

**The Syndesmos Holy Land Pilgrimage
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To introduce the Syndesmos pilgrimage to the Holy Land the following report by Elizabeth Behr-Sigel is quoted as a preface to the meditations by Father Gillet.

In the early hours of Sunday, August 22, after having attended the liturgy the pilgrims left Beirut to go to Damascus, where we were received by the Patriarch of Antioch. Then to Jerusalem where we arrived at night after a picturesque but tiring journey. Oh ancient joustling cars, and the: interminable and incomprehensible waiting at border crossings, under a sky of incandescent steel! We were consoled only by the joy of travelling together towards the Holy City, by the purity of the desert landscape, and suddenly at the bottom of a valley hung with a veil of green - the sight of a shepherd followed by his flock of grey and black sheep, as if springing right from the gospels. It was good, perhaps, that we were not spared from the heat, the thirst, the weariness, in order to be united heart and soul with the words of the Psalmist:

*As a hart longs
for flowing streams
so longs my soul
for thee, O God.*

*My soul thirsts for God
for the living God
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?*

.....

*These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession
to the house of God,
With glad shouts and songs of
thanksgiving.*

(Psalm 42)

A stay of four days at Jerusalem permitted the pilgrims to visit the principal holy sites, and to sing and pray there together. We were received at the Orthodox Patriarchate, and had contacts with Russian monasticism at the monasteries of Gethsemane and the

Mount of Olives, where the carillon welcome with all the bells ringing was especially heart-warming. What was the profound significance of this pilgrimage? Pilgrims young and not-so-young, What were we seeking together in the Holy Land? Some sights which would move our hearts and speak to us of our faith? Certainly we cherish the memory of several admirable views, such as that of the Valley of Cedran, from the Mount of Olives towards the Holy City. Its ramparts of rock, tinted with rose and ochre with the rising sun; purple and blue when the setting sun sets the horizon ablaze above the golden dome of the mosque “Dome of the Rock”; its embattled walls surmounted by innumerable towers, campaniles and minarets! The muezzin's call to Muslim prayer and Christian bells seem to respond to one another in the sky. Here, truthfully, the vision of the earthly Jerusalem seems enlarged to the dimensions of the heavenly Jerusalem, that which we await but which, according to our spiritual guide “exists already within us, if we wish.”

Secret Beauty

The exterior appearance of the holy sites, covered with so much stucco and marble, object of so much confessional rivalry, of so much discussion among various schools of archaeology, are sometimes deceiving, at least at a superficial glance. To know Jerusalem in its secret beauty, in its moving reality, it is not enough to visit the holy sites. One must know how to be silent, in order to hear within himself the reverberation of verses from the Psalms and pericopes from the gospels and Acts which here take on their full meaning. It is necessary to open the Word of God, to allow it to penetrate deep into the spirit with faith and humble receptivity, as the writer Martin Buber has said: ‘only through Zion can one reach Zion.’ Such was the concern of Father Lev Gillet, to help us to see beyond appearances. His homilies and even his smallest explanations prepared our hearts to welcome with simplicity and with faith (which did not ignore, but passed beyond the point of view of archaeological science) the graces offered in that land, sanctified by the birth, the life, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension of our Lord, as well as by the prayers of innumerable faithful Christians, Jews, and Muslims. We remembered all this as we stood together on the esplanade of the Temple, the holy place of all of the ‘religions of the Book.’ Contemplating the landscape as Jesus saw it, admiring the marvellous architecture of Qoubet es Sakhra, the Mosque “Dome of the Rock” which commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham and the Mosque el Aqsa, we prayed for the peace of the Holy City. Day by day we sorted out the meaning of our being there together, not as curious tourists, enchanted with the beauty and superficial picturesqueness, but as pilgrims in quest for a new encounter with Him whose presence changes everything, and who alone is able to make men new.

The culminating point of the stay in Jerusalem was, without doubt, the long night which we passed in song and prayer at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the occasion of the midnight liturgy and procession for the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. Sung by Greek, Slavic and Arabic choirs, concelebrated by our leaders and local clergy, that liturgy will remain with us always as a profound memory. And in that antique church, so humble in comparison with great cathedrals, we felt ourselves at home and

united with the universal Church, the church of the first centuries as well as of today, spread over all the earth, that unknown company of faithful, saints and sinners, whom God has called to the heavenly feast of Love.

The Procession

Then at the hour when dawn was already lighting the valleys of Judea, we joined in the great popular procession which through the narrow streets of the old city plunged us again into the tepid and odorous darkness of night, into the shimmering of hundreds of candles moving toward the Holy Sepulchre ... O sweetness, O deliverance, to be permitted to be carried along by that throng; Oriental crowd, Arab, Armenian, simple persons, pious, joyous! When then, having followed the Via Dolorosa, we went out of the city by the Saint Stephen's gate, the crescent moon shining in the sky in the midst of the paling stars, and around our heads the sound of bells - the clear carillons of the Russian monasteries responding to the great bell of the Holy Sepulchre - the sound passed as an immense flight of invisible birds. It was in such a moment we had this last thought in leaving Jerusalem:

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cleave to the
roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you...*

(Psalm 137)

* * *

Father Gillet prepared these pilgrimage meditations for the members of Syndesmos who went to Jerusalem. They are so beautifully done that the reader who cannot go to Jerusalem, can take a pilgrimage in his own mind, through his personal prayers and meditations, as he reads these suggestions prepared to help any Christian seek inspiration from these Holy Places.

The Approach to Jerusalem

Preface

The experience of divine grace which may be yours in Jerusalem is by no means indispensable to mankind; if this were the case then your pilgrimage would be a monstrous injustice. Rather, this particular grace is one among others to be received

through the Church. Some of the others will not be yours, but will be received by other Christians, for there is a great diversity in the dispensation of grace. Another thing: what you are about to receive in Jerusalem is not merely a personal privilege for you, because you will be there representing your Church. This pilgrimage is thus to be a ministry which you will perform in and for the Church. Just as Islam provides for 'substitutes' to make the pilgrimage to Mecca on behalf of those who are unable to go themselves so also you will be 'substitutes' for the host of believers, of righteous and of sinners on whose behalf and for whose sake you will pray.

