

MEDITERRANEAN ECHOES

December

2011



Les temps ont changé mais le sort des réfugiés reste le même.

L'Ange du Seigneur apparaît en songe à Joseph et lui : « Lève-toi, prends l'enfant et sa mère et fuis en Egypte; et restes- y jusqu'à ce que je t'avertisse.... »
(Matthieu 2,13).

Cette année, beaucoup de personnes qui craignaient pour leur vie, ont dû fuir la Libye et ont trouvé refuge en Tunisie, pays dont les habitants ont ouvert leur porte et leur cœur.

Il y a actuellement dans le monde plus de 43 millions de personnes déplacées par la contrainte.



Hanukkah and Christmas

This year, Hanukkah and Christmas will be celebrated during the same liturgical time.

This reflection can invite us to listen to how these two feasts echo one another.



Light... for Hanukkah is celebrated with lights, eight small flames that are lit on each of the feast's eight days.

Already Flavius Josephus called Hanukkah “the lights”, because the victory of the Maccabees manifested the victory of light over darkness; and St. Jerome takes up this interpretation for his own purposes in his commentary on Jn 10:22, when he says: “the light of freedom”.

In rabbinic tradition, it is the victory of the Torah (“a lamp for my steps, a light on my path”) over the darkness of the Greek empire's paganism, which forbade the Torah.

The Temple... for Hanukkah remembers the “dedication” (which is what the word “Hanukkah” means) of the Temple after its desecration by the Greek empire (cf. 1 Macc 4:36-61 and 2 Macc 10:1-6).

The Jewish commentaries on this feast strongly emphasize the significance of the Temple as God's dwelling place in the midst of God's people, whence the great importance that was given to its purification and renewed dedication.

Here an extract from a midrash on Num 7:12 (chapter 7 in the Book of Numbers is the main reading for Hanukkah): “*So long as the Lord was alone in his world, he longed to live with his creatures here below. He only did so when the dwelling place was established. Then the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought his presence to rest.*”

We can hear Jn 1 as an echo to this: “*The Word was light... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*”

The Messiah... for Hanukkah is a messianic feast.

The Emmaus story in Luke 24 confirms this by having Jesus join the two disciples who are on their way to a very precise place: Emmaus. They are going to a place of remembrance, namely that of the victory of Judas Maccabeus (cf. 1 Macc 4). That Judas did deserve to be a true messiah. But this Jesus was not capable of delivering them from the Romans. They are disappointed and very sad. And Jesus causes them to turn around both physically and spiritually: they too pass from darkness to light.

Moreover, let us note that Jesus is asked the messianic question (cf. Jn 10:22-23) in the context of the feast of Hanukkah.

The prophetic reading for the feast (Zech 2:14-4:7) also underlines this messianic aspect by introducing the “two anointed” (4:11-14): the one represents religious power (Joshua, cf. 3:1-8), and the other political power (Zorobabel, cf. 4:6-10) - two powers that should never be confused – and “my servant sprouts” (cf. 3:9).

The dates of Hanukkah and Christmas... for their relationship is not obvious.

The origin of the date for the feast of Hanukkah is controversial: was it linked to the winter solstice, the time of year when the days begin once again to get longer, whence the importance given to light?

The origin of the feast of Christmas is also complex: is there a connection to the

“Mithra” cult, Mithra being a kind of mediator between heaven and earth, whose cult included invocations to the sun...?

There was a need to find a date for the birth of Jesus, nine months after his conception on March 25... In any case, the first feast celebrating the manifestation of God become man was Epiphany and not Christmas. The emphasis was not placed on a date of birth but on the fact of the incarnation.



How can we be associated with the Jewish people during this week of Hanukkah and Christmas?

Let us remember that Christmas does not claim to be a historical feast; we are not celebrating “the anniversary of Jesus”. Even if its date wasn't chosen because of a connection with the feast of Hanukkah (this connection could have been the theme of light together with the winter solstice), the two feasts do shed light on one another and give us messages that are not contradictory.

Is not Jesus God's dwelling place in this world, the divine light that drives out our darkness, the Messiah who makes no political claim, the Savior of the world?!

When we celebrate Christmas, why don't we remember these two feasts and welcome Jesus, the Messiah, who did not come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets or the Jewish feasts and their traditions.



He came to fulfill the history of salvation while leaving for us as humanity the space of what is not fulfilled, that of “marana tha”, which we can say with the Jewish people with a hope that is all the greater because we know Him who has already come and whose coming in glory we await.

The words of Edmond Fleg can be our prayer:

*And now both of you are waiting,
You that he come, and you that he come again;
But you are asking for the same peace,
And you are stretching out your two hands
With the same love, that he come or come again!
So what does it matter? From the one or the other shore
Make him come,
Make him come!*



Ecce Homo

The Feast of Christ the King.

