

The Pilgrimage

By

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The Pilgrimage

When I began Along the Way , I chose the name to give the series a sense of being conversation among pilgrims all seeking the same spiritual goal. Since then I have tried to keep to that model while not specifically talking about pilgrimage.

Stories became a common feature of Along the Way in recent years, as is appropriate to a pilgrimage theme. Pilgrimage was the setting for the sharing of many stories. The Canterbury Tales is a classic example.

Over the next few months, I'd like to share a story of pilgrimage with you. I present the story as fiction, though very little of it is truly fiction. Persons and events may be combined or structured a bit differently from the way they actually happened but at its heart this story is quite true.

Beginning

Br. Barti really wasn't a brother any more. Years ago He had been a Trappist but after more than 15 years in the monastery his path lead in a different direction. When I met Barti DelCalle he was in his mid -forties and a teacher of history and religion at St. Alered Catholic High School. I was about 26 at the time and worked as a juvenile probation officer out of the

County Family Court system. We were an unlikely pair of friends, given our age differences. Yet, over the years Barti became an extremely important friend and mentor.

One of my responsibilities as a juvenile probation officer was to prepare pre-sentence reports for the judges. These reports were a detailed evaluation of a juvenile probationer. The report helped the judge determine the most appropriate disposition of the case. Writing a report required interviews with the youngster, family members, teachers and other responsible adults who knew the youth in question. About two thirds of the time I recommended probation, which meant that I would be responsible to counsel with and monitor the young man's activities for the next year or two.

Barti was good with kids. He had the discipline that came with more than fifteen years of living in a monastery, as well as the kind heart that such experience often nurtures. His homeroom was referred to as Limbo, since the kids who were in trouble with the principal often ended up there. The kids saw it as their last chance to get their act together or be kicked out of the school. Barti and the principal saw it as an opportunity to give the children the extra attention that they so obviously needed.

Billy Scarlotti was a sophomore at St. Alered and in Barti's homeroom. He had a reputation in the school already and was assigned to Barti as his last chance to stay in school. About the same time Billy was transferred into Br. Barti's homeroom, he was arrested along with his younger brother, Mark, for a series of break-ins and minor burglaries in his neighborhood. I was in the process of doing a pre-sentence report on Billy and needed to interview his school counselor. The counselor encouraged me to speak with Barti, as he had more contact with the boy. I was able to meet Barti in the faculty lounge the next day. We had almost an hour of relative quiet for our discussion before he had to run off to teach class.

Billy's father was a demanding man who pushed himself to the limit and expected the same from his sons. His mother was ineffectual in standing up to her husband. She provided what nurturing she could for the boys but it was clear that much more was needed. The boys feared their father. He rarely struck them but his words were quick and wounding. It was clear that they were a disappointment for him. Yet, no matter how much effort they exerted, they could never please the man. Eventually the boys simply gave up trying to please their father. It was around this time that the burglaries began. They never took anything of real value-- mostly small change, food and alcohol. The police learned that the boys were behind the burglaries

when Mark was discovered drunk and passed out in his parent's living room. He was taken to the hospital to have his stomach pumped and for psychiatric observation. The next day he was released. The police figured that the bourbon Mark got drunk on was stolen from the neighbor. One thing lead to another and the boys were in court.

Bart

i was concerned about the boys. Their fear of the father, as well as their desperate need for the man's affection and approval was evident. He tried to talk with the father earlier in the semester but the man seemed to focus only on their academic performance. His father had been demanding of him and he turned out ok, so he would be equally demanding of his boys. The boys needed to learn to be tough if they were going to survive in today's world. No matter how Barti tried to get the man to perceive how desperate the boys felt, he was unable.

I had a similar impression. I was going to put the boys on a very mild form of probation. They would need to do a few community service projects, visit me every other week for monitoring visits, and the whole family would need to take part in court ordered counseling. perhaps the psychologist would be able to break through the father's shell and see how much his children needed him.

After the business discussion was concluded, I mentioned that I enjoyed the opportunity to visit St. Alered, as I had graduated from the school nine years earlier. I commented that I heard good things about him from the students and faculty with whom I maintained contact. He thanked me for the kind words and explained how he ended up at St. Alered. At least I understood why almost everyone at the school referred to this layman as Br. Barti.

During our conversation he mentioned that he still maintained some involvement with the Trappists as a lay associate --a member of their Third Order organization. The group had a formal relationship with the nearby Trappist Abbey. The monks provided spiritual direction, formation in the Trappist values and tradition, as well as a supportive environment for meetings and retreats. The group functioned as a community apart from the monks but united in spirit. Barti was novice master for the group at the time.

I felt the need for more direction in my spiritual life and questioned him about the group. Rather than begin a lecture on the topic, he invited me to attend a meeting that weekend. I attended, was deeply impressed, and shortly thereafter applied for membership. Thus began a

friendship and a spiritual mentoring relationship that has continued for many years.

What might have been

It was a month later when Billy and Mark Scarlotti were scheduled for their sentencing. I recommend to the judge pretty much what I had discussed with Barti. Prior to the sentencing I met with the boys and their parents and conveyed the gist of the sentence to them. They seemed relieved that the sentence was not going to be more severe, though Mr. Scarlotti was resistant to the idea of counseling.

The morning of the sentencing Alice Harrison, my supervisor, called before I left for work and asked me to come into her office as soon as I arrived at the CourtHouse. I immediately scanned my memory for possible infractions of office policy. I could think of none and was more than a little puzzled about the phone call. So, as soon as I walked into the office and my coat was off I knocked on her door.

"I received a call from the police this morning." Alice began. "It appears that last night Mark Scarlotti took his father's shotgun and killed himself. The police are classifying it as a suicide. Billy Scarlotti's sentencing has been postponed for a month."

I said nothing. I sat there in shock, trying to comprehend what I had been told. Mark Scarlotti, dead? Suicide? Mark was only eleven years old. How could he be dead? Shot himself in the head? Why? Why?

There were probationers to see and reports to write, so I kept busy the rest of the day but it was difficult. My mind kept wandering back to Mark Scarlotti. Why didn't I see it coming? If I had been more attentive or more skilled maybe I could have seen what was coming and prevented the suicide?

Barti attended Mark's funeral, as did I. Both of us would be working with Billy in the coming months and he needed all the support he could get. We wanted him to know that we were there for him. After the internment we spoke briefly with Billy. He seemed to be dealing with the grief better than anyone in the family. His mother was a wreck, barely able to contain the grief that overwhelmed her. Mr. Scarlotti was withdrawn, almost uncommunicative.

I needed to deal with my own grief, as Barti could see. So he invited me out for coffee and conversation. I accepted.

We found a quiet cafe that served excellent coffee. We were lost in our thoughts for the first few minutes, as we picked at scones with orange sauce and sipped our coffee. Eventually, I found the presence of mind to give voice to the pain I was struggling to understand.

"I'm not a stranger to death. I've had aunts and uncles die. All of my grandparents are dead. Class mates have died. It was difficult for me. Each time it was painful, some more painful than others. Yet, now...I feel devastated. I really didn't know Mark Scarlotti that well but the grief is almost more than I can bear. After work last Monday, the day I was told about the suicide, I went home and prayed. I don't think I've ever prayed as intensely or as desperately in my life. I don't even remember the words. I just knew that I had to give over Mark and his family to God. I knew that I had to cling to God with every fiber of my being at that moment and that is what I did. I wept bitterly. The tears that wouldn't come at work were now a flood."

Barti sat and listened to me as I vented the feelings that I had been barely able to contain for the better part of the week. He listened and understood. He nodded as I spoke, making it obvious that his reaction to Mark's death was not all that different from my own. We sat in silence for a while after the words no longer came. Then he began to speak.

"After I made temporary vows the Abbot called me into his office and asked me if I would like to study scripture. The Abbey needed a few scripture scholars to assist with formation and it was the custom to send talented young monks off for advanced studies to provide for the specialized skills a community of monks might require. Apparently I had a gift for languages and I loved Scripture, so I fit the bill. The opportunity intrigued me and I was more than a little puffed up that the Abbot had chosen me for the honor. So, I agreed to undertake the necessary studies. Several months later I was on a plane to Israel. I was to study at the *Dominican School of Biblical Studies* in Jerusalem and stay at the Abbey of Latroun in Ramleh, a town not far from Jerusalem on the road to Jaffa. I would spend a year learning Hebrew and Arabic prior to commencing formal scriptural studies.

"Even though I was a student, everyone in a Trappist monastery contributes to the welfare of the community at Latroun. I was given responsibility for the kitchen. My reputation had preceded me. The Abbot made sure that my kitchen responsibilities did not include cooking, as the culinary arts were not among the gifts God granted me.

"Miriam Mansour and her husband Abed worked for the Abbey. She was the cook and he was the general handyman. It was my responsibility to oversee Miriam. Br. Yacoub had

responsibility for Abed. Miriam was a gifted cook and a saintly woman. They were Palestinian Christians and suffered continually for their faith. The Israelis abused them because they were Palestinian and the Moslems ostracized them because they were Christian. Even though they suffered they were the happiest people I have ever known and the most saintly.

"I am jumping ahead a bit but the event I want to describe took place after I had been in Israel almost eight years. Abed had suffered from a weak back and aching joints for many years, almost as long as I knew him. However, he endured and got his job done. One day the pain became too much for him. He was unable to do the assigned chores. Everyone knew that this was not like Abed. Normally he did what you asked of him in the cool hours of the morning and spent the rest of the day accomplishing a dozen tasks that needed doing but no one seemed willing to undertake. When we sent for the physician tests were ordered. Before long the lab results were back and we all received the news. Abed was dying from cancer. It was eating away at his bowels and hip bones. He would be dead in another month or two.

"Not only his family, but the entire monastery was saddened when they heard the news. We were all losing a good friend and a true man of God. He was a much holier man than most of the monks. We all knew it and admired him for his virtue.

"It is customary among the Palestinians to provide a light meal for the funeral guests at the home of the departed. Immediately after the funeral Mass I went to the Mansour residence to help prepare for the meal. The family members were still at the internment when I arrived, all except for Ishmael, a boy of about twelve. He had been left behind to watch the house and prepare drinks for the guests who would arrive soon. He was making lemonade. Aside from the lemons and sugar, there was no other food in the house. I realized that they were probably broke with the funeral expenses and would be unable to feed the guests. I didn't want them to be embarrassed, so I reached into my pocket and found the equivalent of about twenty dollars. It wasn't much but it would provide something more than what they had. I gave the money to Ishmael and sent him to the store. He didn't come back for over forty minutes. This was a trip down the block that could be navigated in about fifteen minutes even on the busiest of days. When he showed up all he had was a package of tea for brewing and half of a cake. I was more than a little frustrated. It was almost time for the visitors and all we had was unbrewed tea and half of a sad little cake.

"I was ready to explode at the waste, imagining that he had been irresponsible, spending the money on himself. Just as I was about to explode, he began to explain in a halting and frightened voice. On his way back from the store he met a Palestinian woman whose home was hit by Israeli artillery shells in retribution for some Palestinian assault, which had been in reprisal for some Israeli offense. The woman had no place to lay her head and nothing to eat. Ishmael gave her half of the cake. There had been money left over from the earlier transaction, so Ishmael gave the woman the rest of the money in his pockets. With the grace of God, the woman would be able to stay under a roof that night and for weeks to come.

"My righteous indignation melted away into deep shame as I listened to Ishmael. How much like his parents was this boy. His father had just died and the only money in his pocket was a few dollars he received from his parents' employer. Did he think of himself? No! His only concern was for someone to seem to be in even more desperate straits than himself! How like his mother and father, this child saint!

"I carried my shame silently for many days but it continued to burn within me. I could not let go of the shame I felt and my deep disappointment at my failings. In prayer one evening about a week later everything came clear. I realized what must be done. Each of us has a different path as we follow where God leads. My failing was no more than a marker of where I was along the path. Becoming obsessed with my failings only locked me into a self-centered masochism that served no good and only served to undermine my resolve. Before Abed died I promised to help look after Miriam and their children. My responsibility was to keep my promise.

"So, you see, it is a waste of energy to berate ourselves for what we might have done. We did what we did...that is all with which we have to work. Anything else is a fantasy. Neither of us are saints or geniuses. We do the best that we can do. That's all there is. God asks nothing more of us. Mark Scarlotti is dead. Billy is alive and needs us. Let's put aside self-recrimination and focus on Billy and the other children who need us."

He was right. I was indulging in self-pity more than anything else with the emotional roller coaster I had been riding the past week. It was right to grieve the loss of Mark but not to wallow in grief. I had known the boy only slightly and my grief was out of proportion to the depth of our relationship. If I was to honor Mark, it was time to focus on caring for the rest of the young men assigned to me.

Pilgrimage

Mark died in March. By June I was attending the Lay Associate meetings regularly as a novice. These meetings involved time for discussion, common prayer, formal instruction, and silent prayer. Aside from the regular meetings of the entire group, Barti and I would meet a couple times a month as part of my formation as a novice in the group. These meetings were particularly helpful because they not only included instruction in the Rule of St. Benedict and various Cistercian traditions but they were also an opportunity to talk. Barti was rapidly becoming my *de facto* spiritual director and a trusted friend. Our age difference, almost twenty years, didn't seem a barrier to our friendship. It even may have helped the relationship, as he naturally fell into the role of mentor. At that point in my life a mentor was very much needed.

My unquestioning childhood faith was destroyed in the cynicism of my college years. I also discovered that my sense of direction in life had disappeared. with the loss of faith. There were several dark years of spiritual and emotional struggle. Eventually I reached a point where I discovered that at least I valued life. This was not much but it was a toehold. As time passed I discovered other toeholds, that love was important to and hope. Before long I found that I even possessed a basic faith in God. I could accept that God existed but that God was far beyond my comprehensio! What do I do with these insights?

My search lead me through an examination of Judaism, several Protestant denominations, Islam, Zen, New Age philosophies, Baha'i, and ultimately back home to the Catholic tradition where I began. Throughout the search I made discoveries about the importance of prayer, ritual, community, structure, and my spiritual needs. God kept drawing me along. Clues were given just when I needed them. Experiences would come out of the blue or I would meet people through unusual coincidences and these would lead to some new insight bringing me a step closer to home.

I had been back in the good graces of the Church for about two years. It was exciting at first, as I discovered for the first time how rich the Church of my childhood is with support for whoever seeks a deeper relationship with the Lord. With time the novelty began to wear off. It was difficult to keep up with the spiritual disciplines I took on earlier. There was a growing sense of emptiness. I was going around in circles and needed direction. I needed a clear idea of

what God had set out as my life's purpose. Then along came Barti, right on time! In the months since we met, I felt like there was life and movement again.

If the weather was nice, we often got together at the park and walked as we spoke. I found the walk distracting at first. Though it wasn't long before I noticed that the pace of walking helped to slow down our conversation and allow space for thought and a more careful choice of words. Occasionally Barti would have me do simple exercises to help focus my awareness. The exercises were more easily done in the park than a coffee shop, which was the other common venue for our conversations.

On one of the earlier walks through the park, I remember sharing my frustration with Barti over having no clear direction in my life. His response was quick.

"That's not anything I can give you! I might tell you to do this exercise or read that book as part of your formation but I am only here to help you find your own way. God's will for me is not His will for you. My path is different from yours. Only you can find the path along which God is calling you."

"I understand that," I responded. "Yet, how am I supposed to find my path? I don't read minds. How am I to know what it is God wants of me?"

Barti smiled at my sincerity, then continued on. "You put one foot in front of the other and walk. As you walk you look around. As you walk you listen--to the sounds which envelop you, to the sound of your heart, to the voices of those who God sends to instruct you. As you walk watch for the markers that point in the direction of your purpose. Trust in the road, that it will take you where you need to go. Before long you will find yourself walking the path of your destiny and knowing where God is leading you.

"The image that comes to mind is a pilgrimage. The pilgrim seeks some special grace, some transformation of spirit by traveling to a distant shrine, a sacred place. He cuts himself off from everything that is familiar and with the blessing of his pastor, sets off on the journey. As he travels there are challenges that must be overcome. The trip is arduous and makes great demands of strength, discipline, and courage upon the pilgrim. Cut off from his home, he dies to that familiar and comfortable world. He is a walking ghost haunting the highway upon which he travels. He travels through an in-between world of spiritual purpose and sore feet, where ordinary people and objects are infused with new meaning and a sacred purpose. He will meet other pilgrims and find revelation in these encounters. Then, at some point in the pilgrimage,

when he is sufficiently open to hear God's voice, his questions will be answered and he will find himself on sacred ground. He will find himself a new person, transformed, reborn, really alive for the first time and ready to do what is required of him."

"Then I must go on pilgrimage!" The thought burst from my lips before it was half formed. I realized immediately that I was biting off more than I might want to chew. However, I realized also that I was right in wanting to go on pilgrimage. Nothing had ever felt so right in all of my 26 years! Then it dawned on me that I must go on pilgrimage to some particular place. "Barti, where should I go?"

"Well, there are many places you could go. The Cathedral is considered a place of pilgrimage in this diocese. There are regional pilgrimage sites like the Jesuit martyrs shrine in Auriesville, New York. There are national sites like the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. There are international sites, like the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Then, of course, there are the three classic pilgrimage sites: Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela. or modern classics like Lourdes, Fatima and Medjournorie."

I hadn't realized there were so many places of pilgrimage and was unsure of what to say. I wanted a real pilgrimage. I wanted to know what to do with my life. I wanted to feel like I was a new person. I wanted to have a sense of mission, a sense of purpose. Now it seemed I was only marking time. I told this to Barti.

"Each of the ancient pilgrimage sites is a different experience. In a sense, they do a different work in the pilgrim.

Barti stopped walking for a moment and looked at me, as if he were calling me to a decision with serious consequences, as he continued to explain. "*Santiago de Compostela* requires a long journey on foot. This pilgrimage is a 500 kilometer hike across northern Spain. It is a pilgrimage whose landmarks are reminiscent of heroes and adventurers. It is traditionally a pilgrimage of quest where the inner transformation occurs as an element of the journey. The visit to the shrine at the end is essentially a celebration of the journey. The symbol for pilgrims who walk this path is the scallop shell.

"The pilgrimage to Rome is a celebration of the Church. It is a celebration of the community of believers, as fellow travelers and not just as an organizational structure. The history of the community is encountered there. Those who walk this path are called wanderers and their symbol is the walking stick.

"The pilgrimage to Jerusalem is much more a pilgrimage for the individual. History and community are all present but the heart of the experience is the encounter with Christ in the land where he lived out his mortal existence and in which his mission was revealed. It is much more a pilgrimage of faith than the others. One doesn't visit just one site, though the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is considered the ultimate shrine to which one journeys. Rather, there are many sites and many shrines, each reflecting something of sacred history or the life and ministry of Christ. In this pilgrimage one encounters the source and foundation of his faith. Those who make the pilgrimage are referred to as pilgrims and their symbol is the palm.

"Let me ask you a question. Your answer will help us narrow down your options. Where has God lead you so far? Your entire life is a pilgrimage. So if we can get a sense of where God has been leading you, it will be much easier to figure the most beneficial pilgrimage."

"I've been wrestling with this question for years, but it's still difficult to give my thoughts expression." I began. "I need to know that God is real. I have the sense of his reality. All of my seeking has been to find God. I thought maybe that the Rabbi or the minister might know where God is. They spoke to me of God, taught theology and invited me to partake in ritual. I listened to what they said. I participated in the ritual. It was helpful but God still hid from me. Since returning to the Church I have found a greater sense of God's presence. This has been primarily in people like yourself, who seem to live and breathe in God's presence. I want that experience. I want that certainty!"

"Well then, I recommend that you go back to the source." Barti turned away and began walking again, speaking as he continued on.

"Those who desired to encounter God left their homes and after passing through the desert met him in the Promised Land. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua. Perhaps you need to take the Pilgrimage of Abraham and travel to Jerusalem."

"How would I go about it? Abraham followed the fertile crescent. Each of the others you mentioned followed other routes." I was concerned that Barti would want me to travel to Iraq as the starting point for my journey and that the rest of it would be on foot through the desert and Middle -eastern battlefields. It was as if Barti sensed my discomfort. Smiling, he answered my question.

"We each make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem along the path that God sets out for us. It is not like *Santiago de Compostela* with its road and villages. When we go to Jerusalem we are

making a journey of faith and each of us comes to faith by grace. The heart of the journey is internal anyway, so that mode of transportation is of little consequence. It is important that you have time to devote to the pilgrimage."

An idea was taking shape in the back of my mind as Barti spoke. "Do you think you could come with me to Israel? Be my guide on the pilgrimage. I'll cover your expenses." "I'll have to make sure that I can take the time off from teaching. We will need at least a month but as long as the arrangements can be made, I'd be happy to join you. However, as a spiritual guide I will do only what I have been doing on our walks. I will help you by asking questions. The Holy Spirit is your only real guide on this pilgrimage. Listen to Him carefully."

Listening

The next month was a living hell.

Early in the evening on Monday, I got a call from the mother of one of my probationers. The boy was missing. His brother overheard him talking about sniffing glue. The kid had a problem with that and had been admitted to the hospital before because of the results of glue inhalation. I tried to keep evenings for my personal life, what there was of it. However, this could be serious, so I got into my car and headed across town. Along with the boy's mother and brother, I spent the rest of the evening looking for this youngster behind bushes, in alleys, in dumpsters, and in abandoned buildings. He eventually turned up at a friend's house.

Wednesday morning a young boy I was to transport to a juvenile facility ran away. After making his farewells I walked him to my car, so we could begin the three hour trip to the facility. Just as I was trying to get him settled in the car, he wanted to go back and hug his mother one more time. He never gave me any trouble, so I agreed to it. As soon as he was near mom, he bolted out the door and off into the neighborhood. Unlike the TV shows where the hero chases the child for a few blocks until he catches the offender with a flying tackle, in real life there is no chasing. You let the kid run and call the police. Aside from being embarrassed and frustrated, I was angry at myself for falling for the kid's ruse.

A week later my supervisor was telling us that the child support bureau needed some help. They were trying to bring their records up to date and issue warrants against those who were sufficiently in arrears on their court mandated child support payments. We were to spend half days twice a week with the child support bureau going through payment records and figuring out who was naughty and who was nice. I had a talent for working with the numbers and within a week I was assigned to do it half- time every day. I may have had a talent for it but I hated it. I was getting behind in my own work and I hated doing what was essentially an accountant's job. No offense meant to any accountant, but I'm not an accountant and have never felt any attraction to the profession. The work drained me. I was coming home in the evening, collapsing on the couch and waking up just in time to shower and come back to work the next day.

The girl I was going with at the time seemed to have a fixation on the morbid. I could never understand what she saw in Sylvia Plath. Our relationship was going more and more down

hill. I was just about ready to break off the relationship but I still liked her and wasn't sure that breaking the relationship off was the right thing to do.

I was praying but nothing was happening. I'd give over all of these frustrations to God in prayer but the situation only grew worse. Where was God in all this?

So, when my next meeting with Barti rolled around, that was the first issue I brought up. This time we met at the coffee shop. It was mid- afternoon and the shop was almost deserted. Barti listened patiently to my litany of woe, not saying a word.

Finally, when everything was out, Barti told me to sit back in my chair and close my eyes. Next, he told me to relax. Then I was to sit there for the next fifteen minutes in absolute silence and listen--just listen.

I felt like a fool sitting in that coffee shop with my eyes closed for fifteen minutes. I figured that there were only a few people in the shop, so why not? I sat and listened. I heard some dishes rattle as the counterman was putting away clean cups and saucers. A chair on the other side of the room scraped the floor as someone stood up. I hear the footsteps as that same person walked to the door and out of the shop. I heard the sound of cars and trucks on the street--engines, horns, tires on pavement. I heard a couple of boys talking about some ball game as they walked past the coffee shop. I smelled the coffee brewing. It smelled delicious. I could smell some muffins fresh from the oven as they were being placed in the display case by the counterman. I felt the gentle stroke of a breeze as the old rotary fan rotated above me with a gentle wooshing sound and set the air in motion. I heard my heart beating and felt my blood pulsing through my head. I felt my lungs slowly fill and empty all the scents of the shop as I breathed slowly. I heard the couple across the shop talk about their daughter. She was leaving her husband and they didn't know what to do. I heard Barti whisper, "Open your eyes." I didn't see him at first, then I noticed that he was sitting near the couple who were concerned about their daughter. He got up and came back to our table.

"What did you hear?"

I explained everything that happened and what I heard. I was particularly excited about the sensitivity to smells and sensations. I was astonished by the clarity of my hearing.

"Exactly, we go through life blind deaf and dumb to everything that is going on around us. It isn't that we don't have the ability to hear it, or see it, or smell it, or feel it. We take all of this stimulation in through our sense organs. Its just that we tune 90% of it out.

"Now, you were complaining about your job, your girlfriend, your prayer life. the question I have for you is 'How carefully were you listening?'"

He was right. I was so busy feeling sorry for myself that I didn't pay enough attention to the kids, to my girlfriend or to God. My prayers were little more than complaints. I admitted as much to Barti.

"Prayer is talking to God. It's all right to pour out your heart. We need to do so. However, it is just as important to listen. God speaks to us in the silence. We can hear his voice if we make the attempt to listen. God speaks to us in many ways but we have to pay enough attention to realize that God is speaking to us.

"For example, have you really listened to your girlfriend? She is depressed and asking you for help. It's evident in her obsession with morbid poetry and suicidal poets.

"The boy who ran away is another example. Did you give him a chance to talk with you about his fears at being sent to a juvenile facility. He sounds like a fairly young child from what you said...about 11 or so. That must be a terribly frightening fate for such a small child. His mother is probably beside herself from worry over what will happen to the boy. Did you listen to any of them express their fears. Did you explain to them exactly what the training facility was like?

"You want God to speak to you in some baritone voice and give you traveling orders. It doesn't work that way! God was giving you detailed instructions in the person of that boy and his mother. God was giving you detailed instructions in the worries voiced by your girlfriend. You only needed to listen with your heart and respond to what it told you. that requires taking some time by yourself and quietly listening, reflecting on what God is doing in your life and what is being asked of you."

"You might discover the voice of God in the thunderstorm. Odds are however, that you will discover the voice of God in the gentle breeze or the smile of a child. that was the experience of Elijah. He ran from Jezebel in fright, hiding in a cave deep in the wasteland. He sought to find God in the thunder, in the storm, in other loud and dramatic effects. To his surprise, he discovered God in a moment of silence surrounded by the stirring of a gentle breeze. It is the ordinary and commonplace that we will most likely discover God but we must be ready. We must be looking and listening for God in the commonplace.

"Remember also that by listening carefully with an open and prayerful heart to the people with whom you come in contact you are serving as a sacrament of grace for them. God is allowing you to be a channel of his grace to those people, as careful listening to someone is an act of love. People understand this, in their hearts if not their conscious minds, and appreciate it.

We sat drinking our coffee in silence for at least ten minutes.

As I think back, Barti was an excellent example of a loving listener. While I may stress Barti's comments as I tell this tale, the great majority of the time we spent together involved him listening to me. He would draw out my thoughts and feelings. He would help clarify what I was trying to say. Mostly he would simply listen attentively, as if every word that came from my mouth was a blessing he did not want to lose or waste. He was this way with everyone. Whenever he was in conversation with a person, his whole attention was on that person. He took in every nuance and subtle expression. He was totally focused on that person.

Barti promised earlier to make arrangements for the pilgrimage. He broke the silence by bringing me up to date on that activity. Air passage was arranged on *ELAL* with a lay-over at Orly near Paris for a few hours. On the way back the layover would be in London. We would arrive in Israel on February ninth and leave on March 2nd. We would stay in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. That gave us six months before we departed but he suggested that we take the time in between to prepare for the pilgrimage. In a sense, the spiritual pilgrimage would begin immediately, with the actual departure simply being a step in a process that had already begun.

Living in the present

Each morning and each evening I prayed the psalms and then spent fifteen minutes simply listening. He made me promise to spend time at it daily. At first, I was irritated at the responsibility and drain on my limited time that the promise to Barti entailed. Though after a week or so I was looking forward to the listening sessions. No matter how tired I was by the end of the fifteen minutes I was almost bursting with energy. I also found that ideas would float into my consciousness on how to deal with some of the difficulties that were weighing me down.