You will not be pleased with all that you see in and around Jerusalem. You will have the generosity of heart not to let your thoughts linger upon the all too obvious defects which are a part of the human element of Jerusalem. Each time that you are tempted to murmur, just recall that all these sites, that every stone of this earthly Jerusalem have another dimension that belongs to the heavenly Jerusalem which is not bound to any designated spot, and which the Scriptures liken to a '*jasper stone, clear as crystal.*' (Revelation 21:11) This heavenly Jerusalem, if you will, is already within you. And your pilgrimage will only bear fruit if the eternal Jerusalem in your heart can encompass and enfold every aspect of this earthly city.

You will perhaps be saddened or disappointed not to find in Jerusalem the presence of the Lord Jesus which the Scriptures make so vivid. The Jesus of the parables and of the Sermon on the Mount can likely best be found on a hillside in Galilee or on the Sea of Tiberias. But Jerusalem, if you are attentive to her message, can speak to you of the power of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ. She will not communicate so much of the Christ of Nazareth, of Cana, or of Capernaum, as she will of the Christ of Easter and Pentecost. I dare say that Jerusalem has become above all the city of Pentecost, the city of the strong wind of the Spirit, the city where you will reread with awe and excitement the burning passages of the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

Saint Paul said, as he went up to the Holy City, '*I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem.*' (Acts 20:22) We too are going there 'bound in the Spirit', as the servants and obedient instruments of this Other who is to come and who will be stronger than we.

The Approach to Jerusalem

You can reach Jerusalem by plane or by automobile. If you go by air, you come into the Jordanian airport of Kalandia, and from there you travel in a bus, which takes you in about twenty minutes through the new suburbs of Jerusalem and lets you off at the Damascus gate on the threshold of the fortifying wall and the Old City.

An automobile journey is more picturesque, calls forth more historical memories, and unveils more thought-provoking landscapes. You are likely to be coming from Amman. You cross over the Jordan and follow the Jericho road to Jerusalem, with the Dead Sea at your left. The mountains outlined against the horizon will remind you of the

parable of the Good Samaritan: ‘*A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho...*’ (Luke 10:30) The modern city of Jericho, through which you passed before coming to the mountains, is below sea level; it is built on the site of the Jericho known by the Crusaders and is a short distance from the ruins of the biblical Jericho. The latter revives thoughts about Joshua as well as the Gospel stories which took place there: the healing of the blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46) and the calling of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5). But soon you will reach the top of the mountain and will then begin the rapid descent towards Jerusalem. Along your way will be Bethany, which call to mind the names of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary: you will be going the way Jesus often went when, after a night’s rest with his friends in Bethany, he returned to Jerusalem. When you are moving along the flank of the Mount of Olives, you will glimpse the trees and the sacred buildings of Gethsamane, while, before you, on the other side of the valley of Cedron, another mountainside discloses the whole panorama of Jerusalem.

The long rampart which seems to surround the city is the old Temple wall. Only one door is to be seen in this wall, and it is walled up: the Golden Gate. Beyond the wall, domes, minarets, and bell towers are etched against the sky. This city calls people to prayer as no other does. The Muslim muezzin calls from high in the minaret, and the Christian bells ring out in response. This first look at Jerusalem is of course a quick and superficial one, since your bus continues on towards your place of residence outside the city, after passing by this section of the old wall which first caught your attention.

The Jewish pilgrims who used to go up to Jerusalem for the Passover would repeat fourteen psalms, called the ‘song of degrees,’ (Psalms 120-134) on their way. You yourself could find no more fitting spiritual preparation for your entry into Holy Zion. May I suggest that you say these very psalms between Jericho and Jerusalem? Four verses at least would seem particularly appropriate:

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help. (Ps. 121:1)*

*I was glad when they said to me,
let us go into the house of the Lord. (Ps. 122:1)*

*Our feet shall stand within thy gates,
O Jerusalem. (Ps. 122:2)*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
they shall prosper that love thee. (Ps. 122:6)*

Jerusalem in Times Past

It might be helpful to recall a few historical dates and events concerning Jerusalem.

The first written record we have mentions *Urusalim*. This was found on tablets discovered at Tel el-Amarna in Egypt which date from around 1,300 years before Christ. But archaeological research has uncovered the remains of a fortified city dating back to about 1800 B.C., whose name has been interpreted as 'The City of Peace' but which is today given the meaning of 'The City of Salem,' Salem being a Semitic deity. Occupied in the time of judges by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the city was conquered by David around 1000 B.C. Solomon, David's son, erected the Temple. Jerusalem was attacked and pillaged several times, and was destroyed in 588 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The exile of the Jewish people, the 'Babylonian captivity,' lasted until 537 B.C., when Cyrus, the king of Persia, took over. The temple and the city were then rebuilt. Alexander the Great brought Jerusalem into the orbit of the hellenic civilisation; then his successors, the Seleucids of Antioch and the Ptolemies of Alexandria - the North and the South - had a dispute over the possession of the city. In 168 B.C., the profaning of the Temple by the Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes gave rise to the Maccabean uprising. The latter then established their authority over all of Palestine, as kings and priests.

