

Pastor's Column

Rev. Michael Ratajczak
michaelr@stmoside.org
760-758-4100 x100

Jerusalem, the Mother Church

This reflection was penned almost ten years ago while I was on sabbatical for three months in Jerusalem. These thoughts came to mind again as I am preparing to lead the pilgrimage to the Holy Land from November 1-15, 2011.

This week I would ask you to go to the Scriptures and from the New Testament read the first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. (If you need to search for it, it comes right after the Gospel of John).

In these two chapters, we are given the beginnings of the Christian Church. Where does the Church begin? Yes, in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the Mother Church and the Mother of all Churches! So often, when we think of the Mother Church, whatever our Christian denomination, we think of where "headquarters" is presently located. But we need to keep going further back, tracing our roots, historically, if we are to move forward, historically, in ecumenical dialogue.

As we do so, we come to the realization that Christians, despite all of our different beliefs, customs, rituals, practices, and dress, can trace our roots to the one Church, the Mother Church of Jerusalem. What a great "attitudinal platform" for all of us as Christians to have! From that common foundation, we enter into dialogue with one another, not as competitors after a prize, but as brothers and sisters of one Church, sharing Jesus Christ, "The Way, the Truth and the Life," as we have come to know Him as individuals and as churches.

In that dialogue, with a sense of belonging to one another, we search for an ever greater understanding of that Truth that is the Christ.

Here in the Holy Land, in Israel and Palestine, we find not only the historical sites that commemorate the various moments of

Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, in His earthly pilgrimage, but we find a living and thriving community of Christians who make up the Church of Jerusalem, the Mother Church.

The Christian population of Israel and Palestine is just 2%! That 2% is then divided up into Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. And then the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestants are further divided into different rites and denominations. And then, of course, there are many "independent" Christian congregations, not claiming any connection to any larger Christian communion!

The Roman Catholic population (called Latin Rite Catholics here in the Holy Land) is about 15% of the 2% Christian population. That numbers about 20,000 people.

Living here in the midst of those realities, one views life differently! How one views the Latin Rite Church and how one views other Christian Churches changes dramatically. Being a minority in a minority puts a new "twist" on things! There are many things you simply do not take for granted.

Most people around you think and act differently. You begin asking yourself, "What do I believe? Why do I believe this? How can I explain this to those around me?"

You quickly come to a better knowledge of who you are, what you believe and why you believe it. And you then begin to share with other Christians, who now seem much more like kin to you, simply because of the small number of Christians, in greater trust and confidence!

The "Jerusalem Experience," the return home to "Mother" and to one's Christian roots can be quite a profound experience!

Fa. Mike