

OUR LADY OF MERCY PARISH NEWSLETTER

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A Journey of a Lifetime

By Ann and George Mayer, and Patricia and Joe Fitzgerald

“From the ruins of King Herod’s palace in Caesarea on the Mediterranean near Haifa, to the Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, we were always aware of the spiritual and historical events that occurred in those places. Nevertheless, just to make certain that we remained “focused,” Msgr. Morris occasionally reminded us that we were on a pilgrimage, not a vacation, while a spirit of joy was a constant companion.”

We four parishioners of Our Lady of Mercy joined about 60 others from St. John’s in Hillsdale and St. Joseph’s in Oradell to embark upon a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The 10 days we spent in Israel – in the footsteps of Jesus – in early November can be summarized in many ways, the most accurate of which is the single word, “inspirational.”

Departing from Newark airport on November 1, we arrived early the next morning in Tel Aviv where we met our Israeli tour guide, Ofra, a remarkably well informed, gracious English-speaking lady, and Wahib, our skilled Palestinian bus driver. Their skills were invaluable as the 10 day tour progressed. Relying heavily on the expert

biblical narratives and scholarly religious insights provided by our Spiritual Director, Monsignor Philip Morris, pastor of St. John’s, we participated in a pilgrimage that surpassed in reality everything we anticipated.



Left to right: Ann and George Mayer and Patricia and Joe Fitzgerald.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A Journey of a Lifetime	1
Book Review	4
Parish Ministries in Action	5
In the Christmas Spirit	
Gift Bags to Covenant House	
Spiritual Opportunities	
Remembering Therese Mistretta In Honor of Our Lady	6

Our routes took us through various regions of Israel, including Bethlehem and Jericho, which are under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Despite the contentious relationship which exists between Jews and Muslims, our safety was never in jeopardy nor did we experience any personal discomfort in that regard.

Please see *Journey* on page 2

Journey from page 1

Nazareth

After spending our first night in Israel at a comfortable hotel in Tel Aviv, we visited the Blessed Virgin's home in Nazareth, the site of the Annunciation and the little town where Jesus grew up. Although the area is now densely populated and holds none of the charm one would imagine existed 2000 years ago, the closeness we felt to Jesus, Mary and Joseph while being there was uncanny.

Sea of Galilee

We then traveled to the town of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee where a number of events described by the evangelists unfolded. How easily did we conjure up images of Jesus recruiting the early apostles to become "fishers of men" as each began his personal faith journey. A boat ride across the Sea of Galilee (actually a lake), the movement of the waves, the vanishing shore line as we headed for the other side, the sound of the gulls and the glimpse of fishing boats, all gave rise to emotions within us which surely mirrored those of Jesus and his companions.

"In such places, where events portrayed in the Bible occurred, a sense of relevance and reverent participation occupied our thoughts and accompanied our steps. Conversations were laced with expressions of disbelief at the blessing of being in the locations where so much of our Christian heritage began."

Capernaum, Mount of the Beatitudes, Mount Tabor, Jordan River

We visited Capernaum, the Mount of the Beatitudes, Mount Tabor, where Jesus was transfigured in the sight of Saints Peter, James and John, as recounted in St. Luke's Gospel. A visit to the Jordan River reminded us of John the Baptist's role in the story of Christ and its evolution in and around these sacred places. We were also blessed to undergo a repeat of our own baptism when Msgr. Morris sprinkled us with water taken from the Jordan. Talk about unforgettable experiences!

Bethlehem

A visit to the town of Bethlehem brought us into the Palestinian controlled part of Israel. We had to pass through check points manned by armed guards, as if to remind us that dissension, animosity and hostility are part of every day life, even in this country so precious to all three major religions. We were privileged to experience the Eucharistic Banquet at the Church of the Nativity, near the spot where tradition holds Jesus was born. You can be sure that emotions ran high.

Jerusalem

After two nights in Tiberias, we traveled to Jerusalem, arriving late in the afternoon as the sun was setting. Our first glimpse of that holiest of cities was spectacular! We departed the bus at the top of a hill overlooking the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane and the walled city itself. The Dome of the Rock was radiant and dazzling in the reflection of departing sunlight. Cameras were clicking away to capture the scene. The totality of the sight from that vantage point and the anticipation of seeing the places below left many of us short of breath and with inadequate words.

Please see *Journey* on page 3

Journey from page 2

Our first class hotel in Jerusalem was within easy walking distance to the wall separating the old and the new parts of the city. It would be our haven for the next five nights, to welcome us at the end of each remaining day of our pilgrimage.