On behalf of Ecce Homo community Sr. Rita Kammermayer nds and Mrs. Gilda Favretto ccn, Directress of Ecce Homo, welcomed the many friends, past pupils and guests who had come from near and far to celebrate the feast of Christ the King in the Basilica of Ecce Homo.



It was a pleasure to have with us the French Consul, Monsieur and Madame Desagnaux, whom we have now come to know well. Priests from several local communities including, a Bishop from Molda-

via. Msgr. Anton Corsa, Bishop of Chisnau, joined with His Excellency, William Shomali, Auxiliary Bishop for Palestine who presided at the table of the Lord. Later in Salle de Sion all enjoyed afternoon tea and we were pleased to meet Bishop Corsa and talk with him about our sisters and our communities in Romania.



For both communities – the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion and the Community of Chemin Neuf, the Volunteers and the Staff, many of whom were present - it was a lovely day of celebration. The joint preparation once again gave us the opportunity to share our gifts, talents and generosity. It was a day to give thanks as we brought closure to the liturgical year and another year of our ministry of collaboration in Ecce Homo.

The ‘Reign of God’ is visible when we strive together to ‘go’ and to live the call and challenge of today’s Gospel: to seek justice, to be women of peace, to welcome the hungry, to take time with the stranger, to speak for the voiceless and for all those who are held in fear.

Bernadette



Contemplative Sisters

On Father Theodore's feast, we had the great joy of welcoming our apostolic sisters from the region at our house, the Solitude of Ein Karem.

This meeting was meant as a response to the last General Chapter's recommendation to strengthen the ties between our apostolic and contemplative communities, wherever they are.

During a meeting with the PLT, we thought the first thing to share was our "common root" by listening together to what Father Theodore tells us, to his intuitions, his inspiration, his journey.

In response to Diane's request, we accepted to prepare this first meeting on the apostolic and contemplative expressions of our charism as found in Father Theodore's writings.



Each sister was invited to a time of personal reflection based on texts by Fr. Theodore and this was guided by a few questions. The personal reflection was followed by sharing in small groups before reporting the essential to the whole group. A strong moment was when each sister repeated a phrase that had struck her and explained why she had chosen it.

We were very happy with this meeting, and we shall meet again in about three months to continue our common reflection on what gives us life.

Our hearts and thoughts were also turned towards the Grandbourg Solitude, where our sisters were accompanying Sister Christine-Marie to her final resting place near Father Theodore.

The Solitude Community of Ein Karem



Tunisie

Dear Darlene and Trudy,

Of course we are experiencing one thing after the other, and the events on election day were something the Tunisians had never seen or experienced. For the first time in their lives they were voting FREELY! The election locales, most of which were in the "municipalities and schools", were full of people from 8 a.m. on. People of every age, men, women, young people, elderly people came en masse, smiling with happiness, wearing every kind of clothing: traditional, modern, veiled, etc. At times they formed triple lines. Friends told us they spent three or four hours in line before being able to vote. Others told us they spent the entire afternoon in the courtyard of the election locale because there was such a festive atmosphere.

Aïd, a feast was in the air... TV broadcasts all spoke of freedom; they seemed proud of being able to fulfill this act of a responsible citizen. We were there with them, happy to see the people looking FREE.

Now we know that the "religious" party obtained the relative majority. Of course this is a party that was excluded during Ben Ali's time; the party was a "martyr", its members were tortured and many were imprisoned for life. Many saw these members of the religious party as heroes, as people who had given their life because of their faith. To others, the post-revolutionary period



seemed too unstable and they thought the religious party would bring solutions towards more stability, more order, etc. In addition, other "religious" layers have also made their appearance: the "Salafists" and other more radical movements that were previously not known. The concrete experience of democracy must be lived! That costs something, and the country has to experience it...

Another element is that the desire for democracy

has brought forth an "explosion" of parties that stood for election: 1,600 electoral lists (parties) for 7,000,000 registered voters (Tunisia has 10,000,000 inhabitants). In addition, contrary to the "religious Nadha" party, the more modernist and avant-garde parties did not invest enough in their political campaigns among the masses of people...

We are not pessimistic; now it is necessary to "work together", to implement the fact that Tunisians are ONE PEOPLE. The religious party obtained 90 seats in the Constitutive Assembly; the others obtained 117 seats. Now they just have to be united.

Everyone is faced with a new situation... We trust in the fact that the Tunisians have a peaceful history of collaboration, of understanding, without letting themselves be crushed, and that Tunisia has opted for OPENNESS towards the future - and I hope "those with a beard" don't get the upper hand, insh Allah!

Aracely (Nabeul)



Dernière nouvelle

December 19, 2011: Marzouki invites the Jews of Tunisia to return.