At the office I finally went into my boss and told him that I did not have the personality to be spending so much time doing accounting. With all due respect for accountants, I was not an accountant and didn't want to be one! Further, it was not part of my job description. I was able to tell him what I was feeling because I finally realized that the worst that could happen was that I'd lose my job. I had few financial responsibilities and I was young. If I got fired, I could find other work.

This doesn't mean I wasn't nervous. I was so nervous I had trouble getting the words out but I told him. As a result I was back spending all my time working with the kids and doing what I enjoyed. There were no repercussions. In fact, I heard through others that my boss had more respect for me after our little meeting.

I reached the point in my struggles over what to do about my girlfriend that it was clear to me that our relationship had no future. So, while we were out having dinner the following Friday evening, I told her about my feelings regarding our relationship. It was funny. She felt pretty much the same and was trying to figure out how to tell me she wanted to break things off. We were both relieved and had a good laugh over the predicament. The rest of our date was one of the most relaxed and enjoyable we had in a long time. That evening we parted friends.

By the time my next talk session with Barti rolled around, Indian Summer was history and the weather was beginning to turn cold. Though brisk, the weather was still tolerable so we decided to take a walk through the park. I was excited about the change in my situation and the help that the listening exercise had been in bringing that about. I realized how important it was to listen--to those I interacted with, to myself, and to God--and shared this hard won insight with Barti.

He asked me if I understood how the listening exercise worked. Well, I figured that by paying more attention to others it was possible to perceive what they were really saying. I could get past the words and masks they use to protect themselves. Barti smiled and said that I was part right. I was stumped at that point, I couldn't figure out to what else he could be referring. After allowing me to stew for a few minutes, he came to my rescue.

"Being more perceptive of what others are trying to communicate to us in their words, gestures, facial expressions, and general behavior is important. Normally, we are so busy rehearsing our own lines that we fail to really perceive what the other person is trying to tell us. Paying more attention to what the other person is trying to communicate is essential but it is not all that the listening exercise teaches us.

"The most important lesson of the exercise is to get us to focus on the present. When we do the exercise our entire attention is concentrated on our present experience. The slightest wavering of our attention and the exercise fails. Almost all of our problems are rooted in a failure to focus on the present moment.

"Our mind will gnaw on the bone of a past hurt, if we allow it. That hurt will be analyzed from every angle and every possible scenario tested and re tested. All this does is blow up the significance of the event in our minds until some minor failing becomes a life-changing tragedy. A priest I know remarked that a former parishioner left the Church for over twenty years because the pastor back then failed to say "hello" to her when she crossed his path while shopping! How absurd!? The man was probably distracted and hadn't noticed her--or anyone else--while lost in his thoughts. The woman wouldn't let go of this unintentional slight and for the next twenty years that momentary non-encounter became a defining event in her life.

"We can get equally hung up on the future. You were paralyzed at work and in your relationship with the young lady because you were terrified of the future. You feared what would happen if you were to protest the unfair burden that had been dumped on you at work. That fear wore you down. Yet, it wasn't only the extra work you were doing. You were worried over the possible outcomes of various courses of action. None of those outcomes had any reality except in your mind, yet the fear they engendered created a great deal of stress. Together, these two stresses multiplied their impact on your health and attitude.

The same thing was happening with the girl. You were concerned at the prospect of the relationship developing any further. Yet, you were also concerned about letting go of the

relationship. In either case, your worries only amplified each other. In the end you were so tied up emotionally that you couldn't think through the situation or take action to deal with it. By focusing on the present, you were able to eliminate all of these "what- ifs" and simply face the reality before you. You dealt with the present and let the future take care of itself. the result of this was that the problems were dealt with effectively and your worries never materialized.

"We are prisoners of language, especially those of us living in Western, literate cultures. We are able to conjugate verbs into so many declensions and shades of meaning. We separate out various relationships in time among the past, present and future. We think it's real and we begin to live in that mind set. Yet, the more traditional cultures, whose languages only deal with the present, are closer to the truth.

"The past exists only in our memories. It's colored by our perceptions and experience. History is only the stories we tell about our memories of former present moments.

"The future exists only as possibilities. It has no substance. All that exists of time is the present. It's like a breaking wave. We surf the crest. We seem to be moving forward with the wave propelling us but where are we moving? We never move into the future. All that happens is that we make choices in the present and those choices eliminate some possibilities and allow others to be experienced as present reality. When we focus on the present, we focus on the only reality with which we are able to work. This is much more effective than spinning our wheels over the illusion of past or future events."

We spoke a while longer on our preparations for pilgrimage. He asked me to read several books that might give me a better understanding of Christian pilgrimage. Among these books was *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* by Victor Turner. He felt that this book would be the most helpful.

He also had me order a directory of the major tourist sites in Israel. The basic geographic and demographic information in the directory would help me get a better sense of the actual experience of the people living in Israel today. He explained that we often think of the Holy Land as some fantasy world of angels and people dressed in robes. Israel is a real country and an intimate part of contemporary social and political history. It helps to understand that from the beginning.

Fear

The newspapers were filled with news of another bombing in the Holy Land. This time it took place at the Open Air Market in Tel Aviv. Almost thirty people were killed in the explosion. Only a week before there had been reports of a city bus in Jerusalem that was the target of gunmen. Two people were killed in this incident and five wounded.

The violence in Israel worried me. I didn't want to get killed while I was on pilgrimage. There was a feeling of anxiety in the pit of my stomach and it grew stronger day by day as we drew closer to the pilgrimage. Yet, I was committed to going on pilgrimage and had no intention of calling everything off.

I figured the best thing I could do was to discuss my feelings with Barti. So, on our next stroll through the park, I brought up my concerns. Barti's response was helpful.

"Fear is part of being human. It's hard-wired into one of the most elemental parts of our brain. Fear is a survival mechanism. It tells us when we're in danger and puts us on full alert. It isn't a particularly pleasant sensation. It's a lot like pain. Pain lets us know that damage has been done to our body and we need to be careful. If we don't take the pain into account we will soon be dead. Just the same, if we don't respect our fears then we will be foolish when caution is necessary. The ultimate result is an early death.

"You might remember that fear of the Lord is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this context, it is healthy fear. God is well beyond our comprehension. As we consider God, it is good to be aware that we are referring to the most powerful force in the universe. In fact, we are referring to the "ground of being", the foundation upon which all existence is made possible. Failure to take God serious is dangerous, but not because God will zap us. The danger is the same as if we were standing on the edge of a cliff and decided to ignore the law of gravity. If we don't have proper respect for powers that are beyond us, our foolishness can cost us our lives. God is the ultimate power that is beyond us!

Sometimes we are afraid in the face of change. As a result we cling to what we know, even if it is ultimately less helpful in the long run. A friend was married to an alcoholic. The guy was a brute and beat his wife regularly, especially when he was drunk. She had many opportunities to leave the guy but she never did. She knew her brute of a husband and was more afraid to strike out on her own. She would rather live with the evil she knew than face the

unknown. They were eventually separated. Her husband broke her collar bond which was reported to the police by her physician. The courts forced change on the woman, by placing her husband in jail for two years. She eventually adjusted.

"Fear is healthy when it can be traced to some cause that is a reasonable threat to us. It is one of many defenses that protects us from the threat.

"Fear is unhealthy when there is no reasonable link between a source of danger and our fear. It is unhealthy when it is out of proportion to the severity of the threat.

"Here is another exercise for you. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and relax. Imagine that you are walking along a country road and the sun has just set. Darkness is beginning to settle in all around you but there is still sufficient light for you to continue your walk for a bit longer. Unexpectedly, you hear a growling sound from behind you. You turn to face the source of the sound and are staring into the face of that which you most fear.

"Who or what is it that you are looking at? What is it that you most fear? Why are you afraid of it? What is the worst that it can do to you?

"Such fears come from several sources.

"We may have experienced some trauma in the past and it has left its mark on us. As a small child a large dog attacked me. I was pulled out of its path just in time, with no physical harm done. However, I was scared out of my wits. As a result, for many years afterward whenever I saw a large dog a sense of fear rose up in me. The dog may have been perfectly safe but the anxiety was still there. That particular fear was learned and served to keep me on my guard when around dogs, so it had some positive value. However, it also made it difficult for me to be comfortable around dogs when there was no reason to be on guard. So in that sense it became something of an irrational fear. It caused me to react much more strongly to the presence of a dog than the actual threat warranted.

"The way to deal with this is to identify the source of our irrational fear. The source can be an original trauma or even the experience of another person. For example, we might watch a show on television or hear a friend describe a particularly painful experience. As we listen, we take the story to heart and later react to an experience similar to the one described just the same as if we had been the one to undergo the original trauma. So, we must reflect on how we came to have the fear. Then we must reflect if the current situation justifies our fearful reaction. That is, are we responding to a real danger or to the memory of a trauma real or imagined? If there is

real danger present, we respond accordingly. However, if our fearful reaction has little basis in reality, then we must recognize that more is at work and attempt to understand the source of what is disturbing us.

"At the beginning of the 20th century Professor Carl Gustav Jung taught that the human personality is comprised of many different but consistent patterns of behavior. He referred to these patterns as archetypes and felt that a person's overall personality and mental health could be understood in the interaction of a person's archetypes.

"Two important archetypes were the "self" and the "shadow". The self could be understood at two levels. The more common understanding was as our day to day consciousness. The other type of self referred to an ideal, an imagined expression of our best qualities--a perfect us.

"The shadow was the personification of all the characteristics that are part of us but are inconsistent with our ideal self. We tend to repress these characteristics, forgetting about them most of the time. The shadow includes everything that we feel is wrong with us, everything that we dislike about ourselves.

"Redemption comes when we face the shadow, acknowledge it as part of us in all of its disagreeable characteristics, and integrate it into our overall personality. Acknowledging our less desirable traits is important. Without acknowledging those parts of us which we detest, we are powerless to do anything about them. We can't begin to address these traits until we admit they exist.

"We not only acknowledge shadow elements within us but embrace them. These traits have a negative aspect but they are part of who we are. Properly directed the shadow traits can be very useful.

"You once told me that you like science fiction, especially Star Trek. Did you ever see the Star Trek episode where Captain Kirk is being transported and there is electrical interference. As a result, he is split into two Kirks. One Kirk retains his gentle, compassionate nature. The other retains his passionate, volatile nature. The first Kirk is a whimp and the second an unstable, violent fool. It is only when they are together and in balance that a healthy, wise, prudent, yet courageous starship captain results.

"The same applies to our shadow traits. They provide energy to our personality but must be acknowledged and balanced against the other traits of our personality. The goal is not to repress our shadow elements but to incorporate them into our conscious self.

"Irrational fear or revulsion toward something that doesn't seem to warrant such a strong reaction may be the result of associating a particular situation or person with a shadow trait. This type of fear is not particularly healthy, except as a warning sign that we need to do some "shadow work". That is, we need to identify this shadow trait, acknowledge it, and understand its role in our lives.

"For example, we might react very strongly to the sight of a young man wearing a thick gold neck chain and an ear ring. We might feel that such affectations reflect a person with poor morals, gender identity confusion, and a possible threat. This reaction is inappropriate because we know nothing more about the young man than he is wearing certain types of jewelry. The cause for the inappropriate reaction might be found in the person holding the opinion simply by associating such jewelry with tendencies to show off, be flirtatious, and sexually uninhibited. These associations are important because the person has repressed his own self-assertion, self-confidence, and sexuality. Such repression may have been picked up as a child in a strict family or school environment. Thus, the irrational reaction is a response ultimately directed at the person's fear of his or her own less controllable traits. Acknowledging these traits in oneself may result in greater self-confidence and a more outgoing personality, as well as eliminate the irrational fear they generate.

"Frankly, given the news in recent weeks your fears do not seem unreasonable. Israel is a war zone. There is a danger that we might be caught in the middle of it. So, your fears seem healthy and natural. However, having lived in Israel for a few years, I found life there generally safer than in any large American city. I would walk the streets of their cities almost any time of day or night and feel reasonably safe, something that I would not do in most large American cities. There is a large police presence in most Israeli urban centers. This serves as an impediment to random violence. Violence in Israel tends to be more focused, so it is easier to avoid if you are prudent. Violence in America is much more random. It lacks the political focus one finds in Israel. Thus, it is often more dangerous in American urban centers than in Israeli cities, as prudence is not as easy to apply.

"Our fears also teach us of our values. What is it about the violence in Israel that you find particularly frightening? Is it the fear of death? Why do you fear death?"

We had been walking for some time and had reached the end of our usual route. Barti suggested that we continue our discussion the next time, picking up with fear of death. I agreed and hurried off to an appointment with one of my probationers.

Death

Several days before our next get-together the snow began falling. It was still late autumn but winter weather was already settling in around us. The leaves had fallen from the trees weeks before. The snow and the gray sky gave the world a somber feeling. The wind was brisk on the day of our meeting. I had no desire for the endurance test that a walk through the park would be. So, I called Barti about an hour before our meeting and we agreed that the cafe was the more realistic venue.

On the way over I was hung up in traffic for ten minutes, as a funeral procession commandeered the road while making its way from St. Eulalia Church to Holy Sepulcher Cemetery. This was before the era of universal cell phones, so I was unable to call Barti and let him know of my predicament. I wasn't happy with the situation but there was little I could do about it. Eventually the last car in the procession turned the corner and I was able to proceed to the cafe at a reasonable speed.

Barti drank coffee and nibbled at a scone as I walked in and offered my apologies. He hadn't noticed that I was late, so there wasn't much to forgive. No harm done!

I commented on the funeral procession and its role in delaying me. He suggested that it was a good omen, since death was the topic of our conversation that morning. Then, with no further introduction, he jumped right into the topic.

"We were trying to identify basic fears last week that are common to most people. Certainly the most common is fear of death.

"No matter what we believe, death is an unknown. We can only perceive death from the perspective of flesh and blood whose nature is to die. From this perspective death appears quite frightening. One minute we are filled with energy, vital with emotion and intelligence. The next minute we are cold, dull and lifeless. Our survivors bury us and we become food for worms."

Barti paused. I think he may have had second thoughts about the "food for worms" image, as he still had half a scone to finish. He continued on shortly.

"Given such an end, it is quite natural to fear death. Death robs one not only of life but of our consciousness-- our self! We are and then we are not! One who has had a particularly full or a particularly difficult life might yearn for death as release. Yet, this is the exception.

"The experience of death for most of us one of loss. A parent, friend or sibling dies and are left with the ache of loss. Friends, ministers, homilists all try to comfort us with words of hope and promises of eternal life. Yet, it rings awfully hollow at the time. All we see is the dead, lifeless body of the person we love. We have our memories but they only serve to remind us of the one who means so much to us. We cling to the memories and only experience greater pain.

"Eventually we learn to let go, if only because clinging has brought so little benefit. In letting go of the pain and grief we discover that those we love are not so distant. The best example of this is the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is only when they lose themselves in conversation that they are able to move beyond the pain of loss. Once this happens, they are free to discover that the man who traveled with them was the one they believed lost to them forever.

"Our ideas about the world are woefully inadequate, yet we cling to them. No matter how insistent Scripture is that our ideas of life don't begin to adequately express its true nature, we don't easily believe. We look at the corpse and believe only what we can see with our eyes. Perhaps this is why Jesus rose from the dead and spent so much time afterward visiting with his disciples. He wanted to make sure that they looked beyond the grave to the greater reality in which death is only a transition from one form of life to another."

As I listened to Barti I agreed that it is not easy believing the Good News of eternal life when the physical reality in which we function speaks of death rather than life. Even the promise of resurrection seemed remote. I said as much to him a short time later.

Barti considered my observation and then continued. "When my father died I stayed at his apartment for a few days trying to get his things in order, packed up, and shipped out to friends and relatives. I remember that the evening after the funeral I was sitting in the living room of the apartment when I heard his bedroom door open. A few moments later the sound of walking could be heard. Someone could be heard walking from the bedroom to the bathroom. A few moments later the toilet flushed. The door opened again and the sound of footsteps continued. This time the sound came into the living room where I was and moved toward my Dad's favorite rocker. Moments later the rocker began to move back and forth, as if someone were sitting there rocking. That was dad's routine. It was a strange experience because I saw nothing but the movement and heard sounds that had no reason for happening. It was a

comforting experience, as I sensed dad's presence. It seemed to confirm that he was still around in some form. That memory helped me to make it through the process of grieving and get on with life. For me, it was clear that life did not absolutely end with death.

"Now, this experience meant a lot to me and was a real comfort over the years that followed. Someone else might call it a fantasy induced in a grief stricken son, dismissing it as evidence of anything. I don't care if anyone else believes it. It was proof enough for me. If you can take something from it, then you are most welcome to do so.

"There is evidence that the cold, dead corpse is not the only byproduct of death. Some would argue that there is abundant evidence. If we want the evidence, we must be open to it and not deny what we see, hear, touch or smell because something about the experience doesn't fit our expectations."

"We have hope of life beyond physical death." I began my next question. "As a result of our faith traditions and the beliefs we forged from personal experience. Yet, it is still a matter of faith in the end. At least until we move beyond the veil of death, worms are the only certitude given us. How can we live with that?"

Barti took a sip of coffee and then with a gentle smile on his face asked, "How can we live without it?"

I was more than a little confused by his response. I could live quite happily without the spectre of death hanging over my shoulder. Barti could see the response forming on my lips and anticipated my response.

"I want you to do an exercise. It's simple. All you need do is close your eyes and follow where your imagination leads.

"You are in a doctor's office. The physician expresses her sorrow and informs you that you have only a few days to live. The disease is such that you have almost full control of your faculties and are physically active. The end will come unexpected, probably in the form of a heart attack. Take this as reality. You only have a few days of life remaining. Ok, now tell me what thoughts are going on in your mind."

"I'm frightened at the news and angry." I explained.

"What is it about the prospect of approaching death that frightens you?"

"Well, I'm afraid of the pain that might be involved. It's strange the thought of ceasing to be is not that frightening. If Im' not around then there is nothing to worry about. I can't believe

that Purgatory is a pit of fire. If we end up there because we don't have our act sufficiently together for heaven, then I assume the basic function of Purgatory is education. I enjoyed school growing up, so Purgatory as a supernatural school sounds like fun.

"I kind of fear the loss of everything that is so sweet about being alive, not knowing if there is some analog of these pleasures in the afterlife. I enjoy the pleasure of a good book. The smell of rain just after a shower is wonderful. I would miss the opportunity of sitting here every few weeks drinking coffee and speaking with you. I love the color of a blossoming rose and the sound of waves crashing on the shore. These are all small joys but dependent upon our senses. Even if we continue to exist in some spiritual form, without our bodies would these simple pleasures be possible?"

"Very good," Barti said. "Now, why would you be angry."

"Because I'm still young. There is so much I want to do with my life and I've barely begun to act on those dreams. I'm not sure that I even know what my dreams are, except for a vague apprehension of possibilities. I'm angry at the unfairness of God for taking me so young. I'm angry at myself for wasting what little life I have been given."

"If you are angry at yourself for wasting your life, how would you spend those last few days?"

"Well, I guess that once I was able to deal with the thought that I have very little time left I would try to get my affairs in order. Oh, I would take care of the insurance, will, and other legal papers but that would be the least of my concerns. I would want to make right all the opportunities I wasted. I would treat each remaining moment as precious. I would wring as much awareness, joy, and pleasure as I can squeeze from each moment. Certainly, I would not harm others but I would not be concerned about what others might think of me. Who cares if they think me a fool? I would be truly foolish only if I let fear of the gossip or disapproval of others keep me from experiencing my remaining days to the full.

"If I was in love, I would speak of passion to my beloved. If she rejects me, so what? At least, I proclaimed my love and did the best that I could. I'd have no regrets.

"I would greet my friends and thank them for the joy and support they brought me over the years. I would tell them what their friendship meant to me.

"As to those who offended me, I would visit with them and offer forgiveness. In turn, I would seek out those whom I offended and ask for forgiveness.

"If I yearned to experience the best food or wine, then I would eat and drink.

"If I sought wisdom, then I would find the best teachers and wrestle with the problem I sought to solve.

"If it was just the simple pleasures of walking in the garden, enjoying the sight and perfume of the flowers, that I feared losing, I would walk in the garden. I would spend as much time as I wanted simply looking at the flowers, smelling their intoxicating scent, feeling their leaves and petals, and listening to the sound of the wind rustling the leaves. I would live those last days with all the concentration, awareness, and intensity I could muster."

Barti smiled as I spoke and nodded his head. My response was exactly what he wanted to hear. When I finally ran out of words, I was surprised how energized that speech left me feeling. Barti waited a moment for me to relax and then continued.

"You are under a sentence of death. You may die within a week, in the next five minutes, or fifty years from now but you will die and you don't know when! How does knowing that you will die in a week or so differ significantly from knowing that you will die in the next five minutes or the next fifty years? We try to kid ourselves and imagine that we will never die. It is a lie that blinds us to the fact that we have only a little time to enjoy the gift of life. We have only a little time to accomplish any goals or realize any vision. We have only a little time to drink in the beauty and enjoy the delicious taste of life. We have only a little time to do anything that is important to us and we must use that time or lose it!

"Fear of death is like fear of the Lord. We speak of fear of the Lord as a virtue and a gift of the Holy Spirit. So, it is! We waste our lives if we get caught up in petty squabbles, become locked into doing what we dislike, or closing our senses to the wonder all around us. When we take God for granted, we are ignoring the source of our life and all the good that comes into our life. We are wandering around blind and deaf to the reality that surrounds us. Fear of the Lord causes us to treat God with all the respect, reverence, and full awareness that fear of death inspires in us toward the gift of life."

What Barti said made sense but still I was confused. "I always thought of fear as something that makes you freeze in the face of danger, something that keeps you from doing what is necessary. Am I wrong in this understanding?"

"There are degrees of fear. In large amounts, where it takes over your ability to think and act it is a poison that can kill you and cause harm to others. In large amounts fear can keep you

its prisoner. Its bonds can be worse than those of any jailer because the only one who can free you from those bonds is you. Extreme fear is a terrible thing. Fear of death, taken to the extreme, can rob life of all its joy. Instead of trying to savor every bit of grace that is poured into our lives, excessive fear forces us to hide from grace. We feel threatened by every possibility that comes into our lives. We are afraid to act because every action can introduce change into our life and we fear change because it is what leads us on toward death. Of course, it also leads us to cherish the joys this world has to offer.

"I am not saying that fear is always beneficial. Many times it is not. However, the fear that reminds us of our limits and all of the grace and possibilities that we have been given is good. It is good if it reminds us to see that all of the graces and possibilities are precious gifts. Fear is like a bitter tonic that in small amounts help to cure us but in larger amounts can harm us or even kill us. Fear is good when it prompts us to greater awareness of the many gifts that are ours to enjoy. It is bad when we are so paralyzed by it that we shut down and our awareness becomes even more constricted than before.

"So, going back to your original concern, I'm glad that you are concerned about the possibility of death on our Pilgrimage! Learn from that fear. Let it teach you to treat each moment as a gift that is priceless."

JFK

We continued to meet during the next two months. The focus of our meetings shifted away from the broader spiritual conversation of the earlier visits. The focus became much more narrowed, as we prepared for the pilgrimage.

Time was running short. We had to arrange for visas and confirm our hotel reservations. Barti wanted me to have a working knowledge of the major shrines we would visit long before we set foot in the Holy Land. Each shrine has its unique history and that history shaped the meaning and experience of the shrine over time. More than other major pilgrimage centers, the Holy Land pilgrimage is a journey through time and the pilgrim needs a good mental map of the physical and spiritual ground that will be covered.

I also learned a few Hebrew words from a Jewish friend at work, who had both friends and relatives living in Israel. I learned the important things: how to greet people and to ask where the bathroom might be found. I discovered that the greeting was useful but that most Israelis spoke enough English that simple needs could be communicated rather easily in English. Along with French, English seemed to be the standard second language.

Around mid-afternoon on February 8th Barti and I boarded a shuttle flight to JFK Airport in New York City. We were to connect with an 11:30pm *ELAL* flight to Israel. There was a connecting stop at Orly Airport near Paris. We reached JFK around 4:30pm, so we had a fairly long lay over waiting for our *ELAL* flight. The lay over was longer than six hours and *ELAL* was very particular about accepting potentially unaccompanied luggage. So, we had to haul our oversized suitcases around the terminal with us until check-in time, around 8:30pm that evening.

The flight to New York had been long enough to be irritating but too short for the airline to serve a meal. So, we ate dinner at one of the terminal restaurants. The food was better than I expected but it was still airline terminal food. After that we tried to get comfortable in one of the waiting areas not far from the entrance to the security screening for *ELAL*. One thing that never changes about air line terminals is the chairs provided for the waiting passengers. The chairs are durable but that is their only virtue. They always seem to have more in common with medieval instruments of torture than with furniture designed for comfort. They are always off-size, either too small or too large to really be comfortable. These particular chairs were strips of some leatherette material hung on a metal frame. When you sit in them for more than ten minutes, you

begin to feel like a sack of rice. Your back is twisted out of shape and your legs soon fall asleep as the flow of blood to them is cut off. any attempt to find a more comfortable position is quickly defeated, as gravity eventually forces you back into a position of total discomfort.

I was in the midst of trying to find some way to be a bit more comfortable when a street person wandered into the waiting lounge. At least, I thought the man was a street person. He was not as well dressed as anyone else in the waiting area. There was a certain "air" about him that suggested he had not bathed any time recently. He moved silently among the travelers in the waiting area giving out little blue cards. The cards had the letter equivalents of the alphabet in American Sign Language and asked for a handout.

I resented such an imposition on unwary travelers and thought that the panhandler might be breaking some terminal security rule. When he worked his way around to me again, I pulled a dollar out of my pocket and gave it to him. In the back of my mind I kept telling myself that it was a scam and the guy was no more deaf than I was. But what was I going to do? Make a big scene? In situations like that you feel almost as if you are being robbed by these people. Tell them no and they are likely to insult you or leave you feeling guilty because you are too cheap to help someone in need. I hated it when beggars approached me. You get that in any big city but New York is the worst. The beggars are really aggressive and insulting.

Barti watched all this as it played out. I noticed that he gave the beggar a couple dollars, smiling as he did so. Then to my surprise he signed to the beggar and the beggar responded in sign. I began to feel ashamed of my inner grumbling realizing that the panhandler actually knew American Sign Language. Perhaps he really was handicapped! Barti continued on with the man for several minutes and then shook his hand before the man left to continue his rounds of the waiting lounges in the terminal.

I couldn't look Barti in the eyes after the man left. Here I was...ready to embark on a sacred pilgrimage--a supposedly transforming spiritual experience, and I had thought such terrible things about the poor man. My only consoling thought was that all of this took place internally. At least to a outward observer my actions reflected a certain charity. As I tried to rationalize my behavior, I felt Barti's hand on my shoulder in a brotherly gesture.

"Anything wrong my friend? You look like you just murdered your mother!"

I guess my inability to look Barti in the eye was an obvious sign of the guilt with which I wrestled. He doesn't let anything get by unnoticed. So, I explained to him what was going on in

my heart while the gentleman was giving out his cards and trying to collect a bit of change from the people in the lounge. A sympathetic smile flashed on his face and he sat down next to me so he could talk without lecturing everyone in the lounge.

"You are right to be concerned about the internal wrestling match, though I would not be overly concerned. Our ultimate actions in any situation are important. They are the concrete expression of our inner disposition in any situation. Until we are able to read one another's minds as clearly as we can speak with one another, actions are the only real evidence we have of what a person intends. However, there are times when our actions reflect something other than our intentions. If you feel the coercion of social pressure or a desire to look good in front of others as a significant factor in reaching your final action, your intention may actually be quite different. When it comes to spiritual development, your intention is at least as important as the resulting action. Intention may even be more important than your course of action.

"Americans are a very practical people. We are only concerned with results. How you get the desired results is pretty much up to you, as long as you don't harm anyone else in the process. At least, that is what we would like to believe. Often times ethical concerns are of little consequence as we strive toward our goal.

