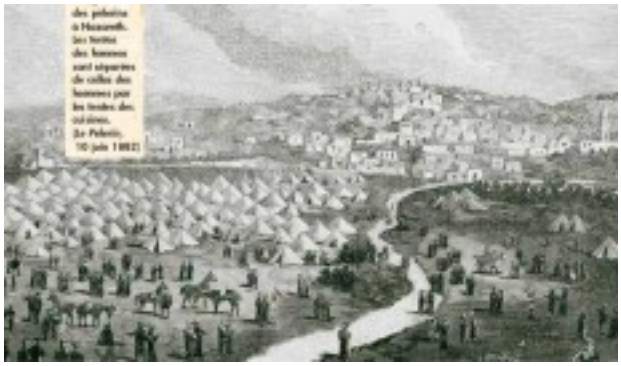


This past October 1-13, a small group of American pilgrims made their way to Turkey and Israel seeking to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and St. Paul. This small venture carries on the tradition begun by the Assumptionists in the 19th century. In late April 1882, a group of Assumptionists organized the first modern large-scale pilgrimages to the Holy Land when they set sail from the port of Marseilles in two ships, the Picardie and the Guadaloupe, accompanied by some 1,000 stalwart pilgrims. It took 8 days to reach the port of Haifa. Once arrived, they traveled by foot, donkey, horse and camel, sleeping in tents or under the stars. Nothing like it had been seen since the time of the Crusades. In all, the pilgrims stayed for 40 days and began a tradition that would continue uninterrupted till Word War I in 1914 and would restart afterwards.



The 2010 version was much more modest, in size (13) duration (13 days), and accommodations and travel (!!!). First, it was on to Turkey, often called the cradle of Christianity because of the presence of early Christian communities, the site of so many of the towns visited by St. Paul and home of many of the first Church councils (Nicea, Chalcedon, Ephesus, etc.). The first days included the ancient cities of Pergamon, Hierapolis, and Ephesus (the second largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome itself. Then it was on to Istanbul (Constantinople), capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires for a visit of the Sultan's Palace, the Blue Mosque, and the Church of St. Savior. Moving on to Israel, the group was treated to the full complement of sacred sites: carrying a cross along the Via Dolorosa, climbing Mt. Tabor, descending to Jericho and the Dead Sea, sitting on the slopes of the Mount

of Beatitudes, and celebrating mass in many, many significant spots (the Holy Sepulcher, St. Peter-in-Gallicantu, the Garden of Gethsemani, Nazareth, etc.). Aided by extremely competent native guides in both countries, everyone came away with deeper faith, convinced that they will never be able to read the Scriptures the same way in the future.



Here are some of the answers they submitted to the question: "What did I learn from this trip?"

+ "I was able to see where Jesus actually lived and died. Even though he is a historical figure, it is hard for me to imagine as someone who actually existed in a particular place and time. This trip...made Jesus much more a real person to me.

+ "It started off as a simple trip for me and within a few days it became a pilgrimage....During many of the Masses I felt such an inner peace and a spirit of forgiveness.

+ "I have a feeling of peace and fulfillment that hopefully will stay with me the rest of my life as I read the gospels."

+ "The Bible will have so much more meaning for me now. I learned how important it is to read the Scriptures slowly."

+ "The highlight for me was to carry the wooden cross with my wife along the Via Dolorosa. The cross was smaller and lighten than the cross of Christ and we needed two people to carry

it. It made me understand better what Christ went through to redeem the human race."

+ ""The boat ride on the Sea of Galilee reminded me that Jesus can calm any storm and that we need to put our trust in him in all things. Was it a coincidence that there were 12 of us with our leader"?

+ "I was awed at the magnificence of the Temple Mount and realized just how shocking, threatening, and courageous Jesus' challenging of there status quo was."

+ "I come back with a better understanding of the common roots of the three major religions."

+ "The degree to which the Israelis have transformed the desert to green farmland is truly amazing."

+ "First and foremost, it was a journey of faith for me. There was one experience in particular that moved me --- at the Assumptionist church of St. Peter-in-Gallicantu. I asked everyone on our side of the church if they had heard a cock crow. I thought how neat it was that it had crowed just for us as we celebrated Mass. But no one heard it but me! Then I knew that indeed God had talked to me, called me, hit me over the head (choose one!!!)"