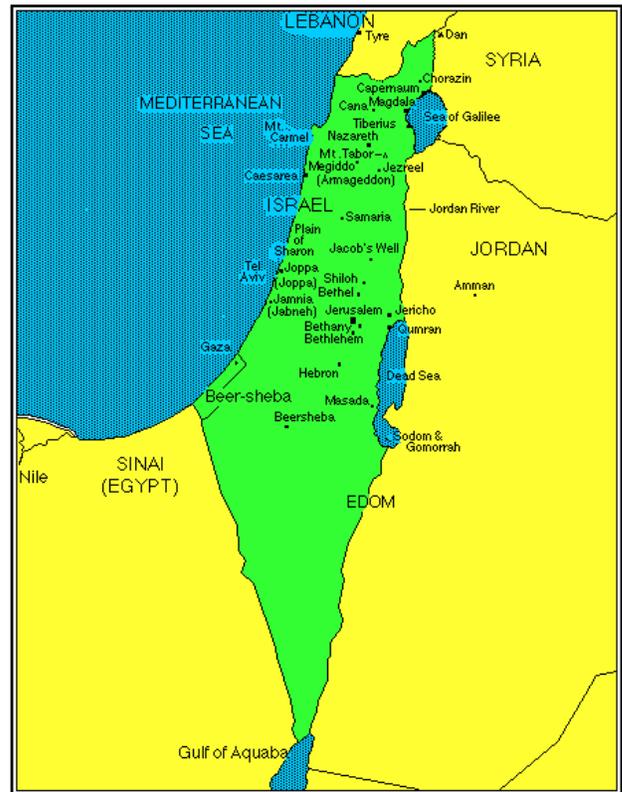
On the same day we visited the site where Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, we toured Yad Veshem, a poignant memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. The depth and scope of the graphic displays in this museum testify to the tragedy that is man’s horrendous capacity to hate, kill and destroy. Words cannot describe the frightful images one takes away from that memorial.

The hours leading up to Jesus’ suffering and death were recounted in several other parts of our journey. The Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives enabled us to sit, reflect and pray about the suffering he must have endured as a prelude to the crucifixion itself. It was not difficult to imagine the arrival of the temple authorities closing in to take him prisoner and the kiss of Judas in that lonely, isolated place.

We each took up a symbolic wooden cross, taking turns carrying it along the Via Dolorosa, stopping at a number of places reflecting various stations of the cross. As we progressed along the narrow alleys that make up the route past the merchants and bazaar owners, who were indifferent to what we were doing or disrespectful of its solemnity, we thought of the sights, sounds and taunting that Jesus must have encountered on his journey to Calvary.



Jerusalem



At the Church of the Holy Sepulcher we were able to crouch low and enter the tomb where Jesus lay until the glory of Easter morning.

While in the old city of Jerusalem, we also visited the “Wailing” or Western Wall, where we had the opportunity to leave written petitions as well as silently pray. An interesting footnote at this site is the fact that the women are not allowed to pray at the same part of the wall as the men and must pray at an area set aside to segregate the genders, in accordance with Jewish law.

Dead Sea

Toward the end of our pilgrimage, we visited the Dead Sea where some of our more daring companions ventured into the water, tried floating in its hyper-salinity or applied some of the mud alleged to have healing and beneficial qualities.

Please see *Journey* on page 4

Journey from page 3

Dead Sea (continued)

The area of the Dead Sea encompasses the ancient Jewish stronghold of Masada, built by King Herod atop a 1400 foot plateau. In defiance of Roman authority, in the first century 960 Jewish inhabitants chose to commit suicide rather than become prisoners subjected to deadly atrocities. The archeological and historic importance of this desert area, including the caves where the Dead Sea scrolls were found, is still being explored.

This summary of our pilgrimage would not be complete without mentioning the reaction shared by all of us who participated in the experience. Without exception, we experienced a deeper sense of our faith and a greater awareness of the importance the Bible stories play in our lives. In every way, this was truly a journey of a lifetime, one that can never be duplicated and one each of us will reflect upon for all our future years.

"It is not possible to single out any one place or happening as a highlight of the tour because each had particular significance to us individually or collectively. A celebratory event was the renewal of our marriage vows at the Church of The Holy Family in Cana, the little town where Jesus performed his first public miracle. How could we possibly be in that place and not reflect upon the "water-into-wine" event?"

Book Review

The Faith Club

By Ranya Idliby, Suzanne Oliver and Priscilla Warner

Reviewed by members of the Cornerstone Women's Book Club

"The book is a narrative written in the first person by three women from New York: a Muslim, a Christian and a Jew who describe their quest to understand and communicate their own belief systems in an effort to find common bonds, refute stereotypes and promote tolerance. The personal dialogue from each author makes this high-interest reading. We highly recommend this book."