"From the perspective of spiritual development, how we reach the goal is supremely important. Spiritual development is a process of transformation from a state of fear and self-centeredness to one of courage and *agape*. You may remember that *agape* is a Greek word that refers to unselfish, unconditional love. Courage is the strength of character to act from *agape* under all circumstances. This goes back to the many references to God as love that we find in John the Evangelist. Spiritual development is becoming more like God and the fundamental way we move toward that goal is to embody love ever more perfectly.

"This isn't a matter of moving through school and earning A's and B's. It's a matter of our character. How do we instinctively respond in a particular situation? Is it from *agape* or from some other characteristic? Our thoughts and intentions matter! We may eventually give into expectations or the pressures of a guilty conscience but our initial reaction tells us where we stand in regard to the test we just encountered.

"No matter how ashamed we are when we fall short of our ideals, our less than perfect reactions have much to teach us. Remember a few months ago when we were speaking of fear of death and its relationship to our shadow? Our less than perfect intentions reveal our shadow

traits. For example, your reaction to the beggar suggests a fear of being used. This may be the result of earlier experiences where you were taken advantage of. Or, it may simply represent a general discomfort with your conflicting values--to be generous yet not to be used. This is not unusual, especially for a young person like you. It's best to reflect on your inner motivations, rather than me play psychoanalyst and try to guess what is going on. The point is that by identifying the root of your reaction you can begin to understand and integrate it with the rest of your personality.

"Remember, the positive side of your reaction was prudence. Also, even though it was not your immediate reaction, you did assist the man. That shows that your intentions are moving in the right direction. No one can fault you for being a student, especially if you show signs of learning your lessons."

After his explanation I didn't feel as bad as before. He turned a shameful failure into a learning experience. I was grateful.

"Thank you. I like your definition of spiritual development, Barti. 'Spiritual development is a process of transformation from a state of fear and self-centeredness to one of courage and *agape*.' I always see *agape* or love in its more generic terms referred to as a central element of spiritual development. This is the first time I've seen courage placed in such a central role as well. Why is it so central to spiritual development?"

"We can understand the difference between right and wrong, yet not act properly... or not even act. We can feel the most profound unconditional love for another, yet not act on that love. We can think that our faith is absolute, yet when put to the test fail dramatically. Courage is the virtue that enables us to act on our inner dispositions of mind and heart.

"Aquinas described the two central characteristics of humanity as intellect and will. According to him, it is these characteristics that make us the image and likeness of God,. Intellect refers to our capacities for rational thought and decision making. Will refers to the motive power that translates thoughts and decisions into action.

"Courage can be understood as the application of will. Yet, it can not be reduced simply to the exercise of will. Courage is a virtue. It is a consistent characteristic of our personality. It is evident in our commitment to what we perceive as true, good, or beautiful--of God, no matter what obstacles we may face. Courage is evident, even when reason suggests another, less demanding course of action, yet we continue with what we know is right. There are times when

we will to act in a certain way but lack sufficient ground upon which to take the first step. Courage provides the firm ground for the first step. The only example that comes to mind is when Jesus invited Peter to step out of the boat and join him walking upon the waves. Peter trusted in Jesus. He had sufficient faith. He willed himself to put his leg out of the boat and stand on the water. Yet, as he did so, he couldn't find any place of adequate firmness upon which to stand. One additional virtue was necessary, the courage to put his foot into the moving, insubstantial water and stand upon it. When he found the courage to act upon his convictions and do what was illogical and impossible, he did the impossible and walked on the waves with Jesus.

"Without courage, we retreat to the easy and comfortable. The easiest difficulty will defeat us. Much of life is facing apparent obstacles and discovering that they are not obstacles but blessings and opportunities that we have viewed through the lens of fear. Courage is a corrective lens that helps us see past the illusion and do what is necessary.

"Perhaps if your courage had been greater you would have confronted the beggar with your doubts. If you had done so, you would have learned of his genuine handicap, his struggle to survive, and his many problems in addition to the challenge of simple survival because of his handicap. The result would have been the money you gave him having its source in *agape* rather than resentment. It may not have meant much to the beggar but it would have been a profound difference for you.

Aliyah

It wasn't long before the *ELAL* staff instructed the passengers to begin security screening. This was the most extensive security screening I ever experienced. There were metal detectors, "pat downs", and detailed examinations of our person and possessions suitcase by suitcase. Around that time there had been a series of plane bombings. *ELAL* was the most obvious target of such attempts. That being the case, they were determined not to give anyone a chance to blow up one of their planes. It seemed unusually early to begin security clearance for the flight when we were first called. However, by the time everyone was through, it was only minutes before the flight attendants were ready to board the plane.

The flight itself was rather uneventful. Much of the journey from New York to Paris was during the early hours of the morning. Most of the passengers, except for a few insomniacs or those suffering from terminal fear of flying, slept through the greater part of the flight. We were about an hour out of Paris when the light of dawn shone through the windows and caused the sleeping passengers to stir. Shortly, breakfast of lox and bagels was served, along with a variety of juices. The sunlight brought a sense of adventure along with the new day.

As we flew over France headed for the Orley Airport near Paris, I was fascinated by all of the little square patches of farmland. They seemed to cover the terrain like a grandmother's quilt. Rivers and roads were stitches of silver and black thread that held the quilt together.

Much of France was countryside. I had always thought of Europe as crowded. That impression had been reinforced by hundred's of television shows portraying its cities, town and villages. I imagined that after centuries of cultivation and construction little would be left of the countryside, long converted to concrete buildings and asphalt roadways. What I found below was a beautiful wonderland, with few signs of urban overcrowding and dysfunction.

The stop over at Orley was for an hour and a half. We were instructed to leave the plane so they could service it. The remainder of the trip was a seven hour flight. We needed to stretch and walk a bit before submitting to the endurance test that awaited us.

The airport was immense but similar to almost every other major airport in the world. After a few minutes of wandering the nearby shops and trying to negotiate the purchase of an English language tabloid and a snack in French, I returned to the waiting lounge for our flight on to Israel. Barti had an old friend at a Cistercian abbey nearby and spent much of the layover

trying to place a phone call to the abbey. I ended up getting involved in a conversation with a professional boxer, an American, who was on his way from Paris to Israel for a fight. The conversation was fascinating but of little consequence.

Once on the plane I began flipping through the tabloid looking for an article of sufficient interest to keep me busy until we were airborne. There was an article about some woman taking a movie star to court over the paternity of their supposed "love child". Another article discussed the latest developments in biochemistry. The scientists had developed a pill that allowed a person to lose twenty or more pounds in little more than a week or so. Progress was being made on a cure for baldness. A calf had been born with two heads and local folk were taking it as a bad omen. There was also an article about Nostradamus, a native son of France, which attempted to link his prophecies with those of Edgar Cayce, an American psychic of legendary proportions, as well as Our Lady of Fatima. I was a little upset with the association of the Blessed Mother with fortune tellers but I realized that I could expect little better from the tabloid press.

Barti joined me before the doors of the plane were sealed. He was quite pleased that he had been able to place the call and speak at least briefly with his old friend. His friend was the prior of the abbey. If it had been anyone else, he probably would not have been allowed to have the conversation, even if he had been able to make the connection. The call from outside would have been considered an intrusion on monastic silence.

I put the tabloid aside as lunch was being served. Somehow the conversation got around to the article on Nostradamus. He was amused by my reaction.

"We are a church of prophets and visionaries. Why should we be harsh on those who also report visions. If I remember correctly, Nostradamus was a Catholic. I know that Cayce was a Christian and a very religious man. After all, aren't we all prophets and visionaries to a certain extent?"

"I guess so," I mumbled in response. Then, with more strength in my voice, I added. "But this business about visions and prophesy has always been a part of religion that I found uncomfortable. It seems to me that it turns serious reflection about God into little more than a circus!"

"What's wrong with the circus? People love going to the circus. It's the high point of the year for many people. Often times we take religion too seriously. Everything is so serious and

so meaningful that we lose sight of the fact that God is a mystery to us! We want to contain God in a little box we can mark "*handle with care*" and which we can control. God is much too wild and uncontrollable to fit in any box. God is mysterious. He loves to sneak up behind us and surprise us when we least expect it! God is a lot like a clown who is trying to get us to smile and enjoy His creation.

"Prophets and visionaries get caught up in the experience of God touching their lives. They sense things. Their imagination gets carried away and they see things.

"While people like Cayce may only offer prophetic utterances on people's health, the Biblical prophets sensed God's hunger and thirst for justice. They felt the pain of injustice as it burdened God's people. It was this pain and God's demands for justice that caused them to cry out and demand that justice be done in Israel and in the world.

"Visionaries, like Nostradamus, might see images of a possible future play themselves out on the screen of their imagination. They might also see visions of a time when the lion will lie with the lamb, swords will be hammered into plowshares, and spears bent into pruning hooks. The visions give us hope and we need hope to get through the challenges of life. When the world is lying in ruins around us, do we need hard-nosed pragmatism or a vision of what can be? I believe that only hope will allow us to transform the ruins into new life. That is the lesson of the Resurrection.

I'm not speaking so much of Nostradamus and what people have made of his visions. Rather, I'm thinking of the Psalms, the Book of Revelation, all of the saints' tales of the wonders that await us when we drop the mortal coil and return to our heavenly home. Even inspired visions of what life on planet Earth can be like with a little effort can be a wonderful source of hope and motivation to do something to bring the vision to reality. We need such visions to keep us going. We need such visions to remind us of the mystery!"

As I listened to Barti, I turned the page of the tabloid and found an article that made my point. "Look at this. '*Lost Jesus Prophecy speaks of down turn in stock market.*' Now, isn't this foolish? I doubt seriously if it has anything to do they kind of prophecy and visions you've been talking about."

"Probably not. That headline is concerned with selling papers. No visions, except of dollar signs, are involved in the story at all. Yet, no matter how foolish the article or even more

foolish those poor souls who actually believe the article, the importance of dreaming dreams is not diminished.

"When I was a college student trying to figure out where God was leading me, I went to an ecumenical lecture at the campus Newman Center. There were four or five speakers. About half way through the evening I figured that I had wasted my time, as the speakers were both uninspired and boring. Then, just as I was getting ready to make my exit, a new speaker began his presentation. There was extraordinary power in his voice. He was entrancing. He didn't speak of theology or religious practice. He didn't speak of sacraments or ministry. What he shared with us was a vision of the future! He spoke of justice and cooperation. He described how nations and peoples would work together as brothers and sisters. He spoke of a passionate God who loved His people and wanted us to love one another with similar passion. It was a wonderful vision. His words inspired me. I wanted to see that vision of what the world made real. This experience was the motive force behind a new direction in my life. That direction eventually resulted in me seeking admission to the Abbey and in a round about way helped bring me where I am this moment. It was a beautiful vision, reflective of the Good News. I was lucky.

"Not all beautiful visions are good news. Friends of mine from college heard what they believed to be good news and were similarly inspired. They ended up becoming involved in a cult group. They survived the experience but paid dearly for the education they gained in the school of hard knocks.

"Throughout human history communities have had their shaman, mystics, visionaries, psychics, soothsayers, priests, prophets, clairvoyants, and fortune tellers. While some of those who filled these roles were fakes pulling a scam on the village people, it is too broad and consistent a phenomenon world-wide for it not to have some basis in fact. We don't understand the possible mechanics of such abilities but it is quite reasonable to accept that something exists which serves as the basis for the roles these people occupy. We don't know to what extent these people are tapping into reality, into possibilities, or into wishful thinking. We don't know to what extent the content of their visions is the result of a clear perception of some approaching reality or an imaginative interpretation of what they thought they saw. If that isn't enough, some of the most beautiful dreams for a better world turned out to be more of a curse than a blessing in the long run.

"At the tail-end of the 19th century most people looked forward to the 20th century with relish and anticipation. They imagined that this would be the century when engineering would experience a tremendous breakthroughs. Science fiction based visions of robot servants, Flash Gordon jet packs, moving sidewalks, and unlimited space travel danced in the minds of many people. This vision of the future grew out of the insights of 18th century scientists that were being applied to everyday life by engineers and technicians. Looking back one hundred years, it is obvious that much of the turn of the century vision has been realized. Developments have occurred that go far beyond even the most visionary of the early 20th century futurists. For example, no one had a sense of the impact that computers and world- wide communication would have on the world. The same goes for television and automobiles.

"While this vision gave rise to much good, it also had its dark side. Humanity began to feel that everything was under its control. Even if we occasionally came across evidence to the contrary, we assured ourselves that if not now, then soon we would be in control of everything.

After World War I a series of articles began to appear in scientific journals both in Europe and the Americas. these articles encouraged the application of the scientific method to controlling the human population. The articles discussed contraception, eugenics, even abortion as desirable methods for preventing the conception or birth of children. The idea was that if you controlled the size of your population you had a better handle on the available resources. Some governments offered people cash incentives not to have children, while others encouraged couples to have as many children as possible. This view of people as animals has a certain reasonableness to it, as we are creatures of flesh and blood. The biological sciences have direct application to human beings. There is a danger however, that humans will be treated simply as objects to be manipulated. That is one of the dangers that the Church is concerned with in its teachings on contraception and abortion.

"An example of what can happen when we allow supposed, neutral "scientific thinking" to replace our values can be found in the chronic care facilities in Germany. It was argued in medical journals during the late twenties that the principles of animal husbandry should be applied to humans. This principle was known as "eugenics". Farmers carefully mated their stock to ensure the healthiest and largest cows, chickens, goats and other farm animals. Unhealthy animals were not allowed to mate and were first priority for the dinner table. The medical journals compared persons with disabilities to the unhealthy farm animals.

"Many countries passed laws allowing the developmentally disabled to be sterilized involuntarily. That occurred even in the United States. In fact, the last recorded cases of this were reported in the mid -fifties. In Germany the government didn't stop with sterilization. It is well documented that beginning around 1936, inpatients in mental hospitals and chronic care facilities for the mentally and physically disabled were systematically put to death. The techniques developed to eliminate the disabled were eventually applied to the elimination of the Jewish people in Europe, as well as anyone who dissented from Nazi ideology.

"If we take a look at Nazism, we find that it appeared to be "good news" to many people. After World War I Germany was in disarray. It's economy was in shambles. The other European nations were so angry at Germany for its role in World War I that they wanted to take revenge for the damage it caused and to grind the German people into the ground so completely that the nation would never be a threat again. These burdens caused much suffering. The financial burdens placed on Germany following World War I were particularly onerous and caused a terrible resentment among the German people. In the midst of this suffering and hopelessness a voice rose up speaking of the ancient nobility and glory of the German people. This voice encouraged the people to overcome the adversity they suffered. This voice promised a glorious future in which the ancient wonder of the German culture would reach a golden age in a thousand year reign. Germany would be the new Roman Empire. This vision captured the hearts of a defeated people and gave them the strength to rebuild an economy that had been near death and to hope in a glorious future.

"However, the dark side of this vision was that the Nazis argued that it was not responsible for its downfall but others were to be blamed. Germany had been able to deal with its historic enemies (France, England, and the other Allied nations) for centuries. It was traditionally the first among the nations of Europe. Rather, Germany fell because it was sabotaged from within. According to the Nazis, Germany had been sabotaged by the Communists, by homosexuals, by religious fanatics, and worst of all by the Jews. If Germany was to rise again, it would do so only by ensuring that these saboteurs could not damage the nation.

"The source of this vision was Adolph Hitler. For some it was a revitalizing vision of hope and renewal. For others, Hitler's vision was a nightmare. In the end, Germany was reduced

to rubble, its people subjected to the privations of war, and eleven million innocent people murdered in Nazi death camps.

"It is human nature to dream dreams and to see visions. Some may be more outlandish than others, the more colorful make it into the pages of your favorite tabloid. Some may stimulate humanity to scale the heights of greatness. Others may pull humanity down into the depths of despair and incomprehensible horror. Often times it is difficult to tell the difference at first. Is the vision ultimately a blessing or a curse to humanity? The one thing to always remember is that '*by their fruit you will know them*'. "

By the time Barti finished his thoughts on visions the pilot was announcing that the coast of Israel was just ahead of us. People were moving toward the side windows of the plane in order to see the Holy Land as the plane came in over the beach. The airport was not far from the beach so the plane was relatively low. As the shadow of the plane whipped across the Mediterranean and came up on the sandy beach below, there was loud cheering throughout the airplane. Music was playing in the background, something about *Mazoltov*, that is blessing, and people were crying for joy. It was the first time I had ever experienced such an emotional landing approach. The thought came to me that only one hundred years before the idea of Israel had been only a vision --a dream of a few people. In little more than fifty years that dream had become a reality. With that thought echoing in my mind, the *ELAL* Boeing 747 touched down in the Holy Land.

Shabat

Lod Airport was very different from Orly or JFK. While the other airports were massive and ornate, Lod was simple. The terminal was no larger than those found in most mid-sized American cities. The design was pure utility, with no decoration. It could have been a military terminal, which was probably the basis for its design.

It was sunset when we flew into Israeli airspace. By the time we disembarked and were going through customs and immigration it was dark. Again, the customs inspection was exceptionally thorough, so it was at least an hour after we arrived before we finally had our luggage and were ready to head into Tel Aviv. Hotel bus service into town was available. Soon Barti and I were riding along the dark road from the airport headed toward Tel Aviv.

We stayed at the Dizengoff Hotel. The hotel was in downtown Tel Aviv but in an area that catered to the growing tourist industry. We could see taller and more business-like structures in the distance. The hotel was across the street from the beach and afforded a wonderful view of the Mediterranean. Our room was on the fourth floor. Before going to sleep, we spent a few minutes on the balcony, breathing in the warm, moist air and offering a prayer of thanksgiving for having arrived safely. We were exhausted from the journey and slept soundly that night.

Both of us were up with the sun the next morning and enjoyed the free breakfast buffet provided by the hotel for its guests. The buffet was exceptionally good. It included fresh vegetables and fruit, breads, yogurt, juice, coffee, tea and a wide variety of cheeses.

Our "official" pilgrimage wasn't scheduled to begin until Monday. As it was Friday morning, we had a couple of days simply to be tourists and enjoy the sights. Our plan was to stay in Tel Aviv until Sunday. We would then travel north to Haifa where we would stay for the rest of the week. Finally we would move on to Jerusalem for the heart of our pilgrimage, visiting the shrines in that area. Along the way we would stop overnight at Ramleh, so Barti could visit his old home, the Abbey of Latroun. After ten days in Jerusalem, we would complete our time in the Holy Land with an overnight in Tel Aviv prior to our departure.

Our plan that day was to wander around Tel Aviv looking at the sights. Barti was familiar with Tel Aviv and felt comfortable showing me around. We changed some of our traveler's checks to Israeli pounds and were turning to the door when the desk clerk reminded us to be back

at the hotel by 3:00pm. Barti smiled and thanked the clerk. Moments later we were on the street and headed toward the heart of town.

I was a bit confused by the clerk's remarks and asked Barti to explain.

"Today is Friday. *Shabat* begins at sunset. Sorry, I mean the Sabbath. It is the Jewish holy day, like Sunday is for the Christian. It is a time for prayer and worship. Around 3:00pm everything closes up and people head home so that they are off the street by the time sunset rolls around, which should be about five-thirty this time of year."

When Barti mentioned Sabbath it finally sank into my thick skull that we were fast approaching the holy day. I remembered the account of the crucifixion from John's gospel describing how the disciples were in a rush to get Jesus' body down from the cross and into a tomb by sunset. It was such a rush that they didn't have time to properly prepare the body for burial. Since they still had to anoint the body and properly wrap it, Mary Magdalene and the other Marys went to the place of burial early Sunday morning to complete the job. It was then they discovered that Jesus was risen from the dead. Such concern over not violating the Sabbath seemed like something from another era and I told Barti as much.

"The vast majority of Israelis are Jewish but, quite honestly, care little about the strict observance of the Sabbath. However, the leadership of the observant Jewish community wields a great deal of influence. They enforce a strict Sabbath in Israel. The police won't do anything if you violate the Sabbath but observant teenagers may pelt you, your home or your business with stones. Such informal enforcement of social mores is a powerful means of social control. There is little resistance from the non-observant Israeli Jews in any case. They enjoy the day of peace and quiet as much as the next person. It's a visible reminder of their Jewishness, something like not eating meat on Friday was for us Catholics up until a few years ago. Also, it is a reminder that Israel is a Jewish state. That is a source of considerable pride for Israelis. Anyway, the non-observant Israeli's find creative ways to get around the more onerous of the Sabbath restrictions.

"Remember, the Sabbath holds a very special place in Jewish life. The community doesn't view it as an imposition by a few ultra-observant citizens. It truly is a special celebration for the people. It's a memorial of creation and of the exodus from Egypt. It's a day of special favor from the Lord, when his presence is intimately felt. There is a tradition that angels accompany the devout Jew as he walks to and from the synagogue on the Sabbath.

"The Sabbath prayers speak of the day as if it was a fair and chaste bride visiting her beloved. It is spoken of as a wondrous queen, bringing blessings beyond measure. The Sabbath is not an imposition but a gift from God, an opportunity to turn from the dross of daily life to soar in the heaven of Scripture and God's transcendent presence. It is part of the order of creation, with its origin in God. It is a time of joy and freedom from labor.

"In the home Sabbath is celebrated with family prayer accompanied by the lighting of candles and the breaking of bread. It begins with a prayer of blessing over a wine cup. There are shared meals, singing, conversation about life, the Lord and the tradition of the people.

"The Sabbath is so central to Jewish faith and practice that the Jewish philosopher Ahad HaAm has described the Sabbath as '...keeping Israel, even more than Israel has kept the Sabbath.'"

Barti's enthusiastic explanation of the holy day helped me to realize that the rapidly approaching Sabbath celebration was not a meaningless cultural artifact. Rather, it was a shared bond that united a people in their identity as a nation, a living culture and as God's people. No matter what their political or religious views, the Sabbath held a special place in everyone's hearts.

I must add that we also bowed to the practical realities of the Sabbath and cut our wandering short, reaching our hotel in time for a late lunch and a relaxing afternoon.

Among my friends at work was Hannah Schoff. She was divorced, in her late thirties, and had two boys in their early teens. Hannah was Jewish. We were hired at the same time and went through the orientation program together, along with several other probation officers who also became good friends. We had something of an older sister-younger brother relationship. There was no particular sexual chemistry in the relationship. We were simply good friends who listened to each other's frustrations and tried to help as best we could.

Hannah's "ex" was an Israeli. They met when he was in the States for college. After a whirlwind courtship, they married. They returned to Israel after graduating college. Both their children were born there and have dual citizenship. Her husband's business involvements eventually resulted in the whole family moving back to America, where their marriage deteriorated. Eventually they decided to call it quits.

Having lived in Israel for several years, Hannah had many Israeli friends. One of her friends was a retired Israeli Army major, whom she wrote prior to my departure for the pilgrimage. She informed him of my schedule and demanded that he extend Israeli hospitality to her young friend.

So, not long after Barti and I returned to our room to read, and perhaps catch a short nap, the phone rang. The male voice introduced himself as Ari Sabra. He proceeded to explain his relationship to Hannah and the promise of hospitality that she extracted from him. I told him that I didn't want to be a bother and thanked him for his offer. Before I could finish letting him off the hook, he insisted in a friendly way that it was no bother and any friend of Hannah was a good friend of his as well. We made arrangements for him to pick me up at 7:00pm that evening. He would meet me with his car at the hotel. After explaining about my traveling companion, Barti was invited to come along if he wished.

Precisely at 7:00pm Ari pulled up in a small Italian sedan and invited us to get in. As soon as we were settled, he pulled away from the curb and tore down the almost empty streets of Tel Aviv at speeds that seemed more appropriate to combat than a drive through the city on a Sabbath evening. We continued on to the outskirts of the city until we reached a housing development that rose sufficiently over the countryside to afford a picturesque view of the city and the Mediterranean Sea in the distance.

Ari introduced us to his family--a handsome woman about his age and their two teenage sons--and invited us to sit down to dinner. We ate fish and fresh vegetables, both of which were excellent. There was an orange flavor cooked into the food that gave it just the right touch. It was delicious. After eating, as we drank coffee, Ari interrogated us in a very polite manner. I got the feeling that he was trying to carry on some polite chitchat with his guests but after twenty years as an Army officer, a polite inquiry easily turns into interrogation. I did my best to answer his questions about Hannah and her family, as well as our reasons for visiting Israel. After a few minutes he visibly relaxed. Perhaps he realized what he was doing or maybe he was just satisfied that we were who we claimed to be. Who knows? However, the conversation became much more friendly. Through all of this Barti was relatively quiet, except when Ari inquired about his connection with Israel. Then Barti went on at some length about his years at Latroun and the Biblical Institute. Ari obviously respected Barti's knowledge of the country and the institutions with which he had been affiliated.

A short time later Ari invited the two of us to get in his car again. he had a surprise for us. As soon as his sons climbed in with us, we were off on another race through the streets of Telaviv. This time the turns were more harrowing than before and the course took us through darker neighborhoods with narrower streets. After fifteen minutes Ari pulled up to the curb near a somewhat run-down looking house. He jumped out and told us to wait in the car. After knocking on the door of the house, a balding man answered. They spoke for a few minutes in animated conversation, then the older man passed something to Ari.

Having worked as a probation officer for more than a year, the first thing that came to mind was that I had just witnessed a drug deal. It didn't make any sense. It was the last thing I would expect of Ari but I saw what I saw. Barti witnessed the same exchange but didn't say anything.

Ari was in the car a few moments later and we were off again, tearing through the streets of Telaviv. A short time later Ari parked the car and instructed us to get out. He said to follow him and not make any noise. We walked down the block and turned into an alley. At the end of the alley, Ari knocked on a door. He showed the man who answered a few slips of paper and then we were ushered through the door and up a set of creaky steps to a fair sized loft. There were folding chairs all over and a fairly large crowd, trying to get comfortable as they sat on the ancient chairs. In the back of the room was a movie projector similar to those one found in most schools. It finally dawned on me that I had not witnessed a drug deal. Ari had simply purchased tickets for the movies, something that was akin to a drug deal when a strict interpretation of Sabbath regulations made going to the movies a serious moral offense, if not a criminal act. Jesus' admonition, "Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" came to mind as the lights went down. The next two hours were spent enjoying what turned out to be a Laurel and Hardy film festival.

Joffa

We slept late Saturday morning, as the Sabbath wasn't over until sunset that evening. We had a delicious lunch of fresh fruit, vegetables and cheese. I really enjoyed the food I had eaten in Israel so far. It was all fresh and naturally sweet. I also realized that I had better watch my appetite on pilgrimage or I would put on more weight than I needed.

After lunch Barti called a taxi. Most taxi drivers were Palestinians and had no need to observe the Sabbath. There were no reprisals against them for breaking the Sabbath, indeed they provided a useful service for Jews who needed to get around on the Sabbath but couldn't drive themselves because it would count as work. Our destination was a small Benedictine house of prayer in Joffa, on the outskirts of Telaviv.

I was intrigued with Telaviv. Even though it had many of the trappings of a modern urban center with skyscrapers and urban congestion, it still had a great deal of Mediterranean charm. The streets were a mix of wide boulevards and narrow alleys that wound their way through a forest of stores and apartments. The architecture was largely three or four story buildings made from the sandy rose concrete that resulted from the local sand. The pace of life was comfortable. People strolled along the sidewalks enjoying the sights and consistently wonderful weather. This was quite unlike New York or London where the pace was purposeful and rushed. The only signs of insanity were the streets. I quickly realized that Ari's race through the streets of Telaviv the night before was a model of careful driving compared to the chaos that ruled the streets the rest of the time.

As a modern city Telaviv is not very old. It was begun about a hundred years ago on the site of the ancient mound (tel) of what had been a city hundreds, if not thousands of years ago. However, Telaviv was built near the ancient seaport of Joffa. That seaport has been in constant use since long before the time of Christ. Joffa was a relatively small city that consisted primarily of the seaport and a close quartered town of medieval design that housed the men who worked the port or provided support services for the community. As Telaviv grew during the last century, it quickly encompassed Joffa. A proud people, the inhabitants of Joffa resisted the pressures of modernization and maintained their traditional lifestyle. As tourism picked up, the political leaders in Telaviv realized that Joffa was not an eyesore but rather a tourist attraction if treated properly. Grants and subsidies were offered and before long Joffa became a picturesque

touch of the past. Throngs of tourists were brought there to be relieved of a few dollars and enjoy photo opportunities.