In 63 B.C., the Romans, under the leadership of Pompey, occupied Jerusalem, and in 40 B.C. Rome created a kingdom of Judea, over which Herod the Great reigned, and during which time the Temple was built anew. Herod was king of Judea when Jesus was born, about 4 B.C. (the probable Christian era). It was also under Herod that the massacre of the Innocents took place in Bethlehem. After the death of the first Herod, who was both a cruel tyrant and a great ruler, his son Archelaus reigned for a very short time, until Rome abolished the kingdom and put Judea directly under an imperial procurator. This was the title of Pontius Pilate, who was in power (27-36 A.D.) when Jesus was put to death. Herod Antipas, to whom Herod sent Jesus, was a son of Herod the Great. He had no authority over Jerusalem, but rather was Governor of Galilee in the capacity of vassal 'tetrarch' under the Emperor. It was he who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. The kingdom of Judaea was re-established by the Romans from 41 until 44 A.D., when Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, ruled over Jerusalem. His son, Herod Agrippa II reigned in Chalcis and in Galilee, but had no political power over Judea. Both these kings are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as having persecuted the early Christians (Acts 12).

In 66, the Jews rose up against Rome, but the revolt was put down in 70. The city and the Temple were once again destroyed. The second revolt, led by Bar Kochba in 132, was also crushed. Then the Roman city of Aelia Capitolina was erected on the location of the holy city. Under the emperor Constantine, in the Fourth Century, Jerusalem became a Christian city; and after that it was embellished by the Byzantine emperors. Then in 614, the Persians devastated Jerusalem, and finally in 638, the Caliph Omar took over the city.

Jerusalem is considered by Islam to be a sacred city. In Arabic, it is called El Kuds, 'the saint.' Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam, originally designated Jerusalem as the place towards which the faithful should turn to make their prayers. It was at a later date that mosques were built to face Mecca. Both the Turks and the Egyptians had turns

at occupying Jerusalem, before the Crusaders took the city in 1099. Crusaders massacred all the Muslims, although they had promised to let them live. This occupation lasted until 1187; when Saladin defeated the Crusaders. New Latin occupations lasted for short periods, from 1229 until 1239, and from 1243 until 1248. From that time on until the first world war, Jerusalem belonged to the Muslims, either those from Egypt or those from Turkey. The Christians had quite a measure of freedom, for Islam recognises Judaism and Christianity as 'religions of the book.'

The 1914-1918 war put an end to the Ottoman rule in Palestine. Sharp conflicts arose between the Arab inhabitants of the country and the Jewish Zionist emigrants. In May 1948, Great Britain gave up her mandate and evacuated her troops from Palestine; and then war broke out between the Arabs and the Jews. An armistice was signed on Rhodes in April 1949. The armistice line drawn by the international authorities at that time still marks the frontier between Arab Palestine and Israelian Palestine, but the peace has not been concluded. Jerusalem itself is divided into two parts, The Old City, the only one of which I shall speak here, has now been incorporated into the kingdom of Jordan, whose ruler is King Hussein, and whose capital is Amman. It is difficult to estimate the number of inhabitants in the Arab side of Jerusalem, especially with the influx of refugees from the 'other side,' but we might assume that there is now a population of approximately 80,000.

Jerusalem's present state is thus that of a torn city. During our stay there, we shall be moved to pray for some solution which could, in justice and charity, put an end to a heartbreaking situation. The words of the Gospel come back to us with a haunting reminder:

And when he (Jesus) had come near he beheld the City, and wept over it, saying "If thou hadst known, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

(Luke 19:41, 42)

The Shape of Jerusalem

Before going into detail concerning the streets and buildings in Jerusalem, I should like to help you get your bearings in relation to the general shape of the city.

The walled city might be considered as having two poles: to the North, there is the Damascus Gate, and to the South) the Zion Gate. The original Canaanite city was built to the Southeast, between the valley of Cedron and a valley called Tyropoeon. It later spread out towards the Southwest, in the direction of the Zion Rill and towards the Northeast, in the direction of Mount Moriah. The present wall encloses these different places.

In Jesus' time, the city formed a sort of polygon. To the North was a new sector, Bezetha, below which lay the lower city, or Akra, to the East, in the neighbourhood of the Temple built on Mount Moriah. The valley of Tyropoeon cut the lower city longitudinally and extended southward to join the valley of Cedron. Between the lower city and the upper city, Herod the Great had built a palace, a race course, and various other edifices. More towards the South, the upper city encompassed the hill of Zion and, beyond the wall, its view stretched out upon the Hinnom valley which also joined the Cedron Valley. Jerusalem was thus protected on both sides by deep valleys which converged to the South of the city. Only the North side of Jerusalem was accessible over flat land.

Three walls are mentioned in the history of Jerusalem. The first encircled Zion and the higher regions of the South, and came up to about the lower level of the temple, making a distinct separation between this upper city and what was later to become the lower city. By means of arches, the first wall went over the valley of Tyropoeon. This first wall probably dates back to the time of Solomon, and was restored after the Babylonian captivity. A second wall was built soon after the end of the reign of Herod the Great. It is difficult to determine exactly where it lay, but this second wall extended the first and stopped to the North with the lower city, roughly at the level of the fortress Antonia which stood out above the Temple. A third wall was put up by King Herod Agrippa the First, around the year 41. It enlarged Jerusalem to the North, enclosed Bezetha, and may have covered the ground where we now see the Arab wall at the Damascus Gate. Herod Agrippa's wall would seem to have been destroyed during the year 70. During the revolt of 132 another wall was built still farther to the North. The opinions of archaeologists are divided concerning this wall. Some consider it a fourth wall, an emergency fortification which was constructed with materials taken from Herod's third wall. Others take the existence of rocks dating back to Herod's time to be an indication that there was no fourth wall, and that the wall which was there in 132 was the original third wall. This question is rather important, as we shall see later on, since it has something to do with locating the sites of Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

The Old City of Jerusalem is at present enclosed within these walls. Four gates give access to Jordanian territory on the outside: to the North, the Damascus and the Herod Gates; to the East, the Saint Stephen's Gate; and to the South, the Maghrabi Gate (or Dung Gate). Three other Gates, the New Gate and the Jaffa Gate to the East, and the Zion Gate to the South, are closed, because they face the no man's land which separates the Jordanian zone from the Israelian zone.