Cathy Thabit

"The women in this book reminded me that although it is great to surround ourselves with friends who have the same religion and beliefs, it is also essential that we have friends of other religions and beliefs to help us understand what is going on in our world, both locally and globally. The book is also valuable in stressing what people of different backgrounds have in common, such as the love for family, the benefit of group worship, and the search for answers to life's questions. Maybe we are all supposed to write our own sequels as we reach out to others in our neighborhoods or workplaces."

Laura Parisi

"Great book! I was really inspired by the women who showed tremendous faith, courage and understanding in dealing with each other. And I learned a lot about the Jewish and Muslim faiths and how all of our faiths have more in common than we might think."

Kim Grande

Parish Ministries in Action

Interested in making a difference? Check our website www.urolm.org and click Ministry and see the many ministries open to you.



Knights of Columbus:

In the Christmas Spirit

This is the small squad of Knights of Columbus men and young Squires that help put the crèche together for the Christmas season. Starting from the left clockwise: Sam Lane, Joe Martorano, Dan Buonarota, Chris Reilly, John LaMarca, Charles Ryan, Jerry Jacob, Robert Martucci, Edward Jacob, Cory Distlehurst, Nick Buonarota and Tim Lane taking the picture.

Spiritual Opportunities

Retreats: OLM Men, April 25-27, Passionist Spiritual Center, Riverdale, NY. Call Jack Emerick at 201-391-6149.

OLM Women, April 11-13, San Alfonso Retreat House, Long Branch, NJ. Call Pat Stillwell at 201-391-2551.

Reconciliation: Every Saturday morning (9 - 9:30 a.m.) and Saturday afternoon (1 - 1:30 p.m); also Monday evenings (7:00 – 7:30 p.m.).

Eucharistic Adoration: Every First Friday of the month, starting after the 8:00 p.m. Mass and ending at 6:30 a.m. Saturday morning.

Miraculous Medal Novena: Every Saturday in the Sacred Heart Chapel immediately following the 8:30 a.m. Mass.

Rosary Altar Society: Every First Saturday of the month beginning with the 8:30 a.m. Mass, followed by reciting the Rosary after Mass. Breakfast is shared at the Parish Center afterwards.

OLM & OLMC Parish Youth:

Gift Bags to Covenant House

The Youth Groups of OLM and OLMC in Woodcliff Lake got together one evening before Christmas to listen to several speakers from Covenant House Newark. These young adult residents and their advisor, Fred Murphy, spoke about how Covenant House helps young men and women between the ages of 18 and 21 who have no place to stay and need help getting their lives back together. Covenant House offers shelter, meals, counseling, and employment help.

As a result, the Junior High Religious Education classes were asked to donate gift bags of shampoo, body wash, toothpaste, etc. Over 75 gift bags were collected! The Youth Groups, under the guidance of Jenn Kavanagh and Yvonne Post, held a pancake breakfast fundraiser and all donations were given to Covenant House.

We are proud of all our youth for their generosity and thank them for their kindness to Covenant House Newark.

Congratulations

To Monsignor James Turro who will be celebrating his 60th year in the priesthood on May 22, 2008. We thank you for all that you have done for us at OLM over these many years.

Remembering Therese Mistretta

By Jim Flynn

A few years ago Jim spent an afternoon with Therese and was so moved by her gentleness and life experiences that he was inspired to express his thoughts. Therese died on October 19, 2007 at the age of 83. Below are Jim's memories of that visit, an ordinary day spent with an extraordinary person.

At a passing glance, the old stone house certainly showed its antiquity, but as I paused before ringing the doorbell to visit Therese, I realized the 100+ year old house had a unique character. Its large multiple stone facing gave it extra age, and with a stream running diagonally in the rear under an old bridge, another time era rushed into my memory. Occupied since the early 1960s by Therese, her late husband, Al, nine children and one adopted, it has been a beehive of family activity. At its peak, it would have 15 to 20 children visiting, eating, playing and planning a wide variety of cultural and academic activities.

Since Therese and Al were tied closely to their parish life, the family brood was always involved in social action works, from influencing non-Christian playmates to inviting seminarians to dinner or family cookouts.

Therese, as she invited me in through her ancient and rather small kitchen, related how good she felt after four months in New Mexico overseeing a homeless shelter, working a soup kitchen, and fitting in living in a hermitage the last month in the hills of Colorado.

The Gallup, New Mexico homeless shelter, which witnessed Therese's selfless service, is a riveting ministry of daily counseling to homeless girls, alcoholic despondent adults, broken marriage survivors with children, and repeat visitors.

Since 1991, after her last child moved out, Therese and Al have spent each summer at the shelter. She has played multiple roles of mother, vocation counselor, good cop/bad cop, psychologist, career mentor and, most importantly, spiritual advisor.

The focus of her summer's presence, the woman's shelter, is adjacent to a Missionaries of Charity order that helps Therese on the spiritual side and cooks the food for their charges plus the soup kitchen needs. This is a dynamic partnership that works and keeps on giving.