The taxi driver let us off near the port. We could see large containers filled with Joffa oranges freshly picked from nearby orchards. The containers were being shipped to France from the markings on them. As we walked we could see an ancient tower near the shoreline, I believe it was a lighthouse for the harbor at one time. Today it is a photo opportunity and something of a symbol for Joffa on the tourist maps. Nearby there was a flight of steps that seemed to lead the visitor up and into the heart of the town.

As we walked through Joffa I could imagine Peter kneeling in prayer on the roof patio of one of the buildings we passed. I imagined Peter's vision of Jesus and the many animals he instructed Peter to take and eat (Acts 10:3-16). Nothing or no one was unclean any longer, Jesus instructed his disciple. I could see in my mind's eye the emissaries of Cornelius pounding on the door of one of the buildings and demanding to see Peter. I imagined them leaving with Peter along the road we walked. It struck me for the first time that we were actually in the Holy Land. I was walking the same roads that Jesus and the disciples had walked and breathing the same air. It was a slightly disorienting feeling but also quite exhilarating. For a moment time ceased to exist and nothing separated us from possibility that Christ would turn the corner any moment or Peter would stride purposefully by us on his way to baptize Cornelius. Then the moment of timelessness was gone!

Barti was telling me to come into a building. There was nothing special about the building, just a large wooden door in a wall that seemed to stretch up and down the street. Upon entering the building I enjoyed the cool of a darkened walkway for a few moments, until it opened to a courtyard. Obviously, we had arrived at the Benedictine monastery. On one side of the courtyard was a large building that appeared to be the chapel. On the other side of the courtyard were entrance ways to workrooms, the refectory and tier upon tier of monk's cells. I learned later that about fifty monks were in residence at the monastery. Some of the monks were students learning Hebrew in preparation for Scriptural studies the following year. Others were working at the monastery, caring for its maintenance, while still other were teachers. The monks operated an elementary school in the neighborhood for Christian Palestinian children. We walked through the courtyard and then back into the cool darkness of the monetary chapel. Barti told me in a whisper that Mass would begin in about an hour. In the meantime we could spend

some time in silent prayer and meditation. Some time dedicated to prayer would be a good way to begin our pilgrimage.

I settled into the silence of the chapel as if it were a mother's loving arms. I very much needed time to simply listen to the Lord. There had been little time for anything except the business of travel since leaving home several days earlier. Before I realized how long I had been in prayer, the chapel lights came on and the monks began entering the chapel for vespers and Mass.

A single bell rang briefly and the liturgy began with the most beautiful sound that graced my ears in my short life. The monks sang the opening hymn with their deep voices and an obvious devotion that transformed the song into an experience of prayer so transcendent that it brought tears to my eyes. I have experienced such a reaction to the opening hymn of Mass only one other time in my life. Again, the combination of heavenly voices and devout faith were the source of the transcendent quality of the experience.

Living in the 21st century, with all the busy-ness of our lives and short attention spans cultivated by television, radio, the Internet, and every other contemporary medium of communication, it is difficult for us to appreciate the movement of spirit and emotion that is inherent in the Mass. We are in and out of church so quickly each Sunday that the water from the font barely has time to dry on our foreheads before our thoughts turn to the family picnic or golf game after Mass. As a result, the Mass becomes something of an endurance test.

That afternoon I was caught up in the beauty of the liturgy and its gentle movement, as it draws one in to an ever-deeper experience of prayer and communal worship. Like a symphony that carries one along on the crest of music, the liturgy gathered me up in the beauty of the chanting, as well as the color and movement of the celebrants. The intellectual and moral challenge of the readings further engaged me. The transcendental power of the experience swelled to a crescendo as the Eucharistic prayer was offered, indeed the presider almost seemed to be taken up in transports of ecstasy. The time of silent prayer after communion was a time of such personal intimacy and joy for me that I wanted that prayer to go on forever. Yet, before long the last hymn was sung and the monks filed out of the choir to return to their duties. Barti and I remained in our pews for another ten minutes after Mass, finishing the intimate sharing with our Lord that had begun with our earlier prayers. We also needed some time to return our hearts and minds to the world of flesh and blood.

As we stood to leave, I was surprised by the sound of a strong female voice coming from the rear of the chapel. She was obviously speaking to Barti.

"So, what brings the failed monk back to the scene of the crime?"

Barti had a look of honest shock before a big smile replaced it and he almost ran to the source of the voice. I had expected a middle-aged woman of healthy build and filled with vigor from the sound of the voice. I was more than a little surprised when I turned and saw Barti embracing a short and frail looking woman who had to be at least in her mid-eighties. The only thing I could think of was Yoda, the short Jedi master from Star Wars, a film series that was quite popular at the time. After Barti recovered from the surprise of the woman's greeting and his emotional response to seeing her, he introduced me as a young friend and fellow pilgrim. I could see that her eyes were filled with a vitality and strength that was not apparent in her diminutive frame. Her voice was strong. Though after a few minutes it didn't seem so out of place coming from her slight body.

I was informed that the woman was Tabitha Marie Glowaki. Obviously she was a very old and dear friend. We were invited to walk with her a few blocks to her house, also in Joffa, where we would enjoy some tea and cookies. I was not going to suggest any other options, as Barti was so overjoyed to see the woman. I was curious as well about a woman who could get such a reaction out of my normally placid friend. So, very soon we were off to Tabitha's house, where the rest of the day and well into the evening would be spent.

Once we reached Tabitha's home she had us sit in a beautiful patio garden while he explained how he and Tabitha knew each other.

"After studying Hebrew for over a year the Abbot at Latroun wanted to make a bit more use of me than just a house guest and kitchen boy. So he asked me to be part of the team that gave conferences to retreatants at the Abbey guesthouse. There were five monks assigned to that responsibility. We took turns giving conferences on various topics that were appropriate to the particular group visiting that week. Since I had passable Hebrew by that time I was given responsibility for English and Hebrew language groups. As a result, I often had one or two conferences to give each week.

"As you are aware, Trappist retreats are very much a do-it-yourself affair for the retreatant. There is no attempt to lead the retreatants to some reflective process. The setting and regularity of the liturgy of the hours provides a reflective process. Our conferences are really no

more than a resource for the retreatant. People expect conferences at retreats, so we provide a conference.

"Anyway, after I had been giving conferences for about six months, they were becoming a bit rote. I had a set of about ten conferences that were informative and well written, which I used to draw from for most groups. This relieved me of the work of constantly preparing new talks. Studies at the Biblical Institute were underway by then and I had more than enough to do.

"Tabitha made an annual retreat at the Latroun Abbey ever since she moved to Israel. One Tuesday afternoon she was sitting in the Abbey chapel listening to a conference I was giving. It was my best conference, well written and filled with insight from Scripture and the Church Fathers. She sat respectfully through the entire conference. Then when it was over and the others had silently filed out of the chapel, she called out to me from the pew where she still sat.

"Young man, are you sure you're in the right line of work?"

"I was shocked by her question, especially as my doubts were once again undermining my certitude that God called me to spend my life as a Trappist monk. Was I that obvious?"

"She continued with her remarks. 'Your little talk was an excellent piece of scholarship but it was all from your head. There was no passion. How can you speak of love without being caught up in it? She then began to recite a familiar passage from St. Bernard's reflection on love.

I love because I love, I love that I may love.

Love is sufficient of itself, it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself.

It is its own merit, its own reward.

Love looks for no cause outside itself, no effect beyond itself. Its profit lies in its practice.

I love because I love, I love that I may love.

*Love is a great thing so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead,
flows back to its source, always drawing from there the water which constantly
replenishes it.*

*Of all the movements, sensations and feelings of the soul,
love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator
and make some sort of similar return*

however unequal though it be.

For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return;

the sole purpose of his love is to be loved,

in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.

The Bridegroom's love,

or rather the love which is the Bridegroom,

asks in return nothing but faithful love.

Let the beloved, then, love in return.

Should not a bride love, and above all, Love's bride?

Could it be that Love not be loved?

Rightly then does she give up all other feelings and give herself wholly to love alone;

in giving love back, all she can do is to respond to love.

And when she has poured out her whole being in love,

what is that in comparison with the unceasing torrent of that original source?

Clearly, lover and Love,

soul and Word,

bride and Bridegroom,

creature and Creator do not flow with the same volume;

one might as well equate a thirsty man with the fountain.

What then of the bride's hope,

her aching desire,

her passionate love,

her confident assurance?

Is all this to wilt

just because she cannot match stride for stride with her giant,

any more than she can vie with honey for sweetness,

rival the lamb for gentleness,

show herself as white as the lily,

*burn as bright as the sun,
be equal in love with him who is Love?*

No.

It is true that the creature loves less because she is less.

*But if she loves with her whole being,
nothing is lacking where everything is given.*

*To love so ardently then is to share the marriage bond;
she cannot love so much and not be totally loved,*

and it is in the perfect union of two hearts that complete and total marriage consists.

Or are we to doubt that the soul is loved by the Word first and with a greater love?

"As I listened tears formed in my eyes and began to slide down my cheeks. She spoke with such intimacy and passion that I almost felt I was intruding on lovers by listening to her words. The hollowness of my own words only moments before and the hollowness of my life struck me. I was a monk and a holy man, yet even more so I was a fake and a hypocrite, a spiritual cripple who was yearning for God's healing touch. I saw in Tabitha a holy messenger, sent to me by a loving God. At that moment I asked her to be my spiritual director.

"It may seem strange for a monk to approach a lay person, a lay woman at that, to serve as his spiritual director. In the monastery an older monk is made available to serve as your spiritual director and he plays a important role in your spiritual growth and development as a monk. However, it is acknowledged that the Holy Spirit is the only real spiritual director anyone can have and the Holy Spirit will lead us along the path that is best for us. When I heard Tabitha I knew she was a gift of the Holy Spirit. I knew that she was to be my guide for a portion of my spiritual journey. After discussing Tabitha with my regular spiritual director he approved my request. He knew her well and trusted her implicitly. The abbot was also in agreement with the request. I remained in Israel for a little over six more years and throughout that period Tabitha remained my spiritual director and a beloved friend. She was a great support later as I struggled with my vocation. She kept me anchored in the Lord and His will."

As Barti finished his story, Tabitha pushed a cart onto the patio with a pitcher of iced tea, several glasses, sugar cubes and a plate of biscuits. She briefly put her hand on his shoulder in a

loving gesture that reminded me of a mother happy to see her son. Barti spent the next few minutes teaching me how to drink tea while holding the sugar cube between your teeth, a practice he picked up during his years in Israel.

Tabitha

As we enjoyed Tabitha's tea and biscuits, our conversation drifted from one topic to the next. Much of the conversation focused on Barti bringing Tabitha up to date on recent events, at least those occurring since his last letter about six months before. At some point in the conversation I asked Tabitha how she came to live in Israel. I was a bit confused. Tabitha wasn't a sabra (Jew born in Israel). She wasn't even Jewish! Yet, she was a citizen of Israel. She smiled at me, as one might smile at a none-too-bright youngster who was asking questions that were really none of his business.

"My dear young man, what you ask is a long and complicated story. But let me see if I can tell it to you in a short and somewhat straightforward manner.

"I was born in Krakow, Poland into a large Catholic family. At the time Krakow was still under the control of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. My beloved Poland was all cut up back then with Russia, Germany and the Austrians all claiming a piece of us.

"My family was reasonably well off. My father was a hydraulics engineer for the Water Department in Krakow and my mother taught the domestic arts at a Catholic girl's school.

"I was the third of six children. I had an older brother and sister, as well as two younger sisters and another brother. All of the girls attended the school where my mother taught. It was a good school and staff were given a tuition discount. My two brothers attended the Catholic gymnasium."

A smile crossed my lips but before I could say anything Tabitha anticipated my question.

"No, my dear, the gymnasium was not a place for athletics. It was a school similar to what you would call a high school. It prepared young men for university and professional training.

"My oldest brother fought in the First World War. Upon returning home, he completed medical studies at the University. He was an excellent physician, among the top surgeons in all of Krakow.

"My youngest brother became a priest and then migrated to the United States. Many dioceses in the Northeast needed priests to help with the flood of Polish immigrants arriving on their shores at the time. The last I heard from him, he was a monsignor and the pastor of a parish in Lawrence, Kansas.

"We girls were married in short order after completing our secondary education.

"The young man who stole my heart was a recent college graduate and a teacher of history at the gymnasium. He was an idealist and filled with spirit. He was so excited about the reunification of Poland following World War One! He would go on about how wonderful it was that the political boundaries finally matched Poland's cultural boundaries. Poland is a great nation with a long history and her people are very proud of her. The wonder of the ancient days of Polish glory during the late middle ages made itself felt once again. My Ladislaw was one of those in whom that wonder shown most brightly.

"Yet, his interests were not only political. He was a devout son of the Church and a catalyst for apostolic action teams throughout Krakow, but especially among the young men of the gymnasium. The teams did volunteer work in the hospital and shelters of Krakow. He was quite knowledgeable of Scripture, philosophy and theology, as most of his elective courses in college focused on these topics. He was also a voracious reader and kept up with the developments in philosophy and theology. He was devoted to the writings of the Swedish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. He also kept correspondence with Dietrich Von Hildebrand, a young German lay theologian with whom he shared many common interests. Dietrich developed into a good friend but that was some time later, much closer to the next war.

"Ladi and I fell in love and were married in 1912. I had just turned 20 and Ladi was 25. The first few years of our marriage were grand but then the First World War... overshadowed all Europe and life was difficult. Few Poles were strong supporters of the war effort. The Austria-Hungarian Empire was allied with Germany and poor Poland was dragged along into what was ultimately a lost cause. Ladi did not enlist and he had sufficient problems with a childhood fracture to his right leg that he wasn't conscripted either. He did his share with the apostolic teams, wrapping bandage packages for the men in the trenches. The situation became most tense when there was heavy fighting between the Russians and the Austrians near Krakow. That has always been the case, our neighbors fight each other but choose to wage their wars on Polish soil! When he wasn't tending to the wounded, Ladi helped one of the political groups in Krakow that worked for a free and independent Polish Republic.

"After the war we moved to Warsaw. Ladi was offered a position in the new Republic's Ministry of State. By the time we moved to Warsaw we had a boy and a girl. Shortly after the move we had another son, Matteus but he died in 1924 of influenza.

"His death was difficult. It was the first time death touched me so closely. I loved Matteus with a special intensity and couldn't deal with the pain that followed his death. Even though I lost him to influenza, something over which I had no control, I still felt guilt. How could my baby die? I guess physicians today would say that I suffered through a bout of depression. I only remember that 1924 through 1928 was a very dark and dreary time for me.

"Ladi dealt with his son's death much better than I did. It helped that he was caught up in the whirl of responsibility and activities that was so much a part of life in Warsaw. Though by 1925 political life lost its sparkle and Ladi felt called in a different direction. Philosophy had always been his mistress, so now he turned in that direction.

"It was at this time that he began work on a doctorate in philosophy at Jagiellonian University. This necessitated a return to Krakow. After a year, Ladi transferred to the University of Munich. He drank in the knowledge of his professors as a man dying of thirst in a desert might absorb every drop of moisture available. Munich was the center for the great minds of the day, with such great scholars as Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and Adolf Reinach on faculty. No matter how great a university the Jagiellonian was, Ladi was drawn to Munich as it was the heart of philosophical debate. It was at Munich that Ladi met Von Hildebrand. At the time Deitrich has recently completed his doctorate and was a lecturer at the University. They became fast friends.

"I remained in Krakow for the next two years while Ladi focused on his studies in Munich. It was a difficult time for me. I was still caught in the dark grief that overwhelmed me with Matteus' death. Now my husband was gone and I was left alone with two children to raise. I was not opposed to Ladi pursuing the doctorate. He was brilliant and the path he was following was reasonable. Yet, it was not easy. Our children and I stayed with my parents. With small children to care for, I did not return to paid employment. My family and Ladi's family were sufficiently well off to support us while he was at University. Though I did put the time to good use.

"I enrolled in several courses at Jagiellonian and found that I had a talent for theology. The most important development was not the courses I took but the fact that I met Fr. Casmir Zaetawa. He was a Jesuit on the theology faculty and taught several courses on asceticism. Today you would call this spirituality. Anyway, Fr. Casmir became my spiritual advisor and confessor. He was a great help. Working with this holy man I began to let go of the

despondency that clung to me. He also taught me the wonders of prayer and the divine mysteries.

"But I am going on with too much detail...I must be boring you to tears!"

I was entranced by her story, not bored by any means. My enthusiasm seemed to calm her worries and she continued on with the story.

"Again, to make a long story short...Ladi completed his studies and returned to Krakow. Within a year he was able to secure a position on the faculty of philosophy at the Jagiellonian. He continued to be involved in the circle of activities that were centered in Munich and we often traveled there. Life seemed to be on the upswing once more.

"Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1932. Dietrich Von Hildebrand was quite vocal about the Nazi menace as long as we had known him. Now he was practically beside himself. Ladi was no less concerned about Hitler and the Nazi ideology than Dietrich. He was active in opposing any signs of Nazi ideology that appeared in Poland, especially in Krakow.

"Now you must understand this is no little undertaking. While Poland is a Catholic country there is a history of prejudice toward Jews. While it is no excuse, its neighbors brutalized Poles over much of the past millennium. If you are lower down the ladder than others and always being stepped on, it is a human trait to step on anyone who is lower down than yourself. In Polish society it was the Jews who were at the bottom of the ladder. They were the national scapegoat. So the Nazi tendency to use the Jews as a scapegoat found a sympathetic chord among many Poles. Since the Jews were the scapegoat of choice, an affinity between the more hateful Poles and the Nazis was natural.

"Ladi made more than a few enemies among Nazi sympathizers with his vocal opposition to Hitler. On the other hand, Ladi and I got to know many members of the Jewish community in Krakow. Indeed, we became fast friends with a number of Jewish leaders, especially those who were also on faculty at the University.

"I have always been an independent minded person. So, I was not just Professor Glowaki's wife but a woman in my own right. During the decade of the 30's, as I brought our children through their teen years and into young adulthood, I earned a doctorate in theology at the Jagiellonian. That was something of an event, as I was a lay woman in a field that was populated with clerics. I think the fact that Ladi was my husband played a significant role in being accepted by the theology faculty and administration. Of course, there were wonderful

professors, like Fr. Zaetawa who could care less about anything other than my passion for the Lord.

"Since Ladi was already on faculty, there was no possibility of the University hiring me. However, I was well known in the community and not long after receiving my degree I was contacted by the Cardinal. He offered me a position with his curia in the Office for Apostolic Action. That office was responsible for much of the charity and social services work of the archdiocese. I wasn't exactly a social worker but I was not a stranger to the work of this office, as I had been quite involved over the years in voluntary capacities.

"By the mid-thirties the direction in which Hitler's policies were leading became quite obvious. As a result, there was an increased flow of refugees from Germany into Poland. These refugees were primarily Jews and Gypsies who were fleeing Nazi inspired violence. We also began hearing talk of the disabled housed in state facilities dying in extraordinary numbers. It was later learned that it was the disabled who were the test victims for the technology of the death camps. Much of my work was directed at finding food and shelter for the refugees.

"We sent our children to the United States for their university studies. We both had relatives there, including my brother, the priest. It seemed strange for a professor sending his children off to a university in a different country but we both saw the direction in which events were moving. We wanted our children to survive the chaos that was coming and it seemed that the best option was America. My daughter later married a nice young Polish-American boy and still lives with her family near Philadelphia. My son, he enlisted in the Army once the Americans became involved in the war. He was killed near Aachen, a sniper, I believe.

"When the Nazis swept into Poland in 1939, one of the first things they did was arrest many of the university faculty. The university had been a hot bed of anti-Nazi activity for years and the Nazi sympathizers made sure that no one escaped the dragnet. Of course, Ladi was one of the first to be arrested. They were taken to a labor camp.

"I was spared due to the Cardinal's influence. It wasn't that the Nazi's respected the Catholic Church. Rather, they wanted to keep the natives manageable and that meant showing at least a little respect for the Church. I was able to visit Ladi twice as a member of a delegation from the Church. After the second brief visit, I never saw him again. I learned later that he was killed along with many of the other faculty at Auschwitz.

"The Church hid several hundred Jewish families. We operated what you might call an Underground Railroad. We kept Jewish families in safe houses until we could find a way to get them out of Poland and into neutral countries. I am proud to say that Cardinal Woytija, the current Archbishop of Krakow worked with us. He was a seminarian at the time and brought information and supplies to the safe houses.

"I survived the war. It was the worst period in my life. I lost my husband, my son, and my way of life. Then following the war we went from the terror of Nazism to the gray burden of Communism. I remained with the curia until it was possible to reopen the university. The faculty had been decimated by the war, so this lay woman was invited to serve on the new theology faculty. I taught ascetic theology and systematic theology for five years. It was 1959 by then and I was 67 years old. I felt it was time to retire. Two years earlier I was honored by the Knissett with the title *Righteous Gentile* and given Israeli citizenship for my work during the war. Since the Lord placed the opportunity in my path, I decided to move to Israel. Everything that has happened to me since then has been a blessing, including the wonderful years I enjoyed with Barti."

It was difficult to sort through my emotions as I listened to Maria's tale. In the end all I could do is wipe away the tears from my eyes. I sat in awe of this saintly woman who had been through such pain and whose humble soul didn't even notice the heroism that marked her life. She only saw grace. Even in the darkest moments of her life, she found grace. I understood Barti's devotion to this woman and source of much of the wisdom that he was now passing on to me.

I also gained a sense of being part of a spiritual movement that was much greater than I had ever imagined. Fr. Zaetawa was linked to me through Tabitha and Barti and through him all those who helped to shape the wisdom and spiritual passion that he passed on to Tabitha. It would be through those who had been blessed by Tabitha and Barti that the gifts of these great souls would be passed on to future generations.

We were not just isolated souls struggling though the difficult battles of our individual lives. We were brothers and sisters in Christ. We were joined together by faith and our shared, love of Christ. It was not Tabitha, Barti, or myself that were the blessing. Rather, it was the light of Christ visible in us that would ultimately be the blessing to those with whom we came into contact.

If we were able to get out of the way sufficiently to let that light be seen, our individual lives would be sanctified. All would be grace because in all circumstances Christ could be revealed.

The image that came to mind was the Pascal Candle. As the deacon carries it through the Church and sings out "The Light of Christ" at the Easter Vigil, the flame from that candle is shared with the candles of those who sit along the center aisle. That flame is shared from candle to candle and before long the entire church is aglow with a golden light emanating from hundreds of candles. Each candle bears the "Light of Christ". Each candle symbolizes the Light of Christ that burns brightly in the hearts of each person.

Haifa

Barti was not about to squander the grace of this opportunity to visit with Tabitha. Our visit with her lasted well into the evening. Most of Sunday was spent with Tabitha as well. I wanted to give the two of them time to visit with each other, so I took advantage of a guided bus tour around Tel Aviv Sunday afternoon. I saw the major tourist sites, which were somewhat meager except for Joffa. The guide also pointed out the sites of a few firefights during terrorist attacks that regularly hit Israeli cities. Before leaving Sunday evening, we agreed that Tabitha would join us for the Jerusalem leg of the pilgrimage, her health permitting.

We left Tel Aviv Monday morning aboard a limousine that provided taxi service among the Israeli cities. It was the least expensive option, significantly cheaper than the bus. The limo drove north along coastal roads for a good distance never moving more than a mile or two inland. It took us about two hours to make the trip.

The opening scene in Michner's *The Source* offers a glowing description of the city of Haifa as seen from Haifa Bay. He refers to it as a gem. So it is. The character of Haifa is very different from Tel Aviv. The city is set in the hills surrounding Haifa Bay. To go anywhere in the city one must climb up or down the cliff face of Mount Carmel, as it abuts the Mediterranean Sea. Each street is a terrace on the side of the mount. The overwhelming impression left by Tel Aviv is sand and beach front, as that is where the desert meets the sea. On the other hand, Haifa is rich in color. There are many trees in the Haifa area. While the city is no tropical paradise, it is much greener than the rest of Israel. There is a European sensibility that defines much of the city, with its boulevards, pastry shops, open-air cafes, and delicatessens. There is a great deal of charm to the city. Indeed, if one could describe a city as beautiful, Haifa offers much of that is beautiful to the eyes of any observer.

We stayed at the Zion Hotel. This was a basic tourist hotel that offered a decent bed and a hearty breakfast for very little money. It was located about halfway up the cliff face and offered a fine view of the bay. It was centrally located, so we could walk most places we wanted to visit. By the time we arrived and were settled into our hotel it was already close to suppertime. We decided to eat and go to bed early so that we would be rested for the next day's events.

Our first day in Haifa was dedicated to Elijah. Mount Carmel was center stage for much of his activity in the days of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. A taxi driver was more than willing to take us to the top of Mt. Carmel and even gave us a guided tour in anticipation of a generous tip.

The taxi driver brought us to the top of Carmel over a winding road. We went to the edge of the city and then began to wind back and forth ever higher until we reached a small military facility. There was a small field next to it. In the center of the grass covered field was a monument recognizing the site as the traditional location for the great challenge between the Prophet Elijah and the priests of Baal. At the outer edge of the field was a cliff face that dropped rapidly from the top of Carmel to a stretch of wild grass and brush. A little beyond that was the Haifa Hilton property line where the vegetation became lush and well manicured. Below the hotel, the city of Haifa stretched out in awesome beauty.

Our driver explained that Ahab, one time King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, married a beautiful Philistine princess named Jezebel. Politics being what they usually are, it is wise policy to cement good relations with your neighbors. Nothing is better for keeping neighbors on good terms than having the children marry. At least that was the theory. Well, Queen Jezebel was a devout woman and quite religious. In fact, she could be described as zealous and wanted to bring everyone to faith. The only problem was that she was a devotee of Baal, the chief god of the Philistines. This did not set well with the followers of Yahweh. They felt that Baal worship had no place in Israel. Elijah, being a prophet of Yahweh, let King Ahab know of the Lord's displeasure. This appears to have been Yahweh's feeling as well, as Elijah was instructed to go speak to Ahab on the matter. The message was not well received.

So, Elijah informed the king that for the next few years Israel would be cursed with a drought, and so it was. After several years of drought it was proposed that Elijah and the 400 priests imported by Jezebel have a contest. Elijah would represent Yahweh and the priests would represent Baal. Each would have a pile of timber. The object would be to call upon their respective deities and the first one to burn up the wood would be the winning deity.

The field upon which we now stood was the stage upon which this drama was enacted. As the driver spoke, I looked out over the city to a clear blue cloudless sky. It was not difficult to imagine the events taxi driver described taking place on a day much like this. In my mind's eye, I could see the priests of Baal chanting their prayers, singing their songs and even beating

themselves until blood flowed in sacrifice. They were frenzied in the hope that Baal would be moved by their plight and set the timber ablaze.

Nothing happened. Hours passed. The priests pulled every trick out of their magic bag with no success. The sky remained as clear as it was that moment, without cloud or without lightening bolts to set the wood afire.

Finally, Elijah was given center stage. He began his turn with a few moments of standup comedy in which he insulted the unsuccessful efforts of the priests of Baal. To make matters worse, he instructed the king's servants to soak the wood in water. It was too dry and he wouldn't want a stray spark to set the wood afire.

As he spoke a little cloud could be seen forming in the distance. The crowd ignored the cloud. However, the cloud began to grow and was joined by other clouds. Fairly soon the wind began to pick up. Then, Elijah prayed to Yahweh. Before Elijah could say "Amen", lightening struck the water soaked timber and it burst into flame. The heat was intense and the light it gave off blinding. Elijah took the Lord's answer to his prayer as his cue and set about sending each of the 400 priests of Baal off to meet their maker.

On the way back down Mt. Carmel, we turned a curve in the road and the driver pointed out a cave that was known as Elijah's cave. The driver went on to explain that Jezebel wasn't very happy when Elijah killed her priests. She let it be known that she had every intention of having Elijah join the 400.