Inside these walls, the city is more or less divided into four 'quarters' or sectors. To the North-west lies the Christian Graeco-Latin sector, where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is to be found. To the Southwest, there is an Armenian sector, and the Northeast a mixed Muslim and Christian sector. To the Southeast, there is a Muslim area which includes the Hram esh Sharif (the esplanade of the Temple and the Dome of the Rock). These four sectors are quite neatly set off from each other by two axes which cut across each other perpendicularly. The Longitudinal axis is the street which goes from the

Damascus gate at the North to the Zion Gate at the South side. The transverse axis is the street which goes from the Damascus Gate at the North to the Zion Gate at the South side. The transverse axis is the street which goes from the Jaffa Gate at the West to Haram esh Sharif at the East side.

We may now have somewhat of a general idea of the topographical layout and of the ethnic and religious groupings which we are going to discover. Let us now pass through one of these gates, and open our hearts and minds to the joy of walking on these yellow and rose-colored paving stones, and between the walls which are also yellow and pink. For we are setting foot in the Holy City.

*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
and into His courts with praise.*

(Psalm 100:4)

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The first place most pilgrims want to go in Jerusalem is this church, which tradition has linked with the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord. Many, or at any rate some, wonder how valid that tradition is.

We find no traces of veneration for the 'Holy Places' in Christian literature belonging to the first three centuries. This silence does not necessarily mean that no one knew about Golgotha and the Tomb of Jesus. In 135, when Hadrian built Aelia Capitolina on the site of Jerusalem, he had a temple to Venus constructed where Jesus had been buried) or so we learn from the account of Eusebius of Caesarea. In the Fourth Century, Constantine and his mother, Helen, put up a sanctuary, or rather a complex of sanctuaries, to take the place of the pagan edifice. Helen herself came to Jerusalem to supervise the work on this Christian project. As to the discovery of the three crosses, among which the cross of Jesus is supposed to have been miraculously discerned, this tradition raises considerable historical difficulties. Moreover, we cannot know to what degree the memory of the authentic situation of the Holy Places was officially preserved in Jerusalem through two centuries of obliteration. The location of Golgotha and the Sepulchre is linked with the identification of the successive walls which we have mentioned. The Gospel speaks of these Holy Places as having been outside the city walls. Those who support the authenticity of the traditional site think that the second wall, that of Herod the Great, was somehow in the vicinity of the Holy Places without enclosing them. The outlines of this second wall are still subject to conjecture. Certain people assert that the present church of the Holy Sepulchre was within the confines of the second wall. Others have been led by recent research to say that the second and third walls were the same. (These walls were mentioned in Chapter II). For those who hold these two points of view, the traditional site is not in line with the Gospel account, and therefore must not be authentic. Indeed, ever since the Eighteenth Century, archaeologists have searched for the

site of the Holy Places in an area outside the wall, to the North of the Damascus Gate. That was probably where Saint Stephen was stoned and where capital punishment used to be carried out.

I shall not go into the details of this controversy. I should just like briefly to say, first of all, that we must realize that no doctrinal tradition is involved here. Our belief in the Crucifixion, the Tomb, and the Resurrection of Christ are not linked to the exact geographical location of these things. The historian and the archaeologist must carry on their work in the utmost intellectual objectivity. Veneration on the part of diverse confessions and the commemoration observed in liturgical texts do not constitute conclusive historical proofs. However, one should not immediately reject them without first giving them careful thought. And even if it were to be established that the traditional Holy Places are not authentic (although this has not as yet been done), they could not be deprived of their ecclesiastical value or of the spiritual link which they provide with the mysteries of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The grace which belongs to a mystery can be communicated to us wherever that mystery is venerated in a special way, even if that place is not the original site. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been sanctified by so many prayers and tears and ecstatic experiences that we could not but recognise that through a certain grace in the Spirit, the pious pilgrim is here brought into contact with the Cross and Sepulchre of the Lord.

Having brought this long parenthetical paragraph to a close, I want to take you to the traditional Holy Places. Let us go by the Damascus Gate, and straight down the partially covered street lined with shops, where all the noises, costumes and odours of the Orient mingle. Let us go to a crossroads where we see the German Lutheran Church on our left; which is called the Church of Redeemer, and dates back to the last century; on our way, we shall look at the gracious pink columns of Muristan, where the hospital once stood, in the time of the Crusaders. Retracing our steps a bit, we shall go through a little low gate entering the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

We are facing the entrance of the church, one of whose doors is obstructed. With the exception of the bell tower, this facade remains the same as it was when the Crusaders built it in 1144. On the right side, within the courtyard, is the Greek Orthodox monastery of Abraham, home of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre. On the left side, we see the little Arab Orthodox Church of Saint James. We are indeed surrounded by monasteries, churches, and terraces which are intermingled and sometimes running into one another. The Constantinian buildings were destroyed by the Persians in 614. Although the church was restored, it was devastated by several earthquakes, destroyed by the Egyptians in 1009, rebuilt by the Byzantines in the Eleventh Century, repaired several times, and is still being repaired, which explains the scaffolding that disfigures both the inside and the outside at the present time.

I would advise the pilgrim who enters this church not to stop right away at the sites of the Calvary and the Sepulchre, but to walk through the whole building first, in order to get an idea of its structure. The first thing one sees is the 'Stone of Unction'

(John 19:39), above which lamps have been placed. No document attests to the fact that Jesus' body was anointed in this place before being put into the tomb. Now let us move on to the left. Here we find an area which is circular, marked off by columns, and crowned with a dome. In the centre we can make out the part which shelters the Holy Sepulchre; but we shall not yet go in. Beneath the columns are open doors and stairways. Here we see monastic cells. The dome was destroyed and restored several times. In the early church of the Fourth Century, the rotunda was open above, and the Sanctuary of Golgotha by a courtyard. Let us go round the rotunda, from left to right. Behind the shrine of the Sepulchre, we notice a little chapel against the wall of the shrine: the Copts use this chapel. Farther on, to the left of the Rotunda, is the Franciscans' choir and the entrance to their monastery. When we have come round the shrine, we find before us the Katholikon; we shall go round it. A semi-circular ambulatory, which is quite dark, leads to a series of chapels: those of Christ's prison, of Longinus, of the division of Christ's vestments, of the crowning with thorns, and of course, nothing proves that these are the actual locations of the events they call to mind. A stairway leads down to one chapel which was dedicated to Saint Helen. A stairway inside takes us to another chapel where the 'true Cross' was supposed to have been found in 326. The chapel of Saint Helen is bright and sober; it has massive pillars and a Byzantine cupola. The Armenians now use the Saint Helen's chapel. Let us go back up again now, to find ourselves once again in the neighbourhood of the 'Stone of Unction.' The general plan of the church is fairly clear in our minds by this time, except for Golgotha. So let us begin there our visit to the 'Holy Places,' properly so called.