It takes just a short time in her presence to feel her healing impact and realize she is a woman for all seasons. Her days of service and action make her nights of contemplation a true stilling of the soul.

With a maximum of 12 beds in three bedrooms, the woman's shelter is constantly busy, managed by the caring and indefatigable Therese, a woman certainly of the Beatitudes.



Therese Mistretta – A faithful and fearless parishioner of OLM.

Please see *Remembering* on page 7

Remembering from page 6

Near the women's homeless shelter, in the space of a few blocks, is a church and another shelter for men, and a soup kitchen which handles two meals a day for 70 to 80 homeless people that drop in daily. With such a beehive of activity plus postulant nuns in formation in the adjacent convent, the dynamic of spiritual activity is almost overwhelming, but perfect for the talents of a renowned woman, Therese.

After summer winds down, Therese seeks the oasis of contemplation in the mountains of Crestone, Colorado. I understand the magnetic draw for this Renaissance woman to the locale when I read a quarterly issue of *Desert Call*. It is published by a small Dominican monastic community of men and women who embrace a vowed life of contemplative solitude. With an assigned hermitage, Therese stills her soul, and transforms and recharges her being.

She remarked that at 79 years, she has a new energy level despite almost dying within the last year from a poorly diagnosed gall bladder infection.

When I asked her, as we sipped tea on this overcast day, how she managed to surmount the daily events of misfortune and chaos, she meekly replied that the Lord goes ahead of her with a broom, and sweeps away the pebbles as she goes forward.

As I left her monastic-type stone house at dusk, I felt total peace from her inspiring life. The quiet flow of an ancient stream and early winter silence gave a special glow to this woman of God.

In Memoriam

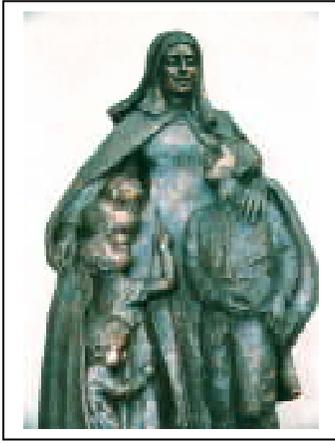
"We first met Therese years ago at our 6:30 a.m. Mass. She was very special to us and a welcome addition to our family. As a confidant she always had an ear to listen; as a spiritual advisor, she had words of wisdom to share. Her true devotion to God was evident not only as she openly accepted His will every day, but also in her quick wit combined with her endless stories. Therese was a joyful blessing and an inspiration who enriched our lives abundantly by her presence. Thank God for the gift of Therese!"

Theresa, John, Matthew and Kristen Corcoran

"At one time when Therese was on her way to New Mexico, lightning struck her home and caused a fire. Upon her return, I recall how thankful she was over what was saved! Another time a heavy rainstorm flooded her home making it uninhabitable, but through her perseverance, despite difficulties, it was restored. Therese had a mass of Thanksgiving celebrated when she returned home.

"After Therese had replacement knee surgery, she came close to death, and later praised God for her recovery. During several strokes that followed, she always kept her faith. All who knew her could not help but respect and admire her grateful attitude and her easy relaxed manner."

Jeannette Warhol



In Honor of Our Lady of Mercy

This beautiful statue of Our Lady of Mercy has been installed outside at the west end of the church facing the school in an area set apart with new plantings, pavers and a pedestal.

The funds for this were part of a generous bequest by Jack and Eleanor Healey to be used for tuition assistance in Our Lady of Mercy Interparochial School and to assist the OLM's pastor in paying for parish maintenance.

The artist who designed and executed this unique work is Sister Margaret Beaudette, S.C. whose studio is on the campus of Mt. St. Vincent College in Riverdale, N. Y.

Our Lady of Mercy protects and shelters all who come to her. "Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy." (from Salve Regina)

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Jim Dlugos, Ann Marie Dong, Cos Ferrara, Rosemarie Myers, Bette and Paul Sheganoski, Christine Venusti

COME JOIN US TO WORK ON THE NEXT EDITION OF THE PARISH NEWSLETTER.

S. Paluch Company, publisher of our bulletin, has donated the printing of this newsletter.

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The Acoustic Café

New Location: Our Lady of Mercy School Cafeteria

Showtime: 8:00 p.m./**Doors Open:** 7:30 p.m.

Admission \$15

March 14: Little Toby Walker, acoustic blues

April 19: Pat Victor, lap steel favorite

May 17: Terence Martin, poetic
singer/songwriter

Seating is first come, first served. Refreshments available.

Part of the proceeds benefit the Vallieres, Haiti
Scholarship Fund.

For more information, call 201-573-0718 or visit
www.goodacoustic.com/cafe.htm.