Where he had been filled with bluster and courage only hours before, his courage gave out when he learned of the Queen's threat on his life. He ran. Scripture says that he fled to Beersheba, in Judah, and then went another day's walking before sitting down and complaining to the Lord. In response to his prayer of complaint, God granted Elijah a unique experience of God's presence in silence and a gentle breeze.

The cave the taxi driver pointed out was in the outskirts of Haifa at the foot of Mt. Carmel and a good distance from Judah. However, tradition and tourism being what they are, if you are going to tell the Elijah story, you need the cave as well as the hill top.

Later in the day Barti pointed out that Elijah's cave on Mt. Carmel was related to a long-standing tradition associating contemplative experience with Mt. Carmel.

"During the Crusades control of the Holy Land slipped back and forth between Christians and Moslems several times. However, there was a period of about one hundred and fifty years

when there existed the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The kingdom was essentially a French colony. The Crusaders who protected the Kingdom during that period were predominately from France.

"If you look across the bay, you can see the outline of Acco. This is an ancient city that goes back at least as far as the Phoenicians. Under Greek control the city was known as Ptolemaïs. The Arabs captured it in 638AD and renamed it Acca. It was captured by Christians in 1104, during the First Crusade and held until 1187, when the Moslem forces took control of the area. It was recaptured in 1191 and held by the Crusaders until 1291. The city was a real prize, as it was an important seaport for the Crusader Kingdom. The Crusaders built up the city, which they called Acre, and established it as a military stronghold in the region. We'll visit it tomorrow and take a good look at the Citadel. It is a classic example of a 12th century-fortified castle. Since the city is now part of a Jewish state it is referred to as Acco.

"Bertold and Aymeric D'Limoges were two young men of the French nobility. Both were graduates of the newly established University of Paris. Both were priests as well. Aymeric was appointed as the Latin Patriarch of Antioch, which included the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Bertold accompanied his brother to the Holy Land. He settled in Acre. Living in the shadow of Mount Carmel, Bertold was drawn to contemplative prayer and the discipline of the monastic life. Perhaps living near the supposed cave of Elijah may have influenced him. Though more likely living next to the site of God's great miracle through the Prophet Elijah was the primary influence upon him. In any case, he organized a number of contemplative hermits and independent monastics living in the region into a community and developed a demanding rule. His efforts were rewarded when his brother formally recognized Berthold's community as the Order of Mount Carmel. About fifteen years later the Order gained approval of the Pope. That order has been known down the centuries as the Carmelites.

"Thus, more than Elijah, the Carmelites linked Mount Carmel with the idea of contemplative prayer. Even if Elijah's mystical experience of God took place miles from Mount Carmel, many other contemplatives have sought a more intimate experience of God in the shadow of Mount Carmel. St. John of the Cross, one of the most famous of Berthold's spiritual descendents, even used the image of climbing this mount as a way to illustrate the process of spiritual development and increased intimacy with God."

After returning from the tour, we spent the greater part of the afternoon strolling through Haifa. We explored the city, following its streets up and down the base of Mount Carmel. I was struck by the friendliness of the people. They were constantly greeting us with "Shalom, Shalom", that is, "Peace, Peace". The appropriate response was "Shalom Alechem". I was also struck by the pleasant residential neighborhoods that were mixed with new shopping districts. The city seemed to radiate a sense of community and peace that was absent in Tel Aviv and most other cities I visited over the years.

I shared my impressions of Haifa with Barti at a small cafe near our hotel. We stopped here daily for coffee and conversation, as a way of relaxing. I noticed that Barti smiled as I spoke of the city. Then, he offered his impression of Haifa.

"This city has seen its share of bloodshed and tears. Though I must admit that it is my favorite among the cities of Israel. It seems to be more neighborly. Perhaps it doesn't have the weight of historic baggage that burdens Jerusalem, nor the need to prove itself, that seems to mark Tel Aviv. People here find ways to get along and make a life for themselves. It almost seems that the hospitable, contemplative spirit of Mount Carmel has worked its influence on the people who live in its shadow."

Our conversation earlier in the day, about the contemplative association with Mount Carmel, got me thinking about my own struggles with contemplative prayer. I tried to relate these frustrations to Barti as best I could.

"I have used various forms of meditation and found each to be quite helpful. I particularly like St. Ignatius' suggestion of using the imagination to transport me back to some incident described in the Gospel and to flesh it out. Reflecting on verses from scripture or the writings of the Church Fathers have also been fruitful. I've even found meditating on certain passages from theologians like Karl Rahner or Bernard Lonergan to be quite beneficial.

"What is really difficult for me is contemplative prayer. It is difficult for me to just sit there and literally do nothing, except be aware. I focus my attention on a flame, a sound, or a word. It doesn't seem to be serving any purpose. I feel guilty that I'm wasting time. Now, I'll admit that when I've been fairly consistent with it there are some benefits. When I've sat in silence for a half-hour or so I've felt very relaxed. At times, I've even felt energized. Yet, these are minor physical benefits compared to the time I feel I've wasted. I know that there is a long

tradition throughout the religions of the world that sees contemplative prayer as the crown of a person's prayer life. I try but it seems useless. Then I wonder if it is only an attempt to have some mystical experience? If it is, isn't that a bit self-centered."

"A very good question, most appropriate as we sit at the foot of Mount Carmel. In one sense, contemplative prayer is useless. Obviously, there are some physical benefits but we could achieve the same benefits with a good night's sleep and an occasional "cat-nap" during the day. Contemplative prayer *is* without significant value from a worldly perspective. It is time that might be better used reading another chapter of a book or getting a half-hour's worth of work done, at least from a secular perspective. Even from a religious perspective a half-hour spent in reflection on Scripture certainly seems much more "useful", if for no other reason that helping one to better understand God's word and apply it to one's life.

"A few months back you told me that as a youngster you enjoyed going for walks through the neighborhood with your father. The two of you would walk together for about an hour several times a week. On some days you would have wonderful conversations. Other days the two of you just walked together saying very little but still enjoying the opportunity to walk with one another. You cherished both types of walks because most of all they were an opportunity for you and your father to spend time together, to enjoy one another's presence.

"That is an example of contemplation. Sitting in silence with an attitude of prayer is sharing time with your Father. The two of you simply enjoy being together. You don't need to say anything. Being together is enough. Setting time aside for contemplative prayer is simply setting time aside to visit with your Father and to be open to Him.

"Remember back when we spoke about listening and the need to listen carefully to everything going on around you, that is, to be totally aware. That is a form of contemplative prayer. It is a state of openness allowing us to hear God speak to us in the silence of our hearts, as well as in the environment which surrounds us.

"It is pretty rare that God will speak to someone through a burning bush or even in an audible voice. We often hear people say that God spoke to them in their hearts. In fact, that seems to be the most common form of personal divine- human communication. Is this just 'Church-talk' or does it have some objective meaning? How does God speak to our hearts?

"The human mind is described by many psychologists as having several levels, each operating at different levels of conscious awareness. Even the physical structure of our brain

reflects this differentiation to a certain degree. The surface level of the human mind seems to draw upon those parts of the brain that deal directly with human perception of the present, as well as serving a coordinating function among the various activities needed to navigate through the environment. If circumstances warrant, this conscious, surface level of the mind can draw upon memories to assist it in its tasks and even use methods of logic to project ahead to possible circumstances that might need to be dealt with in the future. This is our common level of functioning while awake.

"This surface consciousness can be compared to a driver negotiating through traffic using a steering wheel, brakes and signal lights as he attempts to reach a goal. He concentrates on a relatively small range of information in order to do what needs to be done. Yet, in fact, a great deal of action is necessary in order to make his apparently simple actions possible.

"There is a deeper level of mental functioning however that is intricately involved in producing the perceptions and actions which are part of our conscious functioning. Physiologists tell us that the data taken in by our physical senses is massive, apparently chaotic and quite confusing. However, our brain works as a filter, processing the data received, strengthening some signals, weakening others, and organizing them into patterns.

The organizational patterns are often the result of what we have learned. The patterns emerge as we interact with family members and are formed as participants in a particular culture. Experiences, stories, images, skills we are taught, and relationships all blend together as elements of this deeper layer of the mind that psychologists usually refer to as the sub-conscious. It is this level of the mind that helps us make sense of what is going on around us. It is this level of the mind that helps us relate everything into meaningful patterns with which our conscious mind work.

"There is no clear demarcation between the conscious and unconscious mind. Somewhere during the process of thought the conscious mind begins to ignore the mechanics of how it processes perception and thought. At this point only on the conclusions produced by that process are important. This is necessary, as life often requires a quick response to threats. If we are crossing the street and we see a pickup truck running a red light and racing toward us, we need to act quickly. If we were to stand there thinking about the make of the pickup, our relationship to the driver, the relative speed of the car, the cloudiness of the sky, the noise of the

screeching tires, the chores we need to do when we get home, and so on, we would be dead before we decided to get out of the way.

"However, sometimes it is important to pay more attention to what is going on in our subconscious. Patterns of perception or behavior that we learned over the years may end up being a problem for us. We may need to look at these patterns, try to understand how they were formed and why they no longer work. This makes it possible for us to change the patterns and establish more effective patterns. This is the purpose of psychotherapy.

"The subconscious mind is self-correcting to a certain extent and tries to bring problems to our attention. We will have dreams that speak to us of the problem. The dreams will use various symbols and images. Our reaction to certain people or events can be out of proportion. We may experience a vague sense of anxiety.

"The silence of contemplative prayer provides an opportunity for the conscious mind to let down the wall that separates it from the subconscious. This is an opportunity for the subconscious to speak to the conscious mind in feelings, words and images more directly than normally possible and for the conscious mind to perceive the message. The mystics speak of consolations being common in the beginner. No doubt many of these consolations are the surprise and joy experienced as the person gains a deeper level of communication within himself.

"That said, let's turn to our partner in this spiritual conversation. We often think of God as being "out there"...in heaven, in some other spiritual dimension, as being transcendent and beyond the universe of creation. This is our heritage from western civilization. The gods have most often been perceived as superhuman beings not that different from us. There was a sense of some divine reality beyond our comprehension but no real solid understanding of it.

"Thus, people did the best they could and came up with human expressions of those divine qualities that they could perceive around them. Classic mythology gave us families of gods who became involved with humanity for good or ill. While demonstrating that the divine had an interest in humanity and that relationship with the divine was possible, this understanding kept God at a distance.

"The genius of Christianity was to reveal much more of the true nature of God through the image of the Trinity.

"The Father reveals the unknowable, incomprehensible, and transcendent nature of God. God holds the universe in being, making existence possible, yet God is beyond created being.

The Son reveals the personal character of God. God does interact with us and is gracious toward us.

"The Son reveals that the best way for us to understand God's relationship with humanity is in terms of *agape*, self-giving and unconditional love.

"The Holy Spirit reveals to us the implications of this *agape*. Scripture describes us as temples of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecost story describes the Holy Spirit present in the upper room as tongues of fire. Each person present in the upper room was overcome by the presence of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in strange languages praising God. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals to us that God is not only transcendent but also immanent. That is, God is to be found within us, as much as God is to be found in the highest heaven. Our relationship with God is personal and intimate, yet in that relationship we are united with the baptized as the Body of Christ and with all creation as God's beloved.

"Every other form of prayer relates to God as being "out there". Even the meditative prayer, sacred reading or St. Ignatius' active imagination has us draw upon outside images and words as the means of God's communication with us. Contemplative prayer effectively cuts us off from the "outside". We are left in the silence with the Holy Spirit—God with us, God in us, God intimately united with us to such a degree that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

"Contemplation is resting in God's presence, as an infant might rest in her mother's arms. Words are not needed. Thoughts are not needed. One simply is with God. That's all that matters!

"God may very well make use of our sub-conscious thought processes as a means of communication to boot. Our minds are very complex and the relationship of spirit, flesh and mind are largely unexplored territory. Psychology is just beginning to reach the point where it will admit that we are still largely a mystery to ourselves. When I counsel with someone there are often times when I have a hunch or an inspiration that allows me to be of some real help to him or her. Is that the Holy Spirit? Is it a matter of being able to perceive the workings of deeper levels of my mind? Who knows? Perhaps, it is a bit of both!"

The Gardens

The next day we visited Acco. It was my first experience in a very traditional Middle-eastern town. The streets were narrow and dark, lined with compact stone buildings on all sides. Massive stone walls surrounded the city. I seemed to be transported back several centuries to the middle ages, half expecting Crusaders or Islamic warriors to emerge from some dark alley with swords clanging violently, engaged in a fierce battle. In reality, the only people who emerged from the dark allies of the city were children wanting their picture taken with the strange tourists.

Tour guides were plentiful. As we were taken into a number of the buildings, we were able to get a better sense of what life in the city was like.

I particularly liked the local mosque. It was not just a place of worship. It had a reputation that reached back several centuries of being an intellectual center old. The mosque itself was quite beautiful. It was well maintained and intricately decorated. A large enclosed courtyard surrounded it. Built in from the courtyard wall were rooms that contained books, chairs, tables and the other tools of scholarship. I was reminded that not very long ago the center of scholarship and civilization in the world was the Middle East. Back when the people of Europe were mostly illiterate, the youth of this town had access to an excellent education. Not only did this mosque provide a means of educating the youth of the city, it also provided their elders with the means to continue continued seeking ever deeper insight into the world around them and their place in that world.

We visited the Crusader castle and had the opportunity to crawl through one of the "hidden" tunnels below the streets of Acco. The Crusaders used these tunnels as an escape route in case of a Saracen victory. The day ended with a dinner of fresh fish in an outdoor cafe near Acco's harbor gate. We ended the day with a leisurely taxi ride back to our hotel in Haifa.

Israeli demographics are a good deal more complex than Western media would lead one to believe. Westerners tend to think in terms of Israel having only two ethnic groups, Jews and Palestinians. Even considering only these two categories the Jewish population can be divided into Europeans and Orientals. Both are Jewish but each follows different traditions and have very different histories. There are also the recent arrivals and the sabra, Jews born in Israel. Among the Jewish community, you have every shade of theological thought—from near atheists to highly observant and very traditional. Among the Palestinians you have both Christians and

Moslems, each of which has ancient roots in the land and each of which can be further divided along denominational lines.

In addition, you have other religious groups whose presence in the Holy Land extends back in history well before the existence of the State of Israel. Among these groups are the Druses and the Bahà'is. Druses are the contemporary descendents of the Samaritans of Jesus' day. They live in the northern part of Israel in the area what would have been known as Samaria two thousand years ago.

Bahà'is have their roots in Islam. The religion began in Persia (contemporary Iran) in the mid-19th century. They believed that their leader was a new prophet and a successor to Mohammed, Christ, Moses, and Abraham. Indeed, their leader, Mirza Hussein Ali, known as Baha'u'llah, was seen as the latest and greatest of the prophets. This didn't sit well with the Moslem religious and political leadership. The Bahà'ì leader and his family were exiled, first to Baghdad and later to Acco. Toward the end of his life Baha'u'llah was able to leave Acco and settle in the nearby countryside. Ever since then there has been a Bahà'ì community in the area, with the administrative center of the Bahà'is located about halfway up Mount Carmel,.

I mention this because my best friend in college was a Bahà'ì. Even after graduating college we maintained a close friendship. When he learned that I was going on Pilgrimage and Haifa was one of my stops, he made me promise to visit the Bahà'ì administrative center. So, our last day in Haifa was dedicated to the fulfillment of my promise.

The Bahà'ì property is quite beautiful. There are four major buildings on the property. The largest building is the Bahà'ì administrative center. There is also an archive building, a shrine, and a facility to provide hospitality for Bahà'ì pilgrims. The entire property is landscaped with gorgeous gardens, a real feast for the senses. The colors and scents are intoxicating.

The evening before, Barti and I had a cup of coffee after returning to the hotel from Acco. We also enjoyed an extended conversation, touching on everything from Israeli laws governing non-Jewish religious groups, to historical points of interest that Barti had forgotten to cover earlier. Before turning in for the night Barti asked me how I felt the pilgrimage was going. I explained that while the trip was great I felt more like a tourist than a pilgrim. So far, the only time I felt like I was engaged in anything sacred was while we were visiting with Tabitha.

He suggested that perhaps I felt that way because so far we were acting more like tourists than pilgrims. I would be wise, he suggested, if I took advantage of the visit to the Persian

Gardens, as they were known in Haifa, for prayer. Enjoy the gardens as a peaceful setting for prayer and spend some time just resting in God.

So, after strolling around the Persian Gardens slowly for the better part of an hour, I found a bench with a good view and tried to pray. After repeated efforts at prayer, I felt as ungrounded as I did when I began. So, I decided to simply sit there and enjoy the view. There was a certain charm in the manicured orderliness of the gardens. The real beauty however, was not the work of human hands but the intense colors of the flowers and how the leaves swayed in the slight breeze that washed up the side of Carmel. The sun was warm that day. So, sitting in the shade offered a welcome respite from the sun's glare. Feeling the breeze stroke my face and arms sent a chill through me. The gardens seemed unusually quiet, except for the chirping of crickets and the occasional song of a bird. Concerns over my future and what to do with my life were lost in the timeless experience of simply sitting in that garden and reveling in its beauty.

I was aware of everything that surrounded me to an intense degree. Yet, there was little of the mental chatter and stream of analysis that usually disturbs my efforts at meditation. I felt peaceful, aware only of that moment and enjoying it. When my mental chatter began to return I glanced at my wristwatch and realized that about an hour and a half had passed. I hadn't done much in that time except enjoy the simple pleasure of being alive. Since that was something to which I rarely gave my full attention, I cherished the experience.

After the peaceful experience of meditative prayer, it took me a few minutes to gather the energy to return to the business of the day. Eventually, I got up and went over to the visitor center to pick up a trinket for my friend as evidence that I fulfilled my promise. Then, I headed down the street that bisected the gardens and toward our hotel. Barti and I had planned to meet at the cafe next door for lunch and discuss our plans for the rest of the day.

According to our itinerary, we were to leave Haifa the next morning and head down to Ramleh. We would stay at the Latroun Abbey that evening and then head on to Jerusalem the next morning. Barti corresponded with his friends at Latroun months earlier and obtained permission for our visit. That morning, while I was in the gardens, Barti telephoned ahead to the Abbey. He wanted to be sure that no glitches had come up. All was well and the monks were looking forward to our visit.

Earlier that morning I teased Barti about his concern over confirming our stay at the Abbey. He agreed that the concern was probably groundless. Though he still felt that he was

doing the right thing by confirming the reservation. He illustrated his conviction with a story from the *Hadith*, the Islamic oral tradition.

"There was once a master who taught his disciples the importance of utter trust in God's gracious love. This master called two of his disciples from a near by town to visit him. The two young men traveled together on their camels, sharing fruitful conversation as they went. Upon reaching their master's house, one disciple tied his camel to the hitching post. The other disciple left his camel near his friend's mount but did not tie the animal to the post. Both young men spent the afternoon with their master. When they returned to the hitching post the disciple who tied the camel to the hitching post found the camel where he had left the creature. The other disciple was upset and confused, as his camel was no longer there. The young man went up to his master in great consternation.

"Master, your teaching is in error' said the young man.

"You taught us that God is gracious and loves us. God wishes us no harm but only what is good and necessary for us. Yet, when I went down to take my camel and return to my home the animal was gone!"

"The master asked the disciple, 'Did you not tie the camel to the hitching post?'

"The disciple replied, 'No, master. You taught us to trust in God. I felt that by not tying the animal to the post I was demonstrating my trust in God."

"The master shook his head and explained to the disciple with a sad smile, 'Certainly, trust in God...but tie your camel!'"

I grinned at the punch line and appreciated the wisdom of Barti's efforts to confirm the reservations at Latroun. No matter how much we may trust in God's gracious love for us, we live in an imperfect world. Wisdom demands that we "tie our camel".

By the time I reached the cafe Barti was already there drinking iced tea and reading. After joining him at the table, I told him of my experience in the garden. He was pleased for me but offered little other comment on it as we ate sandwiches and shared a plate of hummus and pita bread.

Ramleh

The next day we took an inter-city limousine from Haifa to Telaviv. Then after having lunch in Telaviv, we took another limousine on to Ramleh. Tabitha had gone on to Jerusalem already and would be waiting for us when we arrived. It probably would have made more sense to schedule the order in which we visited the cities of our itinerary differently. However, we wanted to save Jerusalem for last and Barti really wanted to stop at Ramleh. The extended travel time gave Barti the opportunity to orient me to the character of Ramleh.

Ramleh is Arabic for sand. The first historical documentation for Ramleh goes back to 716AD when it was founded in the sand dunes between Jerusalem and Joffa by *Caliph Suleiman ibn Abdul Malik*, who established it as the Arab capital in the region. During the Crusades Ramleh was the site of major battles, as it played an important role in providing security for the road between Jerusalem and Joffa, the primary access to the sea for Jerusalem.

It was a tradition among the Crusaders that Ramleh was the site of Ramah, which is mentioned several places in Scripture. It was supposedly the home of Joseph of Arimathaea and the Prophet Samuel. Jeremiah says, "A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loudly lamenting: it was Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were no more." (31:15). He mentions it in reference to the men of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin who were massacred or deported by the Assyrians at the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Matthew uses this refrain from Jeremiah in speaking of the killing of the innocent children at the order of King Herod in an attempt to destroy the baby Jesus. Whether there is any substance to the traditional relationship between Ramah of Scripture and Ramleh of history is unknown. Though Ramleh has its own share of sorrow.

Ramleh has often been the site of bloodshed or a bone of contention among combatants in the Holy Land. Many of the historic sites in the town have meaning to both Moslems and Christians. The site of a present Mosque may once have been a Crusaders Church and before that a Byzantine chapel. Napoleon used the town as his base of operations in 1799 when he was seeking to conquer Egypt and Syria.

During the British Mandate Ramleh was primarily a Palestinian community. It was a base of operations for the Arab irregular forces that attacked Jewish traffic on the road to Jerusalem. During the chaos following the implementation of the UN mandate establishing the State of

Israel, Israeli forces conquered the city. The Palestinians claim that they were forced to flee their homes by the Israeli military. The Israeli's claim that the Palestinians fled at the encouragement of their leaders and that the Israeli Army was no threat. The ultimate result however, was that what was once a city of approximately 70,000 people--most being Palestinian, was effectively depopulated. It was then resettled with Jewish immigrants, so that its current population is about 65,000. About ten percent of the population is now Palestinian.

As we got further away from the coast the land became dryer and more rugged. I had become so used to the verdant hills of the Haifa area that I was surprised by the desert conditions as we moved south to Telaviv. Once we began moving toward Jerusalem I was even more surprised by the increasingly rugged conditions. All I saw was sand and rocks.

The sun beat down mercilessly, forcing me to appreciate the comfort of our limousine with its air conditioning. The road wound around hills and outcroppings of rock as we continued eastward. Ramleh gave the impression of an oasis situated along the ridge of several hills as the road wound toward Jerusalem. Most of the buildings seemed new, though comfortably settled into the dry sandy world in which the town nestled. There were trees and some grasses around town, though they seemed to depend upon the charity of the human inhabitants for the moisture that sustained their lives.

There were several Catholic religious houses in Ramleh. The oldest was the Franciscan Monastery that was founded during the Crusades. The Cistercian Abbey to which we were headed was another, along with a Carmelite convent.

We arrived in Ramleh at the taxi office where our driver left us with our baggage. Barti made a phone call to the Abbey. He informed me shortly that our ride was on its way, after which he began to point out a number of buildings visible from the garage where we had been deposited. I remember him describing the Great Mosque and the White Mosque, as well as pointing to the Franciscan Monastery off in the distance. He disappeared for a moment into a small shop and returned with cold cokes and several oranges for us to snack on until our ride arrived.

About ten minutes later a Citron sedan of ancient vintage pulled up to the garage. Out jumped a monk in full habit who looked to be a bit older than Barti. When Barti saw the driver he walked up to the car and greeted the man in French, after which they embraced like long lost brothers. I waited quietly while Barti and the monk renewed their friendship in animated

conversation. Eventually, Barti waved for me to come over and introduced me to Br Andrew Weil, explaining that they had been good friends back when Barti resided at the Abbey. Br. Andrew welcomed me to Latroun, commented on Barti's apparent good health, and suggested that we get back to the Abbey.

Br. Andrew had the penchant for wild driving that seemed to be endemic in Israel. Soon we were beyond Ramleh itself and headed toward Jerusalem. Not too far out of Ramleh we wound up a hill part way and then made a sharp turn onto a road which soon revealed the Abbey church and several other buildings that made up the monastery complex. It was a mix of substantial older buildings and more recent construction.

As Br. Andrew pulled the car under the shade of a tree, he explained that the Abbey was about 80 years old and had been founded by a group of monks from the Trappist Abbey of *Sept Fons* in France. Keeping with its origins, French is the operating language of the Abbey. Since its founding the Abbey has existed under Turkish, Arab, British, and now Israeli rule.

The Abbey is at the border between biblical Judea and the Philistine territory. Five of the main Philistine towns of the Bible are situated in the vicinity.

Their property was in the officially designated strip of no-man's land, so they lived between the Israeli and the Jordanian armies. During the fighting on one occasion they were hit by over several hundred shells. There have been innumerable other difficulties and dangers but they endure and even thrive. The Abbey owns over 500 acres, one of the largest pieces of private land in Israel. The monks make a living by cultivating grapes and operating a vineyard. They also produce vinegar, olives, oranges and other fruits and vegetables both for income and to feed the monks and their guests. As with most monasteries, they provide a retreat house for guests and hospitality for the many visitors who visit this place of "the silent men".

After being shown to our rooms in the guesthouse, we washed the dust of travel from our faces and then headed to the Abbey Church for vespers.

The Church is simple in design but has the odor of sanctity. It was cool, even though light filled the building and the sun still beat heavily on the roof. The monks entered the choir and settled into their places. They seemed more formally dressed than the monks back at the Abbey of the Genesee. These monks wore their cowls. The manner of the celebration of the liturgy was also more formal, something I found quite enjoyable. I noticed that Barti wiped tears

from his eyes often during vespers. Obviously, the experience was deeply moving and flooded him with many memories.

After Vespers the monks had supper and a recreation period which was transformed into a welcome home party for Barti. More than half of the 20 monks in residence at Latroun were there during Barti's time. They were all as happy to see their old friend as was Br. Andrew. The celebration was warm and genuine, though much of it was in French, leaving me at a significant disadvantage. Several of the monks made small talk with me in an effort to make me feel at home, but Barti was deservedly the center of attention.

By the time we returned to the Church for compline the party had wound down and the monks were ready to turn in. The monastery day began at 2:30 the following morning. Instead of heading to the guesthouse, Barti suggested that we go back to the refectory for coffee and conversation, as was becoming our custom. We could talk there in comfort and not bother anyone—monks or retreatants.

It was obvious that Barti loved these monks and this monastery. I could see it in the way he interacted with his friends and the glow that suffused him ever since we arrived in Ramleh. What stumped me was why he left the monastic life he so clearly loved?

Once we were settled at a table with coffee before us, I put the question to him. He didn't answer at first. I could almost see him weighing and deciding what and how much he could tell me. He was my mentor and a friend. However, that role required him to be the teacher. He seemed unsure to what extent he should reveal his struggles as a fellow pilgrim. Then he smiled, as if he were mentally saying "Why not?" and began his tale.

"Leaving here was both the most difficult decision I've ever made... and one of the easiest. Let me explain.

"My mother had a dream shortly before I was born that left her with the impression that I was a special gift from God. Now she was a devout woman and took the dream as a sign from God. She didn't talk about it much but once or twice over the years she mentioned it to me, as one might share a precious possession or a family secret.

"She was a good woman and took me to church often. She taught me to pray when I was barely old enough to string two words into a sentence. She kept her personal devotions personal, but her faith was alive and part of every inch of her life. My dad was less overtly devout but he

was a regular member of a prayer group and was quite active in the community on issues of social justice. This was long before such things were fashionable.

"Needless to say, I grew up in a home where faith was as tangible and real as the love that bound us together. If that wasn't enough, my mom's uncle was a priest and my cousin was a Carmelite nun. By the time I was six years old I was "saying Mass" for the neighborhood kids and distributing Ritz cracker hosts. Looking back, my personality has a strong contemplative streak. I would get caught up for the longest time in watching leaves sway in the summer breeze or clouds sail across the sky. I enjoyed Bible stories and tales of Christian saints.

