus is still present and alive there today. In the second reading from this week, St. Paul tells us that “we are his handiwork” (Eph 2:10). Christ has not separated Himself from those He created, and it is here in this simple courtyard that visitors can still encounter Him in the form of a Palestinian Christian man named Michael.

Michael sits in the middle of a constant, ever changing crowd. He was born with multiple birth defects. His right side is withered. He does not speak. Most days he can be found in the courtyard of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in Palestine. He sits not fifty yards from the very spot where the only perfect baby ever was born. When pilgrims or tourists encounter Michael, as many do when encountering Jesus, there are generally three responses. Upon leaving the Church many simply do not see Michael. They may be too busy looking at their cameras, engaging in a conversation with a friend or just happen to be looking another way when they pass. Some look right at Michael, whose need is obvious, and then purposely turn away choosing to ignore him. Some pilgrims see Michael and realize the truth of this man’s situation, his very real need and reach out in compassion. They may reach out with a donation, or a caring touch, or a word of encouragement. They choose to embrace this person, this handiwork of Jesus Christ. They extend their hand in love and solidarity, that this person, fearfully and wonderfully made, would know he is not alone.

It is in these same ways that we respond to our other brothers and sisters living in the Holy Land. Whether we refer to them as “Christians of the Holy Land” or “the Living Stones,” most are ethnically Palestinian Arabs. They trace their roots back over 2000 years, being named in Acts 2:11 as one of the ethnic groups present at the first Pentecost. Today, there are many church and relief organizations, activists and lay people who are reaching out their hands to help ensure that the poor, marginalized and suffering in the Holy Land are not forgotten. One way we can reach out to our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land is to make a generous contribution to the Pontifical Good Friday Collection. When we reach out in compassion, whether to our Palestinian brothers and sisters being marginalized and forgotten, or to a “Michael” sitting alone in a courtyard, we will discover that we can still grasp the hand of the living Christ near the very spot where He was born.