

OCTOBER 30, 2005: THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

PASTOR'S COLUMN

**“PILGRIMAGE TO ISRAEL/PALESTINE –
THE HOLY LAND”**

This Wednesday I leave for a two-week pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine, the land we Christians call Holy, because it is the land on which Jesus walked, lived, died, and rose.

Thirty-six pilgrims will be accompanying me. In Israel, Fr. Garret Edmonds OFM, a Franciscan priest assigned to St. Savior Friary in Jerusalem, will be our official guide.

Please pray for us as we discover the Fifth Gospel—the land in which Jesus lived. It is this Gospel that helps us to better understand the other four written Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

This will be my sixth trip to Israel/Palestine. I find there, for me, spiritual renewal, refreshment, and motivation for my ministry. To spend time in the land of Jesus helps to bring me just that much closer to my Lord and Savior in thought and prayer in my daily life. For me, this pilgrimage is always a reconnection to the source.

Jerusalem, where we will spend about six days, is very special. It truly is the center of the universe. In that historic city, despite the news we hear of violence and terrorism, there are many, many people of different religions, races, ethnic backgrounds, and political perspectives who are working tirelessly to bring about a new way of being, that will be a model for the rest of the world to follow – unity in the midst of diversity.

In Jerusalem, a special place for Jews, Christians, and Moslems alike, there is a spirituality that continues to evolve which will strengthen the spiritual evolution globally.

This spirituality is based on a yearning to create unity in the midst of diversity, a respect for the individual in his/her search for God and for meaning, a desire to create peace through justice, an intent on living with a global rather than tribal awareness, a love for the Earth as humanity's home, a commitment to an ecology that preserves Earth's precious resources, an acceptance that all religious traditions are a means to union with God and humanity, and an acknowledgement that in these traditions are found universal values which are expressed differently through a diversity of words, symbols, myths, and rituals.

To be in this land, one is reminded that we are all children of Abraham—Jew, Christian, and Moslem.

We have so much in common in our history, and in our scriptures. And, if we so choose, we can build on our commonalities for a more peaceful future.

For many of the pilgrims, this will be their first visit to the Holy Land, and it will be an opportunity to grow in deeper relationship with Jesus and their belief in Him as the Son of God. What special days these will be!

Be assured that I will keep all the people of St. Thomas More in my prayers and Masses at all the holy sites throughout these two weeks. I take you with me in thought and prayer.

A special prayer will be prayed at the tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. May all of us continue to die with the Lord and rise with Him to new life, new hope, and new beginnings, not only for ourselves, but also for all the people of our global village!

Fr. Mike