"While there was no obvious pressure from my parents or teachers at the parish school, I was on the priest track. When I was old enough I became an altar server and went on all the field trips to nearby seminaries and religious formation houses. Back then it was common for young men on the "priest track" to go to a junior seminary for high school. So, when I was in the eighth grade and it was time to consider which Catholic high school I would attend, my first choice was the minor seminary operated by the SVD priests. The SVD stands for *Societa Verba Dei* or in English, Society of the Divine Word.

"They are a missionary group. At that time my heart was on the missions, as they seemed the real adventurers in the Church. I was also under the influence of an old Gregory Peck movie, *Keys of the Kingdom*, where he portrayed a missionary priest in China.

"As I said, my father is a devout man in his own right. However, he could not see sending a 13 year old boy to a school that was in a different city and getting him further set on a way of life that he was too young to understand or appreciate. I think he also wanted me to hit puberty and get far along in years to be able to understand the meaning of celibacy.

"I attended a Catholic high school in town. As my father anticipated, I also became more knowledgeable of the differences between the sexes and dated several girls during my high school years.

"During my senior year of high school I had a long talk with my pastor. Even though I was more mature and worldly-wise, I still felt that my destiny led toward a life in ministry. I was more confirmed in that belief than ever. My pastor had known me since I was a toddler and was certain that I had a calling from about the time I began as an altar server. So, he was prepared for my visit and handed me an application form to the Diocesan seminary and a copy of the

glowing letter of recommendation that he mailed to the seminary rector the day I set up the appointment to speak with him.

"I loved seminary life and felt that I had found the place where I really belonged. My college years slipped by quickly and before long I found my self in major seminary only two years from ordination to the priesthood. While I loved seminary life and felt I had a real calling to ministry, I began to have serious doubts about being called to the diocesan priesthood.

"A diocesan priest is a community organizer, social worker, teacher and fundraiser, in addition to the more priestly duties of worship leader, preacher and confessor. I was drawn to worship and prayer. I loved studying theology. Yet, every time I went out to a parish to help during the summer, I would be tense and irritable. Months before I had to go to a parish there would be feelings of dread. I was competent enough in the parishes that the pastors always gave me adequate grades, even though I suffered through the experience. Since my regular academic grades were all excellent, I kept moving through the years of seminary closer and closer to ordination.

"During the summer between my first and second year at major seminary I did a lot of soul searching. The pastor at St. Stan's Parish where I was assigned for the summer was a real gentleman. The parish was an ideal setting--good staff, active parish ministries, good liturgy, thoughtful parishioners, and a comfortable facility. Yet, I was unhappy. I felt out of place and seriously doubted my vocation.

"Seven Story Mountain by Thomas Merton was published not too long before and quickly became very popular. Another seminarian suggested that I read the book, so I bought it to pass time during the summer. Once I started reading, I couldn't put the book down. It spoke to me with such fierce clarity. At the end of the summer I went on a weeklong retreat at Gethsemani Abbey before returning to seminary. Over the next few months I wrestled with my fears and my desires. It seemed clear to me that I was not drawn to the life of a diocesan priest. It was equally clear that the monastic life excited me and struck a chord deep within me. I spoke with my spiritual director several times that fall about my inner struggle. Around Christmas he encouraged me to apply to an Abbey for consideration as an observer. Once I had a taste of monastery life I would be in a better position to choose between that and the diocesan priesthood. He suggested that I try to go as an observer during the summer months in place of

the usual parish assignment. That way, it would be easy for me to return to my seminary studies with no disruption if I chose to continue my present course.

"So, I wrote to the Abbot of Gethsemani with my request. He wrote back a very encouraging letter but suggested that I approach the Abbot of their new foundation in Upstate New York, the Abbey of our Lady of the Genesee. At that time Gethsemani had more men in formation than they could handle. There was no room for any more. The new abbey was young, still needed many strong young men to put its fields under cultivation and finish constructing the Abbey buildings. The way the Abbot spoke Genesee also had something of a frontier atmosphere that I might find attractive--there was still something of the adventurer in me. I wrote to the Abbot of Genesee and the following summer I was an observer at the monastery.

"I was in heaven. It seemed as if I returned home after a long journey. There was no dread that summer, only peace and a sense that I was finally where I belong. By the end of the summer I wrote to the seminary and made all the other arrangements. I was accepted into the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance on September 15, 1953 as a postulant.

"I was happy with the choice of becoming a Trappist and thrived as I journeyed on through postulancy, the novitiate and through temporary vows. The only vocational choice I had to face at that point was whether I wanted to go on to the priesthood. I had the intelligence for it. Also, I was far enough along in my seminary studies that only two more years of theology were necessary before I could be ordained a priest. From my earliest years at the Abbey it was understood that the choice was mine. Most monks remained lay brothers, as the priesthood was incidental to their vocation. The monks who were ordained provided a service to the community but were not considered superior to their non-ordained fellows. About the only difference was that only priests could be elected Abbots of the community. This was necessary because of the priestly functions that the Abbot performed. Since I had no particular ambitions to be an abbot, I decided to remain a lay brother.

"I felt secure enough in my vocation to make perpetual vows and accept assignment to Latroun so I could study Scripture. It was only after I had been here for two or three years that I again felt the same sense of being out of focus that had marked my last years in seminary.

"My duties here in the refectory kept me in steady contact with the people of Ramleh. Scripture studies brought me into Jerusalem several times each week and involved a great deal of involvement with the outside world. Monastic life is very self-contained, as a necessary

precaution to protect the contemplative silence and simplicity integral to the life of the monk. My life was anything but silent and simple. Yet, I had not chosen to pursue Scripture studies or to administer the monastic kitchen. I both longed for the silence and simplicity of any other Trappist brother, as well as enjoyed contact with the people of Ramleh and Jerusalem. The mental stimulation encouraged by my studies, as well as the retreat work to which I had been assigned, was invigorating as well.

"Several insights began to dawn on me very slowly. The first was that the two holiest people I knew were not monks. They were lay women--my spiritual director, Tabitha Glowaki, and our cook, Miriam Mansour. St. Bernard teaches that a monk is a person absorbed in one quest: union with God. Yet, for me the clearest examples of real union with God were not monks.

"The second insight grew from my association with the people of Ramleh. How can I explain this? A monk flees from the world in a sense. He lives apart from the hustle and bustle of distractions that might keep him from giving his full attention to prayer and the practice of ascetical discipline, as these are the means by which the monk pursues holiness. There has been a tendency among believers over the years to portray the world as fallen and evil, filled with temptation, while the monastery is a bit of heaven on earth. Reality is that good and evil are within the human heart. If there is evil and good in Ramleh it is there because of the hearts of those who live there. The monastery is inhabited by human beings not angels. Evil is to be found in the monastery, as well as good. It lies in the hearts of those who live in the monastery. I can flee from the temptations "in the world" but those temptations follow me into the monastery because the temptations are not "in the world". The temptations I run from are in my heart. Ideally the monk comes to realize this and faces the evil that resides in his heart and does battle with it.

"Many of the people I knew from my excursions "into the world" beyond the monastery gates were good people. They prayed. Their lives were more faith-filled than my own. God was a living presence and made a difference for them. They faced tragedies with equanimity and grace. They lived to do God's will.

"While we monks took the vow of poverty, we never went hungry out of a lack of food. We never went without adequate clothing because we couldn't afford even basic clothing.

“I knew families who struggled to give each of their children a crust of bread each evening. Yet, in the midst of their suffering and struggles, their faith was unshaken. It seemed to be stronger than ever.

“So, I began to have doubts about the wisdom of my choice of the monastery. If the two people I considered to be living saints were lay women and the "world" was as rich in opportunities for sanctity as it was filled with temptation, what was I doing in the monastery? Was I truly rendering service to the Body of Christ or was I only following my own fancy?”

All of this was a side of Barti that I had never known before. I was pleased and humbled that he was taking me into his confidence and revealing some of his hidden struggles. I began to perceive Barti less as an authority figure and more as a friend and fellow pilgrim. I also felt a good deal of compassion for him. That the most terrible of his struggles dealt with trying to discern where God was leading him, struck a chord in me, as my struggles were similar to his. As I listened I remembered that he already knew Tabitha at that time, so I asked Barti what Tabitha had to say about his doubts.

"Tabitha said very little. She listened mostly and prodded me to consider my doubts from every angle. She helped me to look deep within myself to perceive what fears were churning up the doubts and giving them life. She also helped me to identify my dreams. The dreams were important, as they helped me to perceive the nature of the vocation to which God called me.

"What were your fears?" I blurted out, not thinking that it was really not any of my business. However, Barti was gracious and continued to explain.

"My fears? A major fear was commitment. The thought of living in a monastery for the rest of my life frightened me. That sounds strange coming from someone who thought of the monastery as heaven. However, it is true. Committing myself to the monastery meant that every other option was cut off. There were no more adventures. My world was the limits of the monastery property. It really doesn't hit you until you've made the commitment and finally realize that's all there is! Since my doubts first emerged after I made perpetual vows, the issue of commitment was obviously a factor.

"Tabitha expected as much and counseled caution. The reality of commitment was frightening for anyone. She described how frightened she was after realizing that she was married and that she was committed to Ladi for the rest of her life. She admitted to doubts many

times during the marriage, especially when her husband was so taken up with his studies or his political involvements that he seemed to forget that he had a wife and children. At least two or three times she wanted to give up on the marriage. Both Tabitha and her husband made mistakes, were thoughtless of each other's feelings, and got their priorities out of kilter many times over the years. It was her commitment to the marriage however that got her through the difficult times and allowed the relationship between her and Ladi to grow into full flower. 'Commitments are just that...', she used to say. You don't walk out on a commitment.

"Another fear was that I had misread God's call years back. I had been so set on escaping the inner pain that I endured in major seminary. Perhaps, I misunderstood where God was leading me?

"I was raised in an atmosphere where it was almost assumed that I was going into the priesthood. There was no overt pressure and my father even threw in a roadblock or two when he felt it was necessary but I was on the ordination track. Had I gone to seminary as the result of some subconscious need to get my mother's approval? Was being a Trappist just another way of guaranteeing her approval without having to be a parish priest? I was confused and had all these doubts whirling around in my head.

"I was also afraid that I was missing out on many of the real graces in life. I thought longingly over what it would be like to have children and a wife. I imagined what adventures God might have in store for me that would be impossible if I continued to live out my remaining years in the monastery.

"Of course, I was also afraid that all of my fears were simply satanic temptation to leave my God given calling!"

"What dreams attracted you at the time?" I asked.

"That was part of the problem. There was no one clear dream. My overarching goal was still union with God. It's just that I felt there were other ways to reach that goal and I was questioning the path I had taken.

"Looking back I'd like to say that I felt attracted to teaching but I hadn't even considered it at that point. I simply felt that it was possible to pursue a spiritual and contemplative life outside of the monastery and that God was drawing me in that direction.

"I felt sorry for Tabitha. Here she was providing spiritual direction to a monk and he starts doubting his monastic vocation. I knew she was worried that being a lay person she was

having some negative influence on me. Of course, she was having an influence! It was a good influence though. It gave me a sense of possibilities that had been absent prior to meeting her. She wondered if I saw her as a substitute mother figure whom I was trying to please. We spent many a session exploring all of the rationalizations I was telling myself.

"She was tough with me. She was unshakable in the opinion that if I was simply seeking more of the same but in a different environment, then I was way off track. My doubts were simply temptations trying to undermine my commitment as a Trappist. If this struggle was from God it would bring forth a new creation and turn my life in directions that I could not imagine—yet, my heart would sense as being absolutely right.

"She demanded that I write down all of my beliefs about life. She didn't want me to write the Apostles Creed. She wanted me to write down the foundation of beliefs upon which I built my life. I believed that God is gracious and ordered our lives for our ultimate benefit. I believed that my life on Earth is only a very small part of the vast expanse of my life. I must live in the moment, for only the moment exists. Eternity exists in the present and my life should reflect it. On and on I went until I began to write things like, 'I believe that I am stagnating spiritually! I believe that God is leading me and I'm not following!'

"She demanded that I work through all of my beliefs examining the consequences of those beliefs on my life. It was a helpful exercise. It helped me to organize my belief from a bunch of loose ideas and teachings into a coherent whole. I began to see how my beliefs shaped my decisions and actions. When it came to my negative beliefs, she made me examine them as well. It was apparent that I was not stagnating spiritually but was in a period of great spiritual activity. It was apparent as well that it was not a matter of me not following God's lead but of my faithful attempts to discern where I was being lead in order to follow God's will.

"Eventually she had me draw up several different plans of action. Each one had as its objective some vision of the future toward which I felt an attraction. The plans of action were quite specific blueprints for realizing the particular objective. If I followed the plan exactly, I would reach my goal. One plan had me staying in the monastery and becoming a hermit. another plan also took place in the monastery but pursued the present course to its logical conclusion of my ministry as a scholar. Another plan had me leaving the monastery to pursue lay ministry and a contemplative lifestyle "in the world". The way each plan was laid out my life would be productive and would make a difference to the world and to the Body of Christ. Each

plan was practical and was a reasonable path to my ultimate goal of holiness and union with God.

“Then she told me to pray about each plan, considering each and every element of the plans. I was to offer my will and person to God, asking that His will be made clear to me. I was to continue with this for as many months as necessary. I could stop only when I had settled on a particular path. I had to feel in my heart that this was what God wanted for me. I had to accept willingly what ever pain came with the path I chose, for all the paths brought varying degrees of pain. Without pain, we do not grow. Finally, I had to be willing to give my word as an unbreakable commitment to God that I would not turn back from the path ever. If I could not do what she asked, then I was to continue praying and simply wait until I could.

"I realized the path I must follow within three months but waited until six months had passed before I told Tabitha. I wanted to be sure that I gave the decision adequate thought. I considered the decision from every possible angle. I prayed until God's will was obvious and unmistakable. I considered every reasonable excuse and lie I might be telling myself to justify my choice. After everything, the answer was the same. I was certain of my choice. I told her. She asked me if I was ready to commit my self to the path for the rest of my life and I told her I was. A decision is only words until one acts on it. So, she told me to go and speak to the Abbot immediately, and tell him of my decision. Of course, you can figure out which path I chose."

I still had one question and gave voice to it. "Do you have any regrets?"

"Not really. There are times when I get nostalgic for my years in the monastery but it is only nostalgia. I faithfully followed the plan I worked out here at Latroun. The result has been so many blessings that I know this is God's path for me."

If I forget thee...

The American Colony Hotel was our base of operations in Jerusalem. Located just north of the Damascus Gate, the hotel was formerly a Pasha's palace built in the 19th century. It reminded me of the British Officer's Barracks in the movie, Lawrence of Arabia. It was characterized by an understated elegance that spoke of the glory of times long gone. Yet, it was also quite comfortable by contemporary standards. It was something of a fantasy fulfilled for me. I intended to write a note of appreciation to the travel agent for booking us there when I got home.

We arrived at the hotel late morning the next day. Since the monastic day begins very early there was ample time for us to visit with the Abbot and a few of Barti's close friends before we made our farewells and pressed on to Jerusalem. Ramleh is only a short distance from Jerusalem. So, we were at our hotel not long after leaving the Abbey. Tabitha had already checked in before we arrived. We met her for lunch fifteen minutes later in the hotel's coffee shop.

During lunch I enthused over the hotel. Tabitha observed that the hotel has a good deal of history and kindly gave me a history lesson.

"In 1873 Horatio Spafford planned a holiday in Europe with his wife, Anna, and their four daughters. Spafford was a successful a Chicago lawyer and very active in the Evangelical Church. He was a good friend of Dr. Dwight Moody, the famous 19th century American evangelist. At the last minute his legal work prevented him leaving Chicago as planned.

"He didn't want to disappoint his family after so much planning had gone into their European holiday. So, he sent them ahead as scheduled. He booked passage on a later ship for himself. While reluctant, Anna, his wife, went on ahead with their four young daughters in the luxury steamer *SS Ville de Havre*. Mid-Atlantic the ship was rammed accidentally by another vessel. It sank quickly. Of the hundreds aboard only 47 were saved. Anna was rescued. She was found unconscious on a floating spar. The rescue ship took the survivors to France. All four children were lost. From Paris Anna cabled the awful news to her husband: "Saved Alone"

"In the following years two more daughters, Bertha and Grace, were born. While their youngest daughters were a consolation, the deaths of their older children were a burden that weighed heavily upon them. The burden was added to when a son tragically died in infancy.

“Deeply religious people, the Spaffords decided to seek consolation in the Holy City and in 1881 they arrived in Jerusalem with fourteen friends. They settled in a house in the Old City, where the group became known as the "American Colony".

"In 1896 Anna revisited Chicago. Her magnetic personality inspired many members of the Swedish Evangelical Church to join the Americans in Jerusalem. Later in the same year their relatives in the village of *Nas* in Sweden made the same decision. Thirty-eight adults sold their possessions and along with 17 children came to join the Colony.

"The house in the Old City was too small to accommodate the newcomers. A new home was found. It was a mansion built about 1860 by a rich Arab landowner for himself and his three wives. It was built in the open country outside the city. In typical Turkish fortress style, it was built looking inward, around an impressive tree and flower filled courtyard. It is the same courtyard and garden that so impresses you, my dear young pilgrim.

"None of the three wives produced a son. He died in 1865 without a male heir. The mansion was placed on the market and available to the Americans and Swedes. They rented, then eventually bought the building where you are now sitting.

"The really interesting part of the story isn't the story itself. The man, Horatio Spafford, is the real point of interest. He was a saintly man by any measure. As you may remember from American history, the city of Chicago almost burnt to the ground in 1871. That fire left 300 people dead and over 100,000 homeless. Spafford invested much of his money in downtown Chicago real estate, helping to fund the rebuilding process. He also did what he could to help individuals impoverished or grief-stricken by the fire.

"Following the death of his children, Spafford wrestled with his grief. Ultimately this produced a moving hymn of faith that became very popular in Evangelical churches during the last century. The hymn is called, "It is Well".

"I was introduced to the hymn by Evangelical friends and now consider it one of my favorites. It appeals to those who have known terrible sorrow in their lives.

*"When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea-billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know:*

It is well, it is well with my soul.

*"Tho' Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed his own blood for my soul.*

*"My sin--oh the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin--not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul.*

*"And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend--
Even so--it is well with my soul."*

*"For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live,
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou shalt whisper Thy peace to my soul."*

We sat in silence as Tabitha sang the hymn in a gentle voice, just loud enough to share with us. Tears were in her eyes. The depth of meaning the hymn had for her was apparent.

A few moments later the somber mood passed and Tabitha asked how I liked Jerusalem.

"I'm a little surprised." I responded, "I always imagined Jerusalem to be an ancient, dusty city with donkey carts, bazaars, and narrow streets. Instead, what I've seen so far is a modern urban center not that different from Telaviv or Haifa."

"It is both, my dear young friend," Tabitha said, smiling at my consternation. "We will see the Old City tomorrow. It is as ancient and quaint as anything you could imagine. The new city however, is a modern secular capital that supports five-star hotels, night cubs, shops, modern

highways and all the baggage of government. Less than a hundred years ago most of the new city was fields and private homes. Now, ancient Jerusalem is little more than a cultural quarter in the heart of the Israeli capital city. Yet, when you walk through any of the gates of the Old City, you walk from one world to another.

"Jerusalem has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. The current version of the ancient city goes back to the 11th and 12th centuries. This is the Jerusalem of the Crusades. Barti told me that the two of you visited the Citadel in *Acco*. You will notice many similarities in architecture between that building and the structures of Jerusalem. It is a medieval city in design. In the larger scheme of things, this is relatively recent construction. Every time I visit the New City I am reminded of Psalm 147, '*...The Lord builds up Jerusalem and brings back Israel's exiles, he heals the broken-hearted, and binds up all their wounds.*'"

"This is also a very complex city. It is the heart of three major world religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each views the city in very different ways. Each has had a profound impact on the history of the city. Each continues to exert a profound influence on the city.

"This is the City of David for the Jews. It is the physical manifestation of their identity and culture. While the Temple Mound is important because it is the location where the Temple once stood and is a physical link to the most important Jewish institution. It isn't that events of momentous import happened here that the city is important to them. It is the city itself that is the focus of their concern, hope, dreams, history, heritage and future.

"While Jerusalem is the setting for many important scenes in the Gospels and Acts, its importance derives from Christ. Thus, it is the sacred sites that are important to the Christians. Mt. Calvary and Christ's tomb are of prime importance. It is to ensure access to these sites that the Crusades were fought. Most Christian interest in Jerusalem today continues to be focused on the sacred sites of Christian history and related scholarship.

"Islam has a bit more complex relationship to Jerusalem. On the same site as the ancient Jewish Temple is found the rock upon which Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac. At least, that is the tradition. According to Islamic tradition that rock was also the point from which Mohammed undertook a mystical experience of the heavens. The site of this sacred rock is covered with the Dome of the Rock. Just across from the Dome of the Rock is the *Al Aqsa* Mosque. Together these two shrines comprise the *Haram al Sharif*, or "Sacred Court" of Islam. After the *Kabbah* in Mecca, the *Haram al Sahrif* is the most sacred site in Islam. Like

Christianity the holiness of the site depends upon its association with historical and traditional events.

"However, Mohammed had a great respect for Jerusalem itself as the crucible where so much of sacred history has unfolded. In the earliest years of Islam Mohammed had the faithful face Jerusalem when they prayed. It was only after Islam received a cold-shoulder from the Jewish leaders of the period that Mohammed had the faithful face Mecca and the *Kabbah* when they prayed. So, Jerusalem itself is a holy city for Islam beyond being the site of important events. It must also be remembered that from the time of Mohammed to the present Islam has been the dominant religious influence in Jerusalem. The period of Christian domination during the Crusades were only an historical anomaly, as is the present situation some might argue.

"The result of all this is that this miniscule city stirs up a great deal of emotion and controversy all over the world.. It becomes the crucible for all of these conflicting claims and perceptions. At times it can be quite a strain living in a crucible."

Tabitha had strong feelings and well informed opinions about Jerusalem. It would have been wonderful to spend the rest of the day just listening to her reflections. However, I was exhausted, having risen at 2:00am for Vigil and gone without sleep since then. Neither Barti nor I were in a mood to do anything but eat and sleep. It was decided that tomorrow morning Barti and I would go for a walk through the Old City to get a sense of its size and feeling. After lunch at the hotel, Tabitha would join us for an afternoon excursion. We scheduled a bus tour to Bethlehem and Hebron for the next day.

I spent the rest of the day writing letters back home, praying, and trying to do some spiritual reading. After an excellent supper, I went to sleep early.

John 12:24-26

I was up early the next morning. I wanted some time to myself and needed a bit of exercise as well. So, I left the hotel compound, turned right on Nablus and walked down past the Shrine of the Kings. In the distance I could see King David Hotel and the Jerusalem YMCA. I was enjoying the walk. By the time I reached Prophets Street, I had to make a decision. Another half block and I would be next to the Damascus gate. Do I head on into the Old City or turn onto one of the streets I was passing and stroll through the New City? After a brief hesitation, I turned. As I walked along Prophets Street, I was struck by its similarity with the streets of Haifa and Telaviv. I think it was all the small shops just beginning to open and the street teeming with cars and bicycles that left me with the impression.

It was a beautiful. The sun was bright. Even though there was still a chill in the air, the sun promised a warm day as it rose in the sky.

Growing up in American cities, my natural tendency at a street corner was to check the light and the flow of on-coming traffic then walk across the street. I usually paid little attention to the color of the light, if the flow of traffic allowed me to cross. So, as I reached one of the larger intersections, I moved on out of habit, glancing at the light, then looking to the right and left for cars. I got no more than a step into the street when I was grabbed by the collar and pulled out of the street and back on to the curb. I turned around ready for a fight when I realized that a gentleman of about 70 years was the one who yanked me from the street. He then proceeded to scold me in Hebrew and showed me an ID that indicated that he was a retired police officer. I eventually realized that people did not jaywalk in Jerusalem. The traffic was much too unpredictable for that American luxury. Further, I was not paying attention to the flow of traffic. In the States people drive on the right side of the road. In Israel, like many countries, one drives on the left. I had looked for traffic coming from the right side of the road and paid no attention to a car that was racing toward me from the left. Realizing what had happened, I was extremely contrite and thanked the older gentleman profusely for both saving my life and teaching me about Israeli traffic laws. A few moments later I continued my journey but with much more attention to my surroundings and the demands of navigating the street safely.

About twenty minutes later, I figured it was time to head back to the hotel for breakfast with Barti and Tabitha. Afterwards, we would head into the Old City and look around. I

considered taking a bus, as the bus stop was across the street. There was a small crowd waiting for the next bus already. I reached into my pocket to see if I brought enough change with me for the bus. I had a few Israeli pounds on me but the bus driver didn't make change. I would have to go into one of the shops and make change first. I was on my way into a bakeshop when I heard the usual clatter and whine of a diesel engine that one associates with a city bus anyplace in the world. I watched as a young mother and her two sons climbed on the bus, followed by several businessmen and a retired couple. There was no hope that I would be able to get the exact change in time and dash across the street before the bus moved on down the street. So, I turned around and began a leisurely stroll back in the direction from which I came.

I was absorbed in thought when I heard a loud "CRACK" sound that set off an echo vaguely similar to thunder. I looked up, as did everyone else on the street, and saw in the distance a ball of flame and cloud of smoke rising from the street about a quarter mile ahead. There was a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. The sound wasn't good--too much like an explosion. The fire and smoke made me think of an explosion as well.

The reaction among the people around me was mixed. Some ran in the direction of the smoke, as I did. Others disappeared into shops or side streets in an effort to avoid any trouble.

By the time I ran only a couple of blocks, it was apparent that the bus had exploded. It was burning fiercely and torn open by the power of an explosion. From the shape of the blast zone around the bus and the level of destruction, I was sure that a bomb had been planted on the bus. A few people were laying on the ground, knocked there by the force of the blast. It was obvious that none of the passengers were alive. My mind is not really clear on what happened next. I was shocked by what I had seen and consciously had to will myself to check on some of the people lying on the sidewalk to see if I could be of some help.

I was not among the first to arrive. A group of military conscripts had been posted not far from the area to assist with security. Six of them reached the devastation before me and secured the area. Police sirens blared in the distance and within a minute or two several police cars and a fire truck were on the scene. One of the police officers interviewed me but there was little that I could say. I felt rather helpless and useless. Eventually, I was able to leave the scene and head back to the hotel. I was almost an hour late.

I found my friends in the coffee shop, as I expected. I didn't feel very hungry, so I drank some orange juice and told them what I had just seen. As I spoke to them, I remembered

watching the mother and her children board the bus, the businessmen, the retired couple. It struck me that they were dead now. A few minutes ago they were alive with no apparent worries and now they were gone. The thought evoked a sob from deep within and I found tears running down my face. My emotions were in chaos. There was terrible grief for the people I knew were dead. I was angry as well. How could anyone bomb a city bus? What benefit was there in killing women and children? What kind of warfare was this?

I could tell that Barti was upset as well. Though his face revealed more anger and frustration than any other emotion.

Eventually, I settled down and ate a light breakfast of yogurt and bread. As I ate Barti tried to explain what kind of warfare it was to blow up a busload of innocents.

"Israel is disputed real estate with claims going back thousands of years. Abraham came to Canaan as one Bedouin chieftain among others, with a promise that his descendants would be a great nation and the land would one day be theirs.

"Hundreds of years later, when his descendants returned from bondage in Egypt they came to Canaan with the legendary promise of God to Abraham as their driving vision. They would be a great nation! However, Canaan was not a barren land at the time. There were many cities and towns. People whose claim on the land was as ancient as Abraham's descendents were farming the land. The next two hundred or so years were spent fighting for control. Israel enjoyed a couple hundred years of relative autonomy and then it was destroyed. The Assyrians killed the people of the northern provinces or took them off into slavery. They disappeared from the face of the Earth as a unique people. All that remained was the province of Judea. Political events prevented the Assyrians from completing the job. Judea continued for another hundred years. Clearly, it continued only because its leaders knew how to play along with the Assyrian and then Babylonian rulers.

