Pilgrimage of the French Squires and Maidens of the Order

Our shared desire to bring the Holy Land into a concrete and living way into our lives, led to the decision to take part in the pilgrimage organized by the Squires and Maidens of the Order. From the desert to Jerusalem, passing through numerous symbolic sites that marked the life of Christ, we walked in the footsteps of Jesus in the places where he was 2000 years ago.

More than an “ordinary” pilgrimage, this experience was **a real initiation into the land of our ancestors in the faith**, immersing ourselves in the daily life of the Christians of the Holy Land for whom the Order never ceases to pray and work. As soon as we arrived in Tel-Aviv, we headed towards Beerot in Judea to be able to spend the first night in the desert.

The next day, we embarked on a long day of walking in the Makhtesh Ramon crater in the **Negev desert**, accompanied by explanations from our guide, Abbot Nicolas. We could not only see, but also concretely feel to what extent water becomes a central and vital element in the daily life of those who crossed and still cross the desert. The image of the desert, which pervades the biblical tests, took on full meaning for us here: it exposes you and strips you bear, which proves favorable to reinforcing the bond that unites us to the Lord. We took time to pray before we marched back to Masada and spend the night there.

We entered the **fortress of Masada**, passing through the access ramp built by the Romans during their siege in 73. This is where the Sicarii committed suicide before the Romans entered the city after seven months of siege. A symbol of resistance in the face of oppression, the soldiers of the Israeli army go there to swear an oath in their military service.

Afterwards, we walked to the Dead Sea for a short but well-deserved bath, before returning to the oasis of Ein Gedi, of which Abbot Nicolas unveiled all the riches. After that, we celebrated Mass near the **Jordan, where we renewed our baptismal promises**. In **Nazareth**, we visited the various

places of the apparitions of the angel Gabriel to Mary. Then, we went to meet the Poor Clares, where we celebrated Mass and visited the museum of Blessed Charles de Foucauld. Later, we went to **Cana** – where the married couples received a blessing – and then to **Capernaum**, before leaving for the Mount of Beatitudes for a time of prayer and reflection.

In the morning we drove to the north of the country, to Dan Banias. Finally, during the **crossing of Lake Tiberias**, we reread the passages in which Jesus calms the storm and walks on water, reminding us that we must place our trust in Him. The evening was animated by an impromptu vigil, which enabled us to experience a beautiful moment of friendship. Our pilgrimage then took us to **Mount Tabor**, the place of the Transfiguration of Christ, after which we stopped at Jacob's well in Nablus. We spent the afternoon in the **village of Aboud**, where the Christian presence dates back to the first centuries. We were warmly welcomed by the community and we had the joy of spending an evening with them in a sign of fraternity.

We then visited **Bethlehem** where we prayed in the Basilica of the Nativity and then finally reached Jerusalem. The days in **Jerusalem** were extremely rich and we visited the symbolic places of Christianity, such as the Upper Room, Dormition Abbey, the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane. We also marked a Way of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa, before arriving at the tomb of Christ: the Holy Sepulchre.

Our visit to Jerusalem ended with a magnificent **Vigil of Arms at the church of Saint Anne**, then with a Mass of thanksgiving the following day, at the **Holy Sepulchre, where four of our Squire friends received Investiture as Knights**.

Our pilgrimage ended with a stop at Abu Gosh, the place of **Emmaus**, where Christ reappeared before the disciples after his Resurrection. It was an opportunity to meet the Benedictine monks who live there and to receive the marvelous witness of this community which continually assures a **fraternal presence** in this region torn by conflict. A beautiful message of love and hope to bring our pilgrimage to a close!

(Spring 2018)