Near the 'Stone of Unction,' two quite steep stairways take us up to the very top of the 'Calvary Hill.' We find ourselves in a chapel situated on a platform outlined by walls and balustrades. Within are two altars in juxtaposition: as we face them, the one on the left is ministered to by the Orthodox and the one on the right by the Latin rite. The Orthodox altar is richly oriental, though its beauty is but mediocre, and is covered with lamps and lighted candles. The Chapel itself is dark. Its lights seem to converge on the heart of the Crucified on the wooden cross over the altar. This effect, quite uncontrived, is most striking. Mosaics dating from the Middle Ages and recently restored decorate the Latin part of the Chapel. A crack, near the Orthodox altar, reveals a piece of rock. In order to get a deeper impression of this place and its atmosphere, one should move back to the balustrade and contemplate the whole in silence. This would also be a good time to read the passages concerning the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) and the last hours of the Passion of Christ (Matthew 27:33-50; Mark 15:22-37; Luke 23:33-46; John 19:16-30).

Let us now go down from the Chapel of Golgotha to the rotunda. We shall enter the *anastasis*, or 'resurrection,' a Greek term which designates the shrine located in the centre. One must bend over to enter here, through a narrow, low door, into a small room. From there, we go into another little room where a number of candles are burning, and here the remains of the original rock are covered by a long marble plaque. It is impossible to linger in this narrow chapel which holds only two or three persons at a time. Most pilgrims kneel down and kiss the marble. Once outside the shrine - whose style is

remarkable in no way - we shall probably stand or sit to reread the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection (Matthew 27:57-28; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 23:50-24; 12; John 20:1-18).

We have now seen the main aspects of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This does not mean that we have thoroughly explored it, for several months would not be too much to give over to a study of this place in a detailed way. There are still some chapels of which I have not spoken, several of which are not easily accessible. There is also the Ethiopian monastery on the roof, or at least on the upper terrace of the church. Now we shall leave by way of the courtyard, thus regaining the Muristan. We could also climb the stairway which would take us out of the courtyard, into the district of the shops, which sell religious objects. The Greek Patriarchate is in this area.

What impression of the Holy Sepulchre shall we take away with us? Many Western pilgrims are disappointed in this church, which is unique out of all the rest. They do not find what they were expecting to feel at the foot of the Cross or at the Sepulchre. The decoration seems to display a rather questionable taste, often quite mediocre. They would like to find more of a meditative, fervent atmosphere. And they are astonished to discover that, apart from certain well attended high offices, the church remains virtually deserted. But one must not hold onto a first impression. It is little by little that we 'understand' the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and that it becomes familiar to us. It is necessary to return often, preferably alone in the morning, when the sun makes its way inside. True, some things disconcert us: hanging ostrich eggs, fake candles, and cheap finery may seem childish to us. But these things are the expression of humble piety, the naive and touching piety of poor Arab women whom we see enthralled by the very touch of the anastasis' wall. The materials which have been used are often precious without lending the aura of beauty for which they were intended. One might say of this church what Isaiah said of the Suffering Servant, '*He hath not form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is not beauty that we should desire him.*' (Isaiah 53:2) This church is the Suffering Servant among all the churches built in the Christian world. It remains to receive us and to carry our sorrows. It has seen so many tears, heard so many prayers! It lets each of us approach it with untold familiarity without imposing any rules, and allows everyone to move about, or speak, or bow down in complete freedom. Now let it permeate your being, silently, passively, and you will be drawn to it. It will become dearer to you than any other church in the world, and will henceforth be for you (and this is true in a sense, with obvious reservations) your one church in all the world. In it and through it you will find tranquillity and strength. You will even see it in your dreams ...

And yet, we must always remember the words spoken by the angels to the women on Easter morning, "*Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen*" (Luke 24:5, 6).

The Mount of Olives

It is strange that the first Christian pilgrims who came to Jerusalem in the Fourth Century were more attached to the Mount of Olives than to the sacred sites inside the city. Bishop Eusebius testified to this fact. Perhaps these pilgrims wanted to get away from the historical Jerusalem and to concentrate upon the new Jerusalem, the spiritual city, which belongs to the Ascension of Christ, and whose beginning was marked by the Mount of Olives.

You will certainly want to spend some time here. Try first of all to get a general perspective, leaving the city through the Saint Stephen Gate, to the Northeast, heading right. At your feet lies the valley of the old Cedron stream, which flows no longer; the valley has been more or less filled in. It contains certain tombs which are interesting from an archaeological point of view: among others, the tomb of Absalom, which has not been proven to be authentic. Straight ahead you see the sanctuaries and other structures; and at the foot of it lies Gethsemane with its clumps of trees, and its basilica. A bit higher up, you can make out the convent of the Russian nuns, because of the bulbous shape of its cupolas. Still higher, you see the Benedictine and Carmelite convents, a mosque, a tower which belongs to the Russians, a chapel called 'The Chapel of Ascension,' two Latin chapels; the one is referred to as *Viri Galilaei*, because the angels are supposed to have appeared there to the apostles after the Ascension, and the other is known as *Dominus Flevit*, in commemoration of the tears shed by our Lord over Jerusalem. The Gospel tells us that the Ascension took place on this mountain, but it would be useless to try to designate any specific patch of ground. Still facing the Mount of Olives, we notice high up and to the far left the old German hospital Augusta-Victoria, and the buildings (on the hill called Scopus) which were the home of the Hebrew University until 1948, and which still house a Jewish military detachment.