"Eventually, Judea fell and met a fate similar to their northern brothers. After 70 years they were allowed to return to Judea, which was a Persian possession at that time. When the Greeks took control of the region, Judea fell under their control. Before long the Romans were in control.

"At least from the time of the Greeks onward the Jewish people rebelled against the oppression of foreign empires controlling their homeland. The most effective way of rebellion was not direct confrontation but harassment. Their goal was to make it impossible to govern.

They did this by terrorizing foreign troops, disrupting supply lines and the mail. The strategy never worked but it did irritate the foreign powers who would occasionally send in the troops and exact a degree of revenge on rebel and innocent alike.

"About thirty years after Christ, the Romans decimated the Jewish people. Those who were not killed were sent into exile. About fifty years later Jerusalem and the Jewish community had rebuilt enough that another attempt at independence was made. This time the Romans were so angry that they completely destroyed Jerusalem. Not one stone stood upon the other by the time they were through. Jews were forbidden to live in Jerusalem. The area officially became a pagan land. Later it became predominately Christian, as Christian belief became the norm for the Roman Empire.

"Around 670AD Judea came under the control of the Arabian armies, newly united and invigorated by Islam. Except for brief periods of Christian control under the Crusaders, this land was under Moslem control until the early years of this century. It was then that the British took control of the area as a League of Nations Trust Territory, when the Turks were defeated during World War I.

"Since Moslem landowners were the main power brokers and leading citizens at the time they could find a way of living with the British as easily as they did with the Turks. The British were usually reasonable administrators when it came to cultures and lands sufficiently foreign. The Jewish community in Palestine was relatively small and seemed to get along fairly well with its Moslem and British neighbors.

"The 19th century was an time of dreamers who wanted to create political utopias. Marx came up with his *Das Kapital* back then. Millerites and Mormons believed that these were the end times and wanted to establish the Kingdom of God—based on their blueprints. Even Jewish intellectuals had a dream of one more having a homeland. This dream was known as Zionism. There were many options considered but the only acceptable idea was to return to the ancient seat of Judaism--Palestine.

"From the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th there was an ever increasing flow of Jewish immigrants into Palestine. They established businesses, taught at schools, practiced medicine, built and farmed. As the community grew the dream became more intense, especially as they saw Gandhi pull India free of British control. Rather than follow the

saint's example of non-violence, the settlers followed the example of their ancestors and resorted to rebellion and terrorism.

"Following World War II the United Nations established a portion of Palestine as a Jewish homeland. The Moslem landowners whose families had lived on that land for more than a thousand years didn't like the development one bit. Initially, there was open warfare between Jews and Moslems for control of the land. The Jewish population protected their new homeland and expanded their territory before everyone settled into an uneasy peace.

"The Israelis considered themselves to be protecting their God given and United Nations approved homeland from those who would take it from them and destroy them. The memory of Hitler was still fresh and bitterly painful. They would not be sheep going to the slaughter any longer. They were determined to protect their homeland and to kill anyone who threatened further harm them as a people.

"The Palestinians, both Moslem and Christian, felt themselves to have become unwelcome in the land of their birth. Their roots went deep into the soil of Palestine. Yet, they were second class citizens in their homeland, living in refugee camps. In the meantime, European immigrants were taking over their lands and acting as if they had a serious claim on the land. Israeli laws allowed free immigration of Jews into Israel while restricting any other type of immigration. Israel was a Jewish state and other religions were under government supervision and considerably restricted in their practice. The situation only grew worse when neighboring Islamic countries attempted to help the Palestinians with political and military action against Israel. In the end, the Israeli territory expanded even further.

"How were the Palestinian's to deal with this situation? They resorted to the same strategy as any people with little military and political power--terrorism. While a rebel with a good moral sense might direct his fury toward military installations and resources, the people of this century are much too pragmatic to consider any issues related to moral considerations. The only question to consider is what works best? Well, if you want to disrupt a community, putting the entire community in harm's way is probably the most efficient approach. You don't even have to put the entire community in harm's way—only make them think they are in harm's way. This disrupts the smooth flowing of the economy and makes the people more open to consider the demands of the rebels. It is a powerful weapon because relatively few resources need to be used yet you can cripple a large and complex government. Terrorism turned from being

primarily a military tool and became a political tool. Its primary impact was psychological. The symbolic value of the target was of as much importance as any military value. Thus, targets like a city bus were ideal under the new rules.

"So, the Israeli army shells some refugee camp where they think the responsible terrorist cell is located and an infirmary or school gets hit. Innocent children or women die and the Palestinians want blood. A new incident is planned and the cycle perpetuates itself.

"I saw more blood than I cared to during my years here. It's insane! How are people to live in peace when no one trusts the other enough to even make a beginning."

I was not a total innocent when it came to violence. Being a probation officer I had worked with my share of young murderers, thugs and gang members. I had seen blood and the results of senseless violence. Yet, the experience with the bus left me disoriented and sickened. I tried to explain what I was feeling.

"Exactly, you are off balance. If enough people are off balance they are no longer a threat. They might even be susceptible to military defeat." Barti responded.

Tabitha picked up the conversation following Barti's pronouncement.

"Terrorism is more than just a political or military tactic. It is a manifestation of evil. Evil disquiets any soul that isn't already corrupted by its foul stench.

"We operate from the assumption that all people are basically good. If they do something that results in the harm of another, we assume that they were misguided or ignorant. We assume that their ultimate goals were good but that those goals got subverted somewhere along the way. It is difficult for us to comprehend terrorism because it undermines our understanding of human nature. It is bad enough when the military target the soldiers of an opposing nation and there is "collateral damage". We can understand this however. The objective of the strike was just, in that it was directed toward combatants. That innocent people were harmed is a terrible consequence of the act but it was not the intention of perpetrators. This we understand. People are inherently good but sometime they make mistakes.

"We can see this in terms of sin. Sin is understood as "missing the mark". That is the literal meaning of the Hebrew used in Scripture. We aim for the bull's eye but there are times when we simply do not hit it. We justifiably view ourselves as essentially good people but subject to human frailty. We apologize for our failures, determine that our actions were wrong, and do our best not to fail again—at least in the same way.

“Evil is a different matter entirely. It is much more a force that drives us away from God. It operates by giving energy to our willfulness. It opposes our inclination to trust in God and to submit to God’s will.”

I thought her analysis of sin was excellent. Though I was having trouble understanding what she meant by evil or how it operated. My confusion must have been apparent, as she slowed down and offered an illustration.

“Sin accepts morality as having some objective reality. Certain acts are fundamentally evil and never justified. These forbidden acts may come from Scripture or identified through the use of reason based on Gospel principles. Thus, if a person commits a forbidden act, he or she realizes that they have done something wrong. They recognize the objective wrongfulness of their action. Their ultimate goal is to do God’s will in their life. Sin doesn’t turn them away from accepting the ultimate goal. It can actually help commit them more firmly to God’s will, if they realize what they have done and repent.

“On the other hand, evil is a fundamental act of rebellion against God. It is the essence of willfulness in that it acknowledges no authority aside from itself. Moral principles are meaningless before evil. Moral principles imply an ultimate desire to submit to God’s will. Evil is opposed to submission to any moral principles. Evil recognizes no authority aside from itself. Evil attempts to turn moral principles against God and those who accept those moral principles.

“Morality of any shade recognizes the principle of not harming the innocent. Terrorism subverts that principle and specifically targets the innocent.”

Now I was really confused. “Tabitha, it is my impression that many terrorists view themselves as warriors for God and deeply religious people. How can you say they are evil when they see themselves as defending Catholicism, as in Ireland, or Islam, as here in the Middle East?”

Barti asked if he could respond and Tabitha nodded her approval.

“True faith always requires an attitude of surrender to the will of God. We attempt to know God’s will through Scripture, our religious tradition, through the wisdom of our religious leaders and through our own prayerful reflection. We acknowledge that we are frail human beings and limited in our ability to know God’s will. So, we do our best. We draw on the fruit of our prayer and reflection. We judge this against the wisdom of Scripture and tradition. We

respect moral principles as best as we understand them and can apply them to our particular situation.

“Evil is most insidious and dangerous under the cloak of religion. Yet it is not that difficult to perceive the evil for what it is. Look at Ireland. The IRA partisans claim to be defending the rights of Irish Catholics. The Ulstermen claim that they are protecting the rights of Irish Protestants. How do both go about protecting the rights of their respective co-religionists? They kill women and children. They shoot men at work or at home with their wives and children. They blow up stores. That the Pope condemns their actions is irrelevant. That their actions are contrary to every teaching in Scripture is irrelevant. That their actions directly violate every principle of just war is irrelevant. That their bishops, priests and most ministers condemn their actions is irrelevant.

“I saw a Irish terrorist being interviewed on television not long ago. He explained that he was drawn into the movement when his father was killed by a terrorist. He was angry and wanted revenge. As he got involved, he became proficient at terror. Eventually it reached the point where it was a matter of getting up in the morning and finding out who was to be killed today, as one might go to work and pick up the day’s assignment. He had become so corrupted by evil that it became banal. It was a routine of no consequence to him. Life was cheap and he was simply doing his duty. If you pushed him for an explanation of why he did it, he might say that he was doing it because of his religion.

“The same process is at work among the terrorists in the Middle East. They act in the name of Islam against oppressive Zionism and its corrupt patrons—America and Europe. They appeal to Islamic concepts, such as *jihad*. Yet, their ultimate authority is themselves.

“The cynical care less about Islam and use it only as a justification for their political power games.

“The sincere believe that they know God’s will and their agenda is its concrete expression. For them God is no longer a mystery. They look in the mirror and see a saint. They see a man who is going to heaven as a martyr. This is the illusion, a satanic false vision that leads them to justify evil and to commit it without a qualm of conscience. They look in the mirror and do not see a frail believer struggling to know God’s will. A true saint is always balanced on a razor’s edge realizing their weakness and sinfulness, all the while pouring out their lives in service. The terrorist imagines he is God's gift to Islam or Catholicism or what every

religious tradition he operates from. He has the delusion that God's will is revealed through him. The more sincere he is, the more dangerous, for the more sincere he is the blinder he is to God's will. In fact they have turned against God and closed themselves off from God's voice. They can not hear God's voice because they listen only to their own voice.

“Terrorists call for a *jihad* against the enemy. They use the methods of terror against those they call their enemies and cover it in the cloak of Islamic *jihad*. Yet, the most cursory reading of the *Koran* makes it clear that terrorism and *jihad* are utterly incompatible. *Jihad* is the obligation to defend Islam and to support its proclamation. Yet, in the defense of Islam the warrior is forbidden to harm women or children. The Islamic warrior is forbidden even to harm the combatant who is without a weapon. The terrorist is as much opposed to his own religion as he is his perceived enemy, for he turns against God's word, twisting it for his own purposes and makes an idol of his own will. That is an act of rebellion against God. It is idolatry, with his will as the object of worship. It is evil, plain and simple.

“You were forced to look upon evil today. You felt its presence and saw it in action. It is disquieting”.

Picking up the discussion when Barti finished, I was concerned that evil was not just the possession of one side. “I can understand the frustration of the Palestinians and the abuse many innocent people may suffer in the name of security, self-defense and justice. I realize that no amount of frustration justifies evil but what about the Israelis. Surely they can not be totally innocent, when their reaction to Palestinian terror only serves to trigger even more terror?”

Barti drank the rest of the coffee in his cup and then responded.

“Nothing justifies evil. The dynamic of terror is that it draws the victim into its clutches through a natural desire for justice. That desire can easily be transformed into a thirst for vengeance and destruction. Vengeance is God's according to scripture. If we move beyond justice and self-defense into vengeance then we join the terrorist. Our actions become similar to those of the terrorist. We usurp what is rightfully God's prerogative by taking vengeance into our own hands. In doing that, we are putting ourselves in God's place, which is exactly what the terrorist has done. We have abandoned justice and have embraced evil.

“Both the Israelis and the Palestinians must walk the razor's edge between good and evil. These are religious people and they must learn to trust in God. Each has every right to demand

justice of the other and expect to receive it. Neither has any right to vengeance. It is a difficult and dangerous path to walk.”

Our conversation continued a while longer but shifted from serious talk of terrorists to the finer details of bartering for a good price with local vendors. I still had souvenirs to buy and I was anxious to get my first look at the holy sites of three world religions.

It was late morning, almost noon, by the time we finally decided to head into the Old City. Rather than the general tour we originally planned, we would head for the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. That Church contained both Calvary and the grave of Christ. We could spend the better part of the afternoon there and then see how much time we had before deciding our next course of action.

The walls of the Old City were massive and extended far into the distance, at least from where we stood. The Damascus Gate was large as well. It seemed to be a portal from the 20th century into some distant era long past. The streets of Jerusalem were only narrow paths lined on both sides by shops, houses, and cafes. None of the shops were very large. Most spilled out into the street making them even more congested. The streets were chilly as well, at least a good five to ten degrees cooler than before we passed through the Damascus Gate. Barti explained that the streets were so narrow that the sun actually reached the cobblestones used to pave the streets only for a few minutes each day. It was also relatively slow going, as the streets were crowded and it was difficult to flow around obstacles. At one point a donkey that was giving its owner a good deal of aggravation held us up.

There weren't many animals in the Old City but there were some. We met an occasional beast of burden like the donkey, as well as chickens and other creatures intended for someone's supper.

The people in the Old City seemed more pushy and demanding than the other citizens of Jerusalem that I met in the New City. Perhaps the density of population had something to do with it? It reminded me of New York City or Chicago.

As we walked Barti or Tabitha would point out some site of interest or explained the architecture we encountered. An occasional archaeological excavation of note would be pointed out or the facade of a religious institute identified. Eventually we turned a corner and Barti stopped walking. In front of us was a small fenced courtyard and a large dirty looking old building with a domed roof.

"This, my young friend, is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre." announced a smiling Barti.

To be honest, I was not impressed. I had imagined the shrine that enclosed the most sacred real estate on the face of the Earth to be a bit more impressive. The building hinted at a former glory but in its present state was pathetic. Those responsible for the shrine couldn't even keep the building clean.

We moved into the courtyard and joined the crowd as it moved into the church. The building was little better from the inside. It looked dirty. The roof was cracked and in serious need of repair. Scaffolding was in place but it looked like years had gone by since anyone had used the scaffolding and actually worked on the building.

We followed the group up a set of stairs and found ourselves in what appeared to be a loft area, not very different in size from the theatre loft we visited on our first evening in Israel. Along the side walls of the room were ornate icons in the Eastern style and an abundance of candles. It was explained that one group of icons and candles covered the rocks of Calvary. There was even a place where you could put your hand through and touch the ground of Calvary. I wanted to pray and take in something of the spirit of the location but there were no kneelers or seats in the room. I felt like I was in a museum rather than a church. Now that we had viewed this exhibit, it was time to move on.

Our group was taken down stairs. Along the way a guide explained that a committee comprised of Catholic representatives, as well as members from two different Orthodox communities administered the shrine. There had been a long history of poor cooperation among the three groups and little trust. Thus, the shrine was in such poor repair and the committee was still unable to agree on how to undertake the needed repairs. These followers of Christ had so much suspicion of each other that a Moslem family held the key to the shrine. It was a member of this family that came to the shrine each evening as a neutral third party to close and lock the shrine.

We reached the main church and lined up to enter an ornate mausoleum built against one of the walls. The line moved steadily forward. Before long I found myself in a small room with a marble bier in its center. The candles filled every niche of the room and gave off a golden glow. An Orthodox cleric stood at one end of the room with a collection basket. I assume the funds were to help with the maintenance of the shrine. Though from the condition of the shrine it didn't look like much money was being put to that purpose. The thought ran through my mind

that this was supposed to be the place where Christ had been buried and from which He rose from the dead. Before I had the opportunity to take in much of a sense of the place, it was time to move on.

We looked around in the shrine for a few moments and then I felt the need to get out. Barti and Tabitha clearly wanted to spend a few more minutes in the shrine. However, I felt that if I didn't get out of the shrine soon I would choke. If this was the site that St. Helena chose as being the location of Calvary and Christ's grave, she had to be wrong. I had no sense of the holy in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The only feeling that rose up in me was revulsion.

Leaving the shrine, I didn't stop until I was out of the courtyard and on the street. I walked the streets near the shrine for a few moments trying to calm my raging feelings and the sense of nausea that threatened to overwhelm me. Eventually, I felt enough in control to stop walking and simply stand and wait for Barti and Tabitha near a religious trinket shop across from the shrine.

I was lost in my thoughts when a young man, perhaps two or three years younger than myself, came up to me and asked me the time. I checked and told him. Then he quickly asked me if I wanted to buy some hashish. I told him that I didn't use the stuff and wasn't interested.

A few moments later my friends who must have thought it was terribly strange joined me. As they approached, I was laughing almost uncontrollably, with tears streaming down my cheeks. What a perfect touch for such a lousy day, being approached to buy hash in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher!

We were thirsty and hungry. Tabitha suggested that we follow her around a few corners. before we knew it we were in an out of the way pocket of Jerusalem that was a little more open than the rest. There was a small garden that bordered the wall. Across from the garden was a cafe that wasn't much larger than the garden. We sat down and ordered cokes and lentil soup. The coke was cold and the soup was warm. Both were much needed.

My emotions were in turmoil. I tried to explain how I felt but I wasn't sure if I even knew myself.

"I expected the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to be the climax of my pilgrimage. I reached the "holy of holies", the place where the drama of redemption was played out. Yet, all I find is a shrine in ruins, religious organizations squabbling and unable to work together long enough to even keep the place clean. Calvary is buried in candles and tacky paintings. The

place of the resurrection is only a museum exhibit with a collection basket. I feel cheated. I feel ashamed those who claim to follow Christ perpetuate this travesty. I feel disappointed. The only honest person I met at the church was the one who tried to sell me drugs. He was a drug dealer and didn't pretend to be anything else. I thought this pilgrimage would help me to gain a better sense of purpose and direction for my life. Right now I feel as if I've lost what little meaning and direction I had."

Tabitha looked at me with a gentle smile and spoke.

"Don't give up so soon, young man. Our illusions must be removed before we can perceive the truth. You have been given a grace today. Cherish it. Be patient, the pilgrimage is not over yet."

After the rest break, we pressed on to the Temple Mound. All that is left of the Temple is a retaining wall. Before the destruction of the Temple as part of Rome's sack of Jerusalem in 70AD, the Temple itself sat on top of the mound. Jewish faithful and others come to the wall crying and praying to God before it. It is all that is left of their place of worship and sacrifice, as called for in Scripture. There is no sacrifice today according to the demands of scripture. All that the people can do is offer their prayers and heartfelt desires to God as they stand in silence before the wall.

The top of the mound today is an open area, with the exception of the Dome of the Rock. After the *Kabbah* in Mecca, the Dome of the Rock is the holiest place in all of Islam. It is believed that from that location the Prophet ascended to heaven in a mystical experience. A large boulder is located in the building. It is upon this boulder that the Prophet was said to have stood. This boulder is also believed to be the place where Abraham laid Isaac in sacrifice to God.

After observing the Jewish worshipers praying at the base of the wall with great devotion, we moved up a ramp to the top of the mound and headed toward the Dome of the Rock. It is an exquisite building. The walls are spotless and covered with brilliant tiles and golden calligraphy. The tiles are a rich blue and quite beautiful. There is a sense of dignity and respect around the shrine. Guides are available. So, we removed our shoes, as is the custom in the Orient, and entered the shrine. Oriental carpets were everywhere, covering the floor and walls. These were not ordinary carpets. Each was a work of art, hand crafted by the most gifted weavers on the face of the planet. We were lead through the shrine by our guide who explained everything that

we saw in a low voice, at sufficient volume for all of us to hear but not so loud as to disturb any of those deep in prayer.

After the earlier fiasco, I found the experience among the Jewish and Moslem worshipers refreshing, almost inspiring.

Luke 2:52

The next day we had an early breakfast. Barti and I were headed off to catch a tour bus to Bethlehem and Hebron. Tabitha was not feeling well enough to take on the exertion of the bus ride. She decided to stay behind and spend the day reading, praying and getting caught up on correspondence.

Bethlehem is a fifteen-minute bus ride outside of Jerusalem. The scenery is stark once the city is left. The landscape is dry and rocky. The road takes you down into a nearby valley and then up and out the other side. You repeat this process a few times before you come up the crest of a hill and find yourself on a ridge that widens into a small town. There are a few homes and shops. The ever-present tourist traps are easily seen, ready to sell the visitor religious trinkets. A large rectangular church next to an open parking area large enough to hold several thousand people or dozens of tourist buses dominates the town. The town is Bethlehem and the church is the Church of the Nativity.

We stepped down from the bus and after a few moments for all the passengers to get organized we followed our tour guide into the church. I was pleasantly surprised. Compared to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, this church was spacious, clean, and illuminated with the sunlight pouring through the windows. Our guide explained that the church was in an on-going state of renovation. I figured that this accounted for its more pleasing appearance. Whatever group operated the Church seemed to get along better than their counterparts in Jerusalem.

As we walked through the church we came to a gaping hole in the floor that was cordoned off. The guide explained that a church has been present on this site to commemorate Christ's birth all the way back to the earliest years of Christianity. Archaeological work on the site was underway and had revealed a mosaic floor from around the 4th century, a portion of which we could see by looking down into the hole in the floor. We leaned forward and were treated to a simple but beautiful mosaic of Christ surrounded by disciples and various religious symbols. It was done mainly in browns and other earth tones.

We continued to walk through the church as the guide pointed out aspects of the architecture or explained the history of various works of art on display. Eventually, we turned a corner and were led down a set of stairs into what seemed at first to be a wine cellar. It was a cave about 20 feet long and eight or nine feet wide cut in the rock. At one end of the cave a

niche was cut in the rock and what appeared to be a stylized, golden star was inlaid. The guide explained that this was the cave of the nativity. It was the ancient tradition that it was in this cave that Mary gave birth to Jesus. Though the guide also noted that the ridge on which Bethlehem sat was pockmarked with similar caves. Someone asked the guide about the gold star. He explained that star marked the location of the manger in which Jesus was placed after his birth. Of course, the sacred character of the location had not stopped several wars being fought for control of the star and the land that surrounded it. Christian and Moslem blood had been shed on this very spot.

Eventually the guide moved on, the people in our group took all the pictures they could handle, and we left the cave behind. The tour of the church continued for another few minutes. Then we found ourselves back on the bus.

It wasn't long before the bus pulled out of Nativity Square and rolled down the street several blocks before coming to a stop in front of a generic tourist shop. Apparently the owner paid a commission to the bus driver for every person he delivered and got to enter the shop. Our driver was most solicitous in encouraging everyone to leave the bus once more and take a look around the shop. All the items were hand made locally and really quite good, according to the driver. Barti and I decided to wait on the bus, as neither of us had the slightest interest in buying souvenirs just then. The disappointment of the bus driver was evident but he did not push the issue.

As we sat waiting for our fellow passengers to return, Barti asked me how I was doing.

I felt much better than I had the previous day. The Church of the Nativity was a much better experience than yesterday's fiasco. The cave didn't seem particularly holy. The fact that people had died fighting over ownership of the cave lessened the value of the land for me even more. Yet, I found the church itself to be much more inspiring than Holy Sepulcher. I particularly liked the mosaic from the 4th century. The mosaic had a simple but haunting beauty that spoke of a vital faith and a great deal of energy in those who made it.

I explained to Barti that I was still confused by the direction the pilgrimage had taken, especially when we had finally come to the heart of the experience.

He listened carefully as I spoke and then sat quietly after I finished. He was silent for so long that I didn't think he was going to respond. Then, suddenly Barti picked up the conversation.

"Pilgrimage is a process, not a tour of historical sites. The pilgrimage began months ago, back in Rochester and the process may continue on for a while even after we return home. So, your experiences in Israel, especially in and around Jerusalem, must be understood as only a small element in the whole process. Your experiences here may play an important part in the pilgrimage process or they may not, we will have to wait and see.

"Everything about our spiritual life is related directly to our relationship with God. Our spiritual life can not be separated from every other aspect of our lives. So, your reactions to yesterday's events can be your teachers, if you allow them."

I didn't understand what Barti meant by allowing my reaction to yesterday's events to teach me, so I asked him to explain further. As usual, Barti smiled and agreed.

"What was it about the Church of the Holy Sepulcher that was so offensive to you?"

I went blank. I wasn't exactly sure why I reacted so strongly. So, I reviewed the previous day's experience in my mind. Bit by bit I tried to remember my feelings and what triggered them.

"Well, whenever I'm really caught up in prayer it's a peaceful experience. I associate that good feeling with spiritual experience, being close to God. I imagined that visiting the very place where Christ died and rose from the dead would result in a similar experience. I wanted the barrier of the years to part for me. I wanted to experience Christ directly, as I might have standing at the foot of the cross or seeing the risen Christ face to face."

He listened as I spoke. Then, after a brief silence, he responded.

"Use your imagination. Be as realistic as possible. What emotions did Mary experience as she stood at the foot of the cross?"

"If I was Mary, maybe... grief, fear, anger, ...confusion."

"What about the disciples, what were their feelings?" Barti continued with his questioning.

"The same as Mary probably. Though they would have also felt shame and disappointment."

"Which of your feelings were closer to those felt by Mary and the disciples as they stood at the foot of the cross or as they laid Christ in the tomb, the confused mixture you actually experienced or the peaceful bliss you expected?"

"I guess the feelings that I actually experienced."

Barti continued. "It's easy to have ideas about spirituality that are unrealistic. All of us enjoy particularly pleasant experiences associated with prayer at one time or another. We like pleasant experiences and want to have more. We assume that the pleasant experiences bring us closer to God. After all, isn't God love? Doesn't love make us happy?"

"God is love but love doesn't always result in happiness. Love brings the experience of both happiness and sorrow. Often times love works best in the experience of sorrow, where its individual character shines most clearly. So, if we assume that a spiritual experience must always involve happiness, then we are blind to the fact that God continues to be present in us whether we are happy or sad. God may even be doing His best work in us when our emotions are in turmoil.

"We can't equate our moods or feelings to spiritual realities. At times they may reflect spiritual realities but most of the time they more accurately reflect the condition of our body or any number of subconscious psychological processes occurring in us.

"If you want some sign of God at work in your life, joy is a much better indicator. Happiness depends on the satisfaction of some appetite, even if it is only the appetite for new experience. Joy is different. Joy is the appreciation that arises from seeing things as they are. It is rooted in the appreciation of simply being alive. Joy has no relationship to the satisfaction of our appetites. As a result, you can be joyful in the middle of pain, suffering and death.

"Tabitha is a good example. She never lost a sense of joy, even during the worst sufferings of the war. Her joy kept everyone going during difficult times. Remember her reaction yesterday when you were so upset? She didn't get caught up in your chaotic emotions. She saw through to the truth of what was happening to you. You were being given a grace in the experience and only needed to perceive that. You needed to appreciate that gift."

What Barti told me made a great deal of sense. Perhaps I was getting too upset about a particular experience not working out exactly the way I imagined it would. Rather than thinking that something was wrong with God, or me, I should try to understand exactly what did happen and discover the grace in that experience. I explained this to Barti and he agreed.

Barti asked me, "Do you remember the experience with the panhandler back at JFK airport?"

I remembered the experience. I became upset because a panhandler was trying to play on the sympathies of travelers by implying that he was deaf and needed their financial assistance.

My reaction was particularly strong, much more than the normal sense of justice would have provoked. Barti suggested the classic psychoanalytic explanation that my reaction was the result of some repressed emotion arising from earlier trauma.

"There may be something similar at work here. What characteristics of the experience were particularly offensive to you?"

I thought again for a few moments before I answered. "The inability of those responsible for the church to cooperate with one another was particularly gauling. It left the church a mess. The church was more a museum or a side show than a place of worship. It was almost impossible to pray there, given the crowds and the constant motion of the lines. I think also, I was upset with God because of the killings earlier in the day."

"Very good, let's take a look at those feelings and see what they have to tell us?" Barti responded, when I could no longer think of anything to say.

"Often we react most strongly to those parts of ourselves that make us feel that we are missing the mark. Is there any aspect of your life where your inability to cooperate with others is causing problems?"

I thought about it for awhile. It dawned on me that I tended to be headstrong in some relationships, especially with my parents and siblings. I resented their suggestions about what I might do with my life. It seemed that all they had to do was say anything that hinted of advice or criticism and I was ready to argue. I was putting so much effort into being *Mr. Independent-Adult* that I was pushing them away. I guess my unwillingness to even listen to my parents was similar to the lack of communication and cooperation among those who cared for the shrine. I explained this to Barti.

"Excellent! Do you see what I mean? The terrible condition of that house of worship, due to the lack of cooperation among its trustees reminded you of the sad condition of your own home. You directed the anger that you felt at your own behavior outward and projected it on the others. That insight helps to explain that part of your emotional response.

"As to the crowds and the side show aspect of the shrine, I feel the same way that you do. I find it distracting. However, given the volume of people that flow through the shrine every day, it is unlikely that they can have any other atmosphere than a sideshow. What is that response telling you?"

"Well," I mumbled, trying to organize my thoughts. "I guess the response is telling me that I want something more from being in the "holy of holies". I want an experience of the transcendent."

"Do you ordinarily have such an experience in a sideshow or a museum?" Barti asked.

"No, I guess some quiet place where I can settle into undisturbed prayer or meditation would be a much better place for that type of experience. A side show is for seeing a curiosity and a museum is for viewing some cultural or historic artifact."

"Could it be then that your response was also speaking to you of a spiritual hunger that is not being met? Have you been setting aside enough time for prayer and meditation on this part of the journey?"

He had struck a chord once more. I realized he was right. "No, I've been so caught up in the trip and then in my moods that I forgot that this is a pilgrimage. I haven't been putting the time aside as I should. After we return from the tour, I'll spend at least two hours in spiritual exercises."

Barti smiled at my promise before continuing.

"I have no intention of talking about your anger toward God. It is a normal reaction to the tragedy you witnessed. However, it is something about which you must speak with God. Tell God of your anger and explain why you are angry. If God has disappointed you, let God know how you feel."

The other passengers were beginning to board the bus and the driver was turning over the engine so that we could continue on to Hebron. Barti lowered his voice a bit and tried to finish the conversation before we were moving again.

"Another thing that you need to keep in mind is that the shrine may not be the site for Calvary or the sepulcher in which Jesus was buried. That particular site was chosen because the mother of the Emperor Constantine was a Christian and wanted to go on pilgrimage. Now this was shortly after the Edict of Toleration and Christianity was freed from two hundred years of state run persecution. When the Emperor's mother arrived she found a small Roman community and the ruins of Jerusalem from when it was leveled to the ground by Roman soldiers more than a century earlier.

"Now, the emperor's mother was a bit like Shirley McLane. She was a charming, intelligent, and very powerful woman. She had a talent for knowing things by intuition and a

very active dream life. When she got to Jerusalem she found it nothing like she had read in the Bible. She immediately took it upon herself to find evidence of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection among the ruins of the ancient city. Following her intuition, she identified one spot as the location of the upper room where the disciples shared the Last Supper with Jesus. Another spot was designated as the site of Calvary and yet another the place of burial and resurrection. She even found what she believed to be the actual wooden cross upon which Jesus was crucified. Now, who knows? She may have been divinely guided to the exact sites. Then again, she may have just had an active imagination?"

Hebron was another forty minutes of driving. The town is predominately Palestinian and surrounds an ancient fortified palace that goes back to Herod. The palace is built over a cave that is said to contain the bones of Abraham, as well as Adam and Eve. As such, it is a place sacred to both Moslems and Jews. Representatives of both religions maintain the site and do a fairly good job of it. You will even see Jews and Moslems praying in the same building. It is really quite impressive. Later, on the way back into Jerusalem the driver stopped for a few minutes at a small building with a large stone marker. Traditionally, this stone is believed to marked the grave of Rachel, the wife of Jacob.

Making the Stations

The next day Barti wanted to visit his alma mater, the Pontifical Biblical Institute. It is located on Paul Emil Botta Street in the New City. He called the school the day we arrived in Jerusalem and had been able to arrange a visit with one of his professors at the Institute who was still there. He was excited about seeing his old professor. Though he expressed his excitement in his own quiet way—by talking about his years at the Institute incessantly! I wasn't interested in this particular stroll down memory lane and told Barti to go on alone. I planned to spend the day relaxing from our previous adventures. However, Tabitha had a different plan.

Around 8:00am Tabitha called my room and instructed me to meet her in the coffee shop for breakfast. I wasn't about to protest. I proceeded to haul myself out of bed, shower and get dressed. About fifteen minutes later I joined her for breakfast. I could see that she was dressed for walking.

While an elderly woman, Tabitha was in excellent health and looked at least ten years younger than her actual number of years. One of the secrets to her good health, aside from a gentle spirit, was walking. She had no trouble keeping up with Barti and I on our earlier walking tour of the Old City.

She quickly explained that we were going to spend the day exploring Jerusalem some more. One of the best tours of the Old City for a Christian was to walk the *Via Dolarosa*, the Way of Sorrows. Every pilgrim had to make this Stations of the Cross, visiting the sites of Christ's passion and death. It was a pilgrim's responsibility that the two of us could accomplish together, while Barti was busy with other things. Finally, she asked me to humor her and come along as a Guardian Angel for a foolish old woman. What could I say? Tabitha was one of the few people who could ask anything of me and I would do my best to comply. If she wanted me to accompany her to the Old City, her request was my command. We ate a moderate breakfast and then headed off down Nablus Street for the Old City.

Whether the *Via Dolarosa* is actually the route that Jesus walked on his way to Calvary is unknown. The city itself has been demolished and rebuilt so many times over the years that it is unknown if the same streets even exist. However, 19th and 20th century archaeologists have uncovered and identified a number of sites mentioned in the Gospel account of Christ's Passion.

It did not take us long before we stood near the Chapel of the Flagellation. Tabitha explained that according to tradition this was where Pilate interrogated Jesus. The chapel is near the site of Antonia Fortress. Archaeologists have confirmed the location as being the site of Pilate's headquarters in Jerusalem. The chapel was small and marked with a traditional illustration for the first station in the arch over its main door. The chapel is relatively new, having been built on the site of a Crusader oratory.

There is a formal devotion that follows the *Via Dolarosa* each Friday afternoon. However, there are always small groups making the Stations. We followed one of the small groups to make our Stations of the Cross.

We went into the chapel and spent a few minutes in silent prayer. The beauty of the small chapel impressed me. There was an exquisite series of glass panels representing the scourging of Jesus, Pilate cleansing his hands of innocent blood, and the liberation of Barabas. On the dome above the altar is a large crown of golden thorns perforated by stars.

While my prayers had been brief and relatively formal, with a short reflection on the particular station, Tabitha seemed lost in prayer. In fact, I noticed that many of the people in the chapel were deep in prayer. I was ashamed of my half-hearted attempts to pray and began to pray the station again. This time I meditated on Christ's interrogation and brutal whipping, remembering that I was at or very close to the spot where it actually happened many years earlier. It didn't take long for me to turn to a consideration of how I was putting Christ on trial in my life. Eventually, I completed the reflection. I saw Tabitha sitting next to me patiently. Then I realized that some time had passed and Tabitha was ready to move on to the next station.

We left the chapel and walked down the street a little bit until we reached another small church. Next to the church was an arch that spanned the narrow street. I noticed a sign which indicated that the arch was known as the *Ecce Homo* Arch.

The practice of treating this as the location of the second station began in the 16th century by pilgrims who believed the arch to be the site of the spot where Pilate displayed the beaten Jesus to the crowd who called for his blood. Pilate called out to the crowd, *Ecce Homo*, or "Behold the man"! The arch itself is part of a larger structure built by Hadrian in 135 AD to commemorate taking the city. This taking of the city ended the presence of a Jewish state in Israel until 1949. Again, we entered the little church and spent some time in prayer.

As we continued on with our devotion, visiting each of the stations, we encountered several more chapels, and a number of *bas reliefs* identifying the various stops along the way. Each of the stations was beautiful and the product of the living faith of many different people. All of the sites were well maintained.

With each station it became easier for me to enter into deep prayer. The story of Christ's passion and death was unfolding in my heart, as I walked the streets of Jerusalem. With each Station I felt a greater sense of dread, as in approaching the hill of Calvary I was approaching the place of my own death. Yet, there was also a sense of peace and joy that I could not explain. After spending a few minutes near an Ethiopian monastery that marked the site of the ninth station, Tabitha and I headed toward the Church of the Holy Sepulcher where the tenth through fourteenth stations are located.

It wasn't as crowded as when we made our first visit to the shrine. Though there were still many people moving around in the church. Various tour groups were moving through the building, as their guides explained the history of the building and trivia about various artifacts to be found there. The artwork was as tacky as ever and the clerics still had collection baskets. Everything that offended me so profoundly only a few days earlier was still present. Yet, instead of being offended by it, I simply took it in as part of the background. My thoughts were on the experience of Christ's Passion into which we entered. My thoughts were on the devotion and its ritual prayers, yet there was no thought. I simply entered into the experience of Christ's death on the cross. Surprisingly, in that place of horror and death, there was peace, joy and life. There was only the experience and it wrapped me in Christ. As the intensity of the experience receded it came to me that the crucifixion, for all its outward horror, is an act of incomprehensible love. It was the love of the crucified Christ that I experienced as I stood in the shrine at the foot of Calvary.

I remember moving to a small *Pieta* for the 13th station. I didn't read the printed prayers this time but only stared at the statue of Mary holding her broken and dead Son in her arms. Again, there was no real thought but I sensed the pain that anyone would feel at the loss of a beloved child. Mark Scarlotti came to mind and with his face the pain I felt so bitterly almost a year before. Tears formed in my eyes and ran down my cheeks. I couldn't stop the tears. I felt as if I was Mary holding the dead and quickly cooling body my beloved child. I felt my heart breaking. Yet, I also felt an all-encompassing trust in God. With Mary I offered up the pain that

was breaking my heart. As I made that offering I entered an experience of peace so deep that there was no more world--just God.

Tabitha and I moved on to the Holy Sepulcher for the 14th and last Station. The peace and joy that enveloped me since standing at the foot of Calvary continued as I got in line and slowly moved forward to enter into the sacred tomb of Jesus Christ. When I entered the tomb I was struck by the same shock as had been Peter and John upon entering the tomb. It was empty! Jesus was not in any grave. The Earth could not contain him! He burst from it transformed and alive! Christ is risen! Now I was a witness to this fundamental reality. My experience of Christ that day was not the emotions felt at a wake. I experienced Christ as alive and life giving. I had never felt more alive than during those minutes so intimately close to the place of Jesus' death.

After leaving the tomb Tabitha and I walked silently from the shrine and headed back to the hotel. Neither of us said much of anything during the walk back to the hotel. I, at least, was lost in thought and still basking in the glow of my experience as I made the *Via Dolarosa*.

Emmaus

The end of the pilgrimage was fast approaching. Finally, I was settling into the experience and beginning to feel some spiritual benefit. I didn't want it to end so soon.

The day after Tabitha and I made the Stations of the Cross the three of us visited some of the archaeological sites around the Old City that were open to selected visitors. Barti's contacts at the Pontifical Biblical Institute were able to arrange for the visits. We spent most of the day below ground level going back in time through the strata that marked the various epochs of the city. At many of the sites we were able to touch artifacts from the time of Christ, even as far back as King David. Barti also took us to visit a Hebrew scholar in the city who let us see fragments of the psalms that came from around the time of Christ.

The next day we visited the Museum of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the morning. Here again, Barti's contacts allowed us to go "backstage" and get a most interesting view of the place and the scrolls it housed. The afternoon was spent at the Shrine of the Martyrs, honoring those killed during the Holocaust.

Our last day in Jerusalem was spent on a morning walk through the Old City, followed by an afternoon visit to an old friend of Tabitha, His Beatitude Giuseppe Biltritti, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. She met the Patriarch years earlier at meetings in Rome when he was an auxiliary bishop to the former Patriarch and she was serving as a theological advisor to several Vatican commissions. Her ecumenical work with the Jews in Krakow and Bishop Biltritti's responsibilities in Israel were common bonds that brought them together on several occasions. A mutual respect developed between them. When Tabitha moved to Israel, soon-to-be Patriarch Biltritti did his best to smooth the way for her. It was not uncommon for the Patriarch to ask Professor Doctor Glowaki's advice on theological and practical issues even though she was retired.

We met with the Patriarch at his office in the Jerusalem Patriarchate. He was a friendly man with a wonderful sense of humor. His English was not very good but was sufficient for greeting a young pilgrim. Much of the time was spent with Tabitha and the Patriarch carrying on an animated conversation in Italian.

Tabitha later explained that the Patriarch was born in Italy but lived most of his life in Palestine. He was ordained for the Latin Patriarchate and served in many of the parishes as a

younger man. In fact, his first parish after ordination was in Ramleh. The Patriarch is fluent in Italian, Arabic, Hebrew and Latin. His English and French are so-so. Since Tabitha was fluent in Italian, the two of them used it as their language of choice when talking.

Much of their conversation that afternoon was over the situation of the Palestinians who were living in the refugee camps. The living conditions were poor and the Israeli government was strict, as the camps were a hotbed of Palestinian resistance. The Church was trying to provide humanitarian aid to the camps and to operate schools there. The going was not easy at that point.

Most of the Catholics in Israel were Palestinian by nationality and Arabic speakers. Indeed, many of the Catholic priests in Israel were of Palestinian origin and suspected by the Israeli officials of being sympathetic to the Palestinian resistance. The efforts by the Church to minister to its people were frequently thwarted. Catholic schools were shut down too often. The efforts of the Popes to promote social justice throughout the world inspired the youth. Yet, there were few safe outlets for them to express their idealism. Moderate efforts were rebuffed by Israeli officials and tarred them with the brush of radicalism. The natural inclination was to go with the more radical elements in the Palestinian community but this involved violence and the Church could not tolerate it.

The Patriarch had worked long and hard to build up the confidence of the Israeli officials in order for the Church to maintain an active presence in the refugee camps with schools, clinics and social services. It was precarious. All it took was one terrorist incident and the camps would be off limits for weeks or even months. The situation weighed heavily on the Patriarch. While he had a special responsibility for the holiest sites in Christendom, his major concerns were those of any bishop—the welfare of his people.

The Patriarch enlisted Tabitha to serve on a task force to deal with the Israelis. Much of her work dealt with the refugee camps and other Palestinian issues. She was an ideal representative as both the Israeli government and the Palestinian community respected her. She used the visit with the Patriarch as an opportunity to report on what progress was being made.

Our visit ended over tea and the Patriarch's inquiry as to the success of my pilgrimage. I explained to him, as best I could, my impressions of Israel and its people. I ended by saying that I was sorry that the pilgrimage was almost over. He wished each of us well, gave us a blessing

and excused himself in order to attend a meeting across town that was scheduled to begin in fifteen minutes.

We checked out of the hotel before visiting the Patriarch so once our visit was complete we were ready to head for Ramleh. The town is not very distant from Jerusalem. So, we engaged a city taxi and with a bit of haggling agreed on a reasonable fee for him to take us to the monastery in Ramleh.

The drive was quiet. Each of us was absorbed in thought.

I was in my usual state...confused. I made the pilgrimage in the hope that it would provide me with a better sense of what God wanted me to do with my life. I didn't feel any greater sense of mission or a direction in life than when the idea of pilgrimage first came up.

No doubt, I felt blessed by all the grace that came my way while on pilgrimage. My experience the other day in making the Stations of the Cross was a high point in my life and still left me with a sense of Christ's presence and love. The memory of such spiritual intimacy was cherished, almost clung to for fear that it would fade. Yet, that didn't undo my confusion. It added to the confusion.

I wanted to give my life to Christ, to make something of it. What way was I to go? What did God want of me? The answer eluded me. It seemed like I was walking down a dark road and had no idea where I was going or what dangers lay in my path. I wanted some guidance, some assurance that I was headed in the right direction and there was nothing. In a little over 24 hours we would depart Israel and I would be no further ahead than when I began.

My musings were interrupted when we made the sharp turn onto the monastery property and pulled up to the guest house entrance. We paid the cab driver and headed into the guesthouse. Arrangements already were made for our stay that evening and keys were waiting for us in marked envelopes. They had been placed on a shelf in the foyer, where Barti knew where to look. I went to my room, showered and changed my clothes. Mass was scheduled for about an hour and a half later. We would join the monks in the monastery chapel for Mass and vespers. In the meantime, I decided to sit in the garden near the guesthouse and try to sort through my chaotic feelings.

I hadn't been in the garden for more than fifteen minutes when Tabitha strolled into the garden and made her way over to me. She asked if she could join me on the bench where I sat. I invited her to join me. We sat in silence for about five minutes before she spoke.

“You look upset for so blessed a pilgrim. My dear young man, may I inquire as to the source of your concern?”

I tried to explain about the confusion I was feeling and the frustration that for all the blessings I enjoyed on the pilgrimage I was no closer to my goal than the day I first considered the possibility of pilgrimage. She listened quietly and with great attention as I spoke. Again, she was silent for several minutes after I finished speaking. I thought her mind had wandered to something else, when she began to speak.

“Snow is a rare occurrence in Israel. It is one of the few things that I truly miss from Poland. It is magical how the tiny crystalline flakes form in the clouds and gently float to the earth. Each is different. Each is beautiful. As a child I would run and catch the flakes, so that I could admire the different shapes and patterns. No sooner had I grasped the flakes in my hand, than they began to melt and disappear. It would frustrate me so much. Laughing at my frustration, my older brother taught me not to catch the flakes in my hand but to use gloves or some other object that insulated the flake from my body heat. It worked.

“God is a mystery. We also are mysteries for we are the image and likeness of a Mystery. You can not grasp a mystery to examine it or to say it is this or that. When we attempt to grasp it, the mystery disappears and our fingers are empty. Perhaps it is the heat of our longing that makes the mystery melt away? Perhaps it is that we are attached to certain ideas of what the mystery should look like and when the mystery is truly a mystery we look at it and fail to see it? Who knows?

It has been my experience that God leads us according to His will for us. He doesn't hand out detailed road maps with all the turns and twists clearly marked, along with rest stops and the best hotels identified. God opens doors for us and calls us to enter. If we listen carefully enough we will hear the call. However, the call may not be what we expect or given to us in the manner we anticipate. If we grasp our expectations or desires too strongly however, we will miss the call and fail to follow Christ through the door.

“Often I am left with only my intuition and a bit of reasoning to mark the path. I follow the path and eventually it becomes apparent that this is where God was leading me. A strong attachment to one path or another would have blinded me to the call. Expectations that the call will take a particular form or expression would have caused me to look in vain for something that would never come. I would have missed the true call.

“Christ comes as a “Thief in the night”. If we have expectations that he will come through a particular door or at a particular hour, he will not show up. Christ comes to us when we least expect it. We can not will the Lord to respond to our demands and our timetable. We can only wait upon the Lord willingly, open to His grace.

“Often we encounter Christ in the most mundane circumstances. Remember the story of the disciples who spoke with Christ on the road to Emmaus and did not recognize him. It was not until the stranger blessed and broke the bread at supper that the disciples realized that the stranger was Christ. Their failure to recognize Christ did not change the fact that Christ taught and guided them along the road to Emmaus.

“Their ultimate recognition of the stranger as Christ was a particular blessing for them, though it also brought about the loss of Christ’s visible presence in their midst. It is not required that we perceive Christ instructing us. It is only required that we be responsive to His instruction, as were the disciples. If we are given the grace of recognizing the Lord in His instruction, good for us! If we fail to recognize Christ but are responsive to His instruction, we have done what is required of us.

“Be patient. This pilgrimage has planted the seeds of transformation in you. Christ has answered your prayers and continues to do so. You already have the answers you seek but time may be required before you are able to perceive the answers. Be patient. Be attentive. Do not grasp at the answers. If you do, your expectations and desires may be what you find in your hand rather than the Lord’s will for you.”

I thanked Tabitha for her advice and spent the next half-hour in silence considering what she explained to me. Tabitha sat in silence with me for a good part of the time. I don’t remember when she got up and continued on her walk through the garden. However, when I heard the bell calling everyone to vespers and Mass, Tabitha was gone.

I was distracted during vespers and wasn’t doing much better during the Mass readings. The homily was in French, as was the entire Mass, so I got very little from it other than another opportunity to chew over what Tabitha shared with me. The singing however, was most beautiful—rich and deep with the voices of the monks joined in praise.

Barti seemed to be lost in thought. It was almost as if the singing were carrying him away to another time. He had been unusually quiet the better part of the last week of the pilgrimage. I was sure that he struggled with the wisdom of the earlier decision to leave the

monastery. Being at Latroun and Jerusalem, as well as spending time with Tabitha, were bringing back many memories. I had no further role in whatever drama was playing itself out inside Barti. So, I simply stayed out of the way and tried to give him enough space to work through whatever questions weighed on him.

As we moved into the Eucharistic Prayer, I turned my attention to the altar and the priest who was presiding at the celebration. He was an older man, at least seventy years of age. He was well built for a man his age, though his skin was wrinkled by many years of toil in the sun and wind. His eyes though were young and alive. He had the same spiritual presence about him, as did Tabitha.

He bent forward slightly and spoke the words of consecration slowly, as if he were savoring each word. The chapel was silent as he genuflected before the Sacred Host. Then he took the large off-white Host in his hand and raised it for the assembly to contemplate in mute adoration.

I am unable to explain exactly what happened next. Words fail me. I can hint at what happened. Yet, the experience itself, which is still crystal clear in my memory, can't be captured in words.

As I looked at the Sacred Host the boundaries that separated me from it and from everything else seemed to melt away. The Host was bright with light, yet the light didn't hurt my eyes. The light filled my vision. It was one, yet in the light it was three. I didn't try to understand what was happening or even observe that anything special was happening. I simply knelt in mute adoration experiencing such intense joy and peace that there is nothing in my life either before or after to which I can compare it. There were no words, only a knowing. I knew that God had a purpose for me. I knew that I could trust in God and rely on God even in the darkest and most frightening times. I knew this because I experienced the flaming, burning fire of God's passionate love for me—for everyone of us. That love knit together every fiber of my being and held me in existence. To live...simply to be...was to be held in God's loving embrace.

It seemed as if I was caught up in the light for hours...eternities of wordless joy...but it was only moments. The priest held up the Sacred Host and Precious Blood, inviting the congregation to proclaim the Great Amen at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. I realized then that the boundaries were once again in place between the rest of creation and me. The light that

bathed my mind, heart, soul, and body was no longer visible to my mortal eyes. The only remnant of the experience was the peace and joy in which I continued to rest as an infant in its mother's arms.

After Mass I stayed in the chapel for almost another hour. I wanted to spend some time in prayer and thanksgiving. I wanted to continue to bask in the peace and joy that still filled me, even if it was now only a memory...a remaining ember of a once all-consuming blaze.

The funny thing was that I had no more answers now than I had before Mass. I was still in the dark about God's plans for me. The only difference was that now I didn't care. If I had been St. Peter called from the boat to walk on the water in those moments, I would have jumped from the boat and tap danced across the waves with utter confidence. Before long the intensity of the experience would be crowded by the business of living and my confidence would be put to the test. However, every time I have been called to get out of the boat and start walking the memory of that Mass at Ramleh has given me the courage to get out of the boat and walk. Every time I have been required to place my trust utterly in God, His support and strength have been there holding me up.

The bell for supper sounded. I had eaten very little that day and was ready for a hearty meal, even if it was only vegetables and cheese. So, I left the chapel and headed toward the refectory. Barti and Tabitha were waiting for me at one of the tables along with Br. Andrew and the Abbot. I joined them and a few moments later, as the last of the monks found their place at table, grace before the evening meal was offered.

As was the practice in monastic enclosures, the meal was eaten in silence except for a young monk who read from a book for the edification of the diners. The book was an English language edition of a history of Ramleh published by the University of Bethlehem, a Catholic university serving the local community. Its author was a regular visitor to the Abbey and had given the book to the Abbot. Ramleh is a very old town and has a fascinating history. Though I only half listened to the reading. My mind still raced. I wanted to take everything in, cherishing every moment and experience.

I noticed a beautiful mosaic on the wall of the refectory. It seemed to be of recent design. Its colors were rich, almost shimmering. It was an image of Christ breaking a loaf of bread with two men, one on either side. I loved the expressions on the two men. It was as if they were

overcome with stupefaction, shock, disbelief and complete joy—all at the same time. The expression on their faces pretty much reflected my own feelings that afternoon.

It was about that time when the words of the lector caught my attention. “*Many scholars are in agreement with an ancient tradition that identifies Ramleh with the town of Emmaus, as described in Luke 24:13-35...*” So, I was among the diners at Emmaus! I was surprised and quite pleased that I was dining with Christ and his disciples, even if time separated us spirit did not

Before long my attention returned to the mosaic. Words were written below the image of Christ and his two companions. “*Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him...*” (Luke 24:29-30)

An Epilogue: Return

When we first spoke of pilgrimage, Barti explained to me that it was a process. One prepared for the sacred journey. One undertook the journey separating oneself from the routine of life. The pilgrim experienced a type of death on the journey—death to his old way of perceiving and living in the world. Finally, the pilgrim undergoes a resurrection to new life and then returns home—a new person!

The pilgrimage was over. All that remained was the return home.

The three of us left the Abbey after Morning Prayer the next day. Br. Andrew dropped us off at the taxi office in Ramleh where we caught a limousine to Telaviv. The drive only took a little over an hour and a half. By lunchtime we were moving our luggage into Tabitha's apartment in Jaffa. We stayed with Tabitha that night, sleeping on the floor in her living room. It was cheaper than staying in a hotel and allowed us a longer visit.

We simply enjoyed the evening together. There was no serious talk that evening. Tabitha shared a few memories from her childhood and the years of her marriage. She spoke of the various curial officials with whom she interacted while serving as an advisor or member of one papal commission or another. Most importantly, she gave me her favorite recipe for homemade pirogie (a Polish pasta delicacy).

Barti was much less distracted than he had been in recent days. He was cracking jokes and telling one story after another about life in the monastery and his adjustment to life as a high school teacher. He fixed a delicious Caesar Salad and garlic breads for our supper. He even purchased a quite palatable dinner wine to go with the meal.

As we sat on the patio after supper, full from the salad, bread and wine we slipped into a time of silence. I remember feeling as if I was finally home. I was content. It was enough for me that my stomach was full and I was with two dear friends. I'm not sure if my contentment was a byproduct of the wine or not but I was happy.

The next morning I took a taxi to Lod Airport after making my farewells. Barti was staying on in Telaviv for another day and then taking a flight to Paris. He was going to visit the friend he had only been able to call on the phone on the way over. He also wanted to play tourist in the City of Lights, as well as visit Lourdes and Chartes as a sort of a "side pilgrimage" before returning home. I was going ahead to England. I had arranged to visit with a old girlfriend from

college who was living with some relatives in Ipswich. Before I made the trip north, I would spend a few days in London to look around. I planned to be in Ipswich for three days and then return to London for a day before catching a flight back home. The trip to England turned out to be an adventure in its own right but that is another story. Suffice it to say that a week later I was back home and handing out Holy Land souvenirs to relatives and co-workers.

Barti continued on in his role as my mentor and spiritual director in one form or another for several years.

When I hugged Tabitha goodbye the morning I left for the airport I expected that I would not see or hear from her again. The thought saddened me, as I grew to value greatly her friendship and advice during our brief interlude together. However, I did visit with her again, not once but several times before she died. Even though she was well on in years when we met, Tabitha lived for another ten years. During that time we carried on a rich correspondence, the memory of which I cherish even today.

As I mentioned earlier, by the time I left Israel I was no more certain about where God was leading me than I had been months earlier when I first met Barti. However, rather than being unsettled by the mystery of what lay ahead, now I was comforted by it. I looked forward to the mystery unfolding at its own pace. I made no effort to anticipate what direction the journey would take. Little did I know it at the time but I had entered a roller coaster ride that would soon turn my world upside down. Exactly one year later I would again find myself on an airplane headed off on an adventure that I couldn't have imagined before setting out on my pilgrimage. However, that also is another story.