Let us now go all the way down the road which passes through the Valley of Cedron. We come very quickly to a crossroads. Actually three of the ways we see lead to the top reaches of the mountain where they converge. At the foot of these paths stand a small Muslim sanctuary and an unusual old church, built in the Sixth Century, which consists of an immense stairway descending into the darkness. This church belongs to the Orthodox, the Armenians, and the Latins and marks a site which was venerated in the Sixth Century as the Tomb of the Virgin. (If it is at all possible to ascertain the location of the tomb of the Most Holy Virgin, history would seem to indicate the necessity for research in Asia Minor, at Ephesus.) Near this church is the 'Grotto of the Agony,' where Jesus may have prayed the eve of his death.

We shall now enter the Franciscan basilica, called 'The Church of the Nations,' which is modern, and surrounded by a small garden containing olive trees and flowers. There was once a Fourth Century basilica on this spot; and the present one, designed by the Italian architect, Barluzzi, incorporates fragments of mosaics and stones from former times. Its dark interior calls to mind the Lord's agony. Gradually, as our eyes become accustomed to the obscurity, we catch sight of the precious materials surrounding us, and

are touched by the dignity and the sober tranquillity of the basilica. However it is perhaps from outside, when we look from a short distance away, that the whole landscape gives us a better vision of this sacred place, in its wholeness and in its deepest dimension. (Yet, once again, we must not be tempted to identify this with a precise historical location). I would advise you to proceed along the road leading to Jerusalem, then to the Church of the Virgin, so that you face the Mount of Olives. Behind you will lie the long Temple wall and the esplanade of the Rock. Now read the passages wherein the gospels, relate the agony and the arrest of the Lord: Matthew 26:37-57; Mark 14:32-53; Luke 22:39-54; John 18:1-13. Read also the account of the Ascension: Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:6-12. Then close the Bible. Just look, and let Gethsemane become a part of you.

In the hall of the high priest, one of the servants said to Peter, *'Did I not see thee in the garden with him?'* (John 18:26) Today, in Gethsemane, have you and I been in the garden with Him?

The Haram esh Sharif

In Arabic, this name means 'the noble sanctuary' It serves to designate the site of the Temple, upon which the sacred edifices of Islam are now standing. The Haram takes up about a sixth of the total area of the Old City. It is a holy place for the three great monotheistic religions: for the Jews, because of the Temple; and the Christians, because of the presence and the teaching of Jesus in the Temple; and the Muslims, because of the sanctuaries built on this spot by their ancestors.

To visit the Haram, you pass by the Gate of Bab el Hadid, where tickets are sold to non-Moslem visitors. Inside the gate, you will find yourself on a vast esplanade bordered by four walls. One of these walls, on the East side, constitutes the long rampart that passes over the Valley of Cedron, which you have already seen from the Mount of Olives. This part of the Haram is in front of you, since you came in through the gate belonging to the West wall. On the esplanade there are various buildings.

You will remember that the Jewish Temple was built by Solomon. Herod the Great erected the second Temple, which is assumed to have been on the Mount Moriah site commemorating the sacrifice offered to God by Abraham. Several courtyards, including that of the Gentiles, that of the women, as well as the courtyard of Israel, and that of the priests, face the East, in the direction of the high, wide door of the sanctuary known as the Holy of Holies. In earlier times, the Ark of the Covenant was to be found here; but it was no longer there in the time of Herod's Temple. The sacrificial altars were out in the open air. Stores, sacristies, the treasure house, and administrative buildings went round the inner part of the esplanade. The Antonia fortress stood at the Northwest corner; there soldiers were garrisoned, a dozen gates gave access to the inside, of which the most remarkable was the Golden Gate, now walled up, which you observed in the East wall facing the Mount of Olives. This gate must not be confused with the Gate called 'The Beautiful,' which is mentioned in the Book of Acts.

It was in this Temple that Jesus was brought as a child (Luke 2:22), and where He discussed with the doctors (Luke 2:46). From there also, He chased the money-changers and the merchants (Luke 19). There he did the bulk of his teaching while in Jerusalem, either in the courts or under the colonnades which surrounded them. He did not want anyone to carry burdens through the Temples or do anything else that would make it other than a 'house of prayer.' But when the disciples called His attention to the beauty of the Temple, He said to *them* "*See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*" (Matthew 24:2)

The prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans. In 135 Hadrian put up two statues, one of himself and the other of Jupiter, on that same spot. In 638, the Caliph Omar took over Jerusalem. Because of his respect for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he built a simple wooden mosque on the esplanade of the Temple. Towards the end of the Seventh Century, the Dome, or the Mosque of the Rock, was erected, which is sometimes erroneously referred to as the Mosque of Omar. After the Crusaders took Jerusalem, they transformed the Dome into a Christian church. The Dome came back to the Muslims as a place of worship when the Crusaders lost the city. Another mosque, Al Aqsa, had been built as well, to the South of the Haram, near the end of the Seventh Century. The latter is well worth visiting. There are also several less important sanctuaries, some minarets, and arcades which frame splendid views of faraway landscapes. But it is above all the Dome of the Rock which will hold our attention.

Steps topped by arcades lead up to the Dome, which is an octagonal structure located roughly in the middle of the esplanade. There are four doors to the sanctuary. The Dome itself, and by that I mean the cupola, is a study in proportion, elegance, -and sobriety. Its gold glistens in the sunlight. Its windows are of plaster, into which holes have been pierced to hold coloured glass. An inner colonnade and a balustrade of precious wood set off the rock itself from the rest. The rock is large, reddish in hue, and commemorates the place where Abraham may have sacrificed Isaac, and where also stood an altar of the Temple. (But none of this is known for a certainty). Wonderful mosaics embellish this sanctuary which is indeed rather small, but where an atmosphere of peace and deep piety reigns. It constitutes the supreme masterpiece of all Jerusalem's Arab art.

The esplanade also contains several small edifices which commemorate personal contacts of Muhammad with Jerusalem. We must not forget that Islam gives a great deal of importance to the Holy City, that by Ishmael it is related to Abraham, and that the Kuran speaks with veneration of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. It even mentions the Last Supper 'surat' of the 'laid table.' The very negations it makes stem from a sort of respect. The Kuran does not admit the sonship of Jesus because it cannot allow a fleshly kinship with the divinities and because it can conceive of no other kind of kinship besides that which is of the flesh. It does not admit the crucifixion of Jesus taken up to heaven, because it cannot allow that Jesus was undone by his enemies. The esplanade of the Rock is the place where the three 'religions of the book' meet one another in the presence of manifestations - diverse and at different levels - of the same heavenly Father.

The Haram esh Sharif is perhaps of all the places in Jerusalem the one which is the most permeated by a certain peace and silence. It is a fitting place in which to pray. Here our prayer is not tied to ruins of the past or to existing sanctuaries. Our prayer will go beyond what was the Temple, beyond what were Christian churches, and beyond today's worship centres. We are reminded of Jesus' words, "*But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple.*" (Matthew 12:6).

In Jerusalem and out of Jerusalem

One of the sacred places that you will naturally want to see is the 'via dolorosa,' the way that Jesus took when he carried his cross to Golgotha. Tradition places this path along the street which goes out from Saint Stephen's Gate westward, then turns left. The pilgrim who follows the 'way of the cross' according to Latin tradition passes by 'stations' or chapels which commemorate the stages in the Passion. The most remarkable of these 'stations' is the church of Saint Veronica, a pure masterpiece of mediaeval romanesque style. The 'way of the cross' finally comes to the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. Is this really the way taken by our Lord? A reply to this question would depend upon the situation of the palace where Pilate pronounced his judgement, because it was from there that Jesus started out for Calvary. Tradition holds that Jesus was judged by Pilate not far from Saint Stephen's Gate, where today we see the supposed Ecce Homo and Lithostrotos. Some archaeologists think that Pilate, when he spent time in Jerusalem over the Jewish Passover, lived in the palace of Herod located to the West near the Jaffa Gate, not far from Golgotha. If this had been the case, the location of the via dolorosa would have been entirely different. Whatever way Jesus did take, today's streets give a poor idea of what Jerusalem's streets were like at that time. They have risen in level gradually, as earth has been accumulated. If we want to have some notion of the original paved streets, we should visit the excavations of the convent of Our Lady of Zion, near Saint Stephen's Gate. Diggings there have uncovered at a much lower level, the paving stones of the Roman *via*. In a place which may have been a military post, we see a drawing which must have been traced by lance-ends, on the pavement stones. It represents a game of dice, the final square of which marks the execution of a king. This may have referred to the 'King of Saturnalia,' a criminal whom the soldiers crowned in order to mock him, and then killed. This vestige is full of meaning, if we recall that Jesus was given a crown of thorns after he had been scourged, and was beaten on the head with a reed, which had been put into his hands as a sceptre. (Mark 15:15-20).

Also near Saint Stephen's Gate, we shall be interested to visit the romanesque church of Saint Anne, built by the Crusaders, and the ruins of the 'Probatre pool' or Bethesda, where Jesus healed the paralytic. (John 5: 1-9) In the time of Jesus, this pool - whose location seems to be confirmed by recent diggings - was in the neighbourhood of the market of the sheep - in Greek *probata*, hence the name of the pool. If Jesus went out of Jerusalem by the Northeast exits to go to Gethsemane on the night before his death, it was probably in the vicinity of the sheep market that he thought of the phrase about the

smiting of shepherd and the scattering of the sheep. (Mark 14:27). In the same way, it is possible that the golden vine of the Temple, illuminated that night because of the Passover, prompted Him to speak of the true vine and the branches (John 15:1-6).

Now let us move southward, taking as a starting point the Jaffa Gate (closed) and the Citadel. Farther South, we shall come to the Armenian sector where we must visit the Armenian cathedral of Saint James, which has a great beauty. After that, we encounter the South wall of the city, which we shall follow along the inside, heading Southeast. Leaving Zion Gate (closed) at our right, we shall soon find on the same right hand the Dung Gate, or Maghrabi Gate. Let us go out by this gate. We are near the demarcation line fixed by the armistice. To the right we see the Israeli-occupied territory, where not far from the wall stands the Benedictine monastery of the Dormition and the traditional site of the Upper Room and the tomb of David. Some others contend that the Upper Room should be identified with the supposed house of the evangelist Mark inside the city. There are no proofs for all these claims. We cannot go over the line to visit these places, but instead shall go down into the valley which stretches out at our feet between Mount Zion and Mount Orphel. There we shall find the church of Saint Peter's in Gallicantu, which means 'at the crowing of the cock,' which is the traditional location of the house of Caiaphas and of the denial of Saint Peter. There, too, exact identification of the place, though possible, is not sure. This area has a certain special charm: it exhudes peace.

For our walk back to the city, let us go along the wall towards the East. At our right will be the Valley of Cedron, and on the other side of the valley, the Mount of Olives. We can re-enter the city through the Saint Stephen Gate, or we can go higher, outside the walls, and visit the remarkable Archaeological Museum.

Now let us come back towards the Damascus Gate. Between the Anglican Cathedral and this Gate, we shall visit the church of the monastery (and archaeological school) of Saint Stephen, belonging to the Dominicans. A traditional site of the martyrdom of Saint Stephen is in the Valley of Cedron, and belongs to the Greek Orthodox. Between St Stephen's monastery and the Damascus Gate is a site called 'the Garden Tomb.' There within a garden one sees a sepulchre hewn in the rock. Many pilgrims came and prayed near this grave which they believe to be the authentic Tomb of Christ. The garden lies at the foot of a hill, one of the sides of which shows a likeness to the face of a human skull. This hill, called 'Gordon's Calvary' has been considered by General Gordon and certain archaeologists as the genuine Golgotha. A Muslim cemetery occupies the summit of the hill. As to the 'Garden Tomb,' it probably is a Christian tomb of the second century. But the garden has a unique beauty. It invites one to pray and meditate and enables one to imagine what the Garden of Easter morning might have been like.

Bethlehem

You will surely not want to leave the Holy Land without having prayed at

Bethlehem. Therefore, I shall say a few words about the place where our Lord was born.

Bethlehem, in Hebrew, means ‘the house of the bread.’ It was there that men first beheld Him who said, *“I am the living bread which cometh down from heaven.”* (John 6:51) And Naomi’s recommendation to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, not to glean ‘in any other field.’ (Ruth 2:22) still holds a spiritual truth for us. This was also the city from which David came.

The Emperor Hadrian, anxious to erase the memory of Christ, had a temple to Adonis erected in Bethlehem. But, by the middle of the Second Century, Christians were coming to Bethlehem to venerate the Birth of the Lord. The emperor Constantine, in the Fourth Century, built a basilica on the traditional site. The circumstances under which this church was later destroyed are unknown to us now. But, in the Sixth Century, a new church was built. The crusaders adorned and decorated it. This is the church which, after subsequent transformations, remained to receive today’s pilgrims.

We reach Bethlehem by the road which leads southward, passing by the foot of the Mount of Olives. Leaving to our right the road which goes to the Mount of Offence, and to our left the road which goes to Jericho and the Dead Sea, we shall go up and across the hills of Judea. We shall come to the ‘tomb of Rachel,’ whose present structure dates back to the Fourth Century. Soon we shall see afar off, and set up high, the city of Bethlehem, now quite a large city, because of the influx of refugees. The convents there are numerous, as well as mosques, and Christian churches of diverse confessions. The ‘shepherds’ field’ offers no guarantee as to its authenticity, but even so, you will probably find it an appropriate place to read the Gospel account of Christ’s birth which tells of the shepherds and the new-born child (Luke 2:8-20). The birth of the Lamb of God (John 10:11) was quite fittingly announced first of all to shepherds. And if these shepherds were responsible for keeping the sheep intended for use in the Temple (for it seems that in the time of Jesus, rabbinic decrees prohibited the raising of sheep for any other purpose in Judea), it was also quite fitting that the keepers of these sacrificial lambs were first to worship the true Pascal Lamb *‘which taketh away the sin of the world.’* (John 1:29)

We shall enter the Church of the Nativity by a small, low door, whose dimensions helped to discourage attacks from the outside. The interior of the basilica is sober and very simple: about forty columns stand along the length of it; the walls are decorated with mosaics and precious marble. In spite of the ornamentation, we do not get a general impression of wealth and grandeur, but rather a sense of humility and peacefulness, in keeping with the birth of the Saviour. The services of the church are seen to by the Greeks, the Arab Orthodox, the Latins, the Armenians, the Syrians, and the Copts. There is an ikonostasion. You go down beneath the church, into the ‘grotto’ where many lamps are burning. A silver star marks the traditional site of the birth of Christ. This location, like so many others, remains subject to conjecture. In the church itself, you feel more of a sense of meditation and quiet supplication than in most of the churches in Jerusalem.

You have said to yourself, as did the shepherds, “Let us go now even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us” (Luke 2:15). Now, has the lord made this event known to you also? Have we felt that ‘unto you’ (Luke 2:11) was spoken for us personally, when the angel said that there is ‘born this day in the city of David a Saviour’? (Luke 2:11) Have we recognised the ‘babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger’? (Luke 2:12) Have we known him in his poverty and his weakness, him for whom there was no room in the inn? It is dangerous for us to feel at ease in the ‘inn’ of this world.

Joseph and Mary, in the time of the new census, went to register in the city of Bethlehem. The Messiah did not want to be born in imperial Rome, or in the knowledgeable and artistic Athens, or in priestly Jerusalem: he wanted to be born far from the grandeur of the world. In what sort of place do we want spiritually to register? Could a follower of Jesus choose any other city than Bethlehem?

Parting Wishes

Now, dear travelling companions, you are about to leave Jerusalem. Forgive me for having spoken of this city so little and so poorly.

The Gospel tells us that the wise men ‘departed into their own country another way.’ (Matthew 2:12) So also, every pilgrim who visits the Holy Land must go home again another way... that is to say, different within himself, changed, and transformed by grace. Daily routine will catch him up again, but he will respond to it ‘in another way’.

I remember saying to you that in Jerusalem one feels less the earthly image of Jesus than the strong wind of Pentecost and of the Spirit. (And it is significant that no one has tried to locate on any spot in Jerusalem the worship of the Holy Spirit.) I also reminded you of Saint Paul's words, spoken on the way to Jerusalem ‘bound in the Spirit’ (Acts 20:22). I believe that now the Spirit says to each one of us: linger no more here, contemplating sacred remnants, but go to the tasks which I give you and which I have perhaps revealed to you in this city; go with the vision that you have perhaps obtained and with the strength which you have perhaps received. May the Lord bless and guide each one of you! Allow me to quote a few words from the Holy Scriptures, which I should like to leave with you:

‘Let my right hand wither if I forget thee, O Jerusalem!’ (Psalm 137: 5)

‘In the beloved city he gave me rest and in Jerusalem was my power.’ (Ecclesiasticus 24: 11)

‘I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved; therefore understand the matter and consider the vision.’ (Daniel 9: 23)

‘O King Agrippa, I was disobedient unto the heavenly vision...’ (Acts 26:19)

‘Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it...’
(Revelation 3:8)