At the end of Monday morning, the President of the Republic, Moncef Marzouki, received *Sheikh Othmane Bettikh, the Mufti of the Republic*, in the Carthage palace. The Mufti said that at the end of the interview, he brought up with the Head of State the approach to religious life in Tunisia and the perspectives for re-establishing in the country the true image of Islam, which is that of moderation and a correct center. He added that the emphasis was placed on the importance of a healthy religious sensitization in collaboration between the government, the theologians, the preaching imams, and the concerned religious establishments.

On the other hand, the President of the Republic received *Haïm Bittan, the Chief Rabbi of Tunisia*, who described the meeting as "historical", noting that the Head of State invited the Jews who used to live in Tunisia and who had left to return. He shared his satisfaction over the President of the Republic's interest in the Jews of Tunisia and in their status as citizens with full rights. The Chief Rabbi expressed his hope that the people holding responsibility and the government in Tunisia would succeed in leading the country towards a better tomorrow.

Dr. Mohamed Moncef Marzouki also received *Msgr. Maroun Lahham, the Archbishop of Tunis*, who said that their conversation dealt with the situation of the Christian Churches in Tunisia, which "live in peace and enjoy the trust and kindness of the Tunisian people". He affirmed that his meeting with the Head of State was "extremely friendly" and gives rise to "love and gratitude in the heart of every human being living in this blessed country".



Travel of Anne-Catherine to Costa Rica

Travel Of Anne-Catherine

Yes, I was invited to Costa Rica to share on the Bible and Jewish Tradition with the sisters and associates.

My topic was "Jerusalem's vocation" as a paradigm of every vocation.

I animated the five days of retreat before their provincial chapter, I worked for one day with the 80 associates (!), and I did some biblical reflection introducing the two days of work of the international team for associates.

I had the good luck to be there for Manuela's commitment in the congregation (she is from Guatemala), and also to take part in several of the high school's activities ending the school year. It is truly a Sion high school! Everywhere there were signs in Spanish saying "In Sion firmata sum"!



Above all, I learned a lot in this province, in this beautiful country. I should have said, in "these beautiful countries", thanks to the sisters who are in Salvador (one young one is Salvadorian like Ara), those from Guatemala (four, including two professed and two novices), and those who live in Nicaragua. They have a very dynamic vocations ministry, and two young women are preparing for a community experience in January.

There is great hope... It was a very beautiful experience, for which I am extremely grateful to those who invited me and to our province and my community, who made it easier for me. That's it very briefly!

Anne-Catherine (Ein Kareem)

Veronique Association

Aubagne, June 2011

Dear Friends,

Our President Yvette Thoumine and I have just returned from an unforgettable time in the Democratic Republic of CONGO. We wanted to go so as to see for ourselves how well the Association is going, which is to say that on the one hand, we wanted to meet the orphans whom you are sponsoring, and on the other hand, we wanted to go and see the rural families who are being reinserted into the villages that they had to leave during the war which has ravaged the region since 1994.

Gratiane, the coordinator of the CO.DI.LU.SI, an organization of the Diocesan Bureau of Medical Works especially dedicated to AIDS, had asked that our 80 orphans from BAGIRA be gathered together in the large parish hall, where they welcomed us with a song in French that brought tears to our eyes...

We were able to call each child by name, to take a picture and to tell him or her the first name of their god-mother or godfather.

Some ten volunteers look after these children, visit their foster families, and gather these families together once every three months so that they can talk about their difficulties, ask



questions, etc. The volunteers also bring the children together.
It is very rare that a child does not adapt to the family welcoming him or her.

An older boy, Gabriel, will finish his secondary schooling this year. He said a word of thanks to us that you will find attached.

The day after this meeting, we left by Land Rover for the “hills” to visit the rural families who had received cows, goats and seeds.

The small farms that are still very poor are quite far from one another. There is no road or running water, no electricity, stores or schools!...

What struck us the most was:

the Faith lived by these people who have suffered so much: a number of them had family members who were assassinated;

the Hope that in the end their work, their enterprising spirit, their solidarity will result in a better life for them and above all for their children. Some ten couples who have not yet received their cow came to tell us that they were counting on us!

The cow is very important, not only materially (milk, meat...) but also symbolically: it is a source of life. “A person who gives a cow to someone in our region becomes his and her mother and father.”

The cows and goats are cared for with love; we have just sent the necessary money to buy a bull and two pedigree rams.

Thus we received a lot of encouragement for continuing this project.

Sr. Geneviève (aubagne)

Aubagne is ALIVE!

*** On Friday, November 4, the exhibit on ABRAHAM opened.**

In Aubagne as in all of France, many religious streams live side by side. The State guarantees the right of certain religions to develop to the extent to which their practices do not disrupt the harmony with non-believers and with other religions. Through its spirit of tolerance, the interfaith group of the Aubagne region tries to unite men and women of good will from all persuasions so that they might get to know one another and carry out concrete activities together.

For the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions, Abraham is the common link, the mythical ancestor. That is why the group, with the support of the city of Roquevaire, is presenting an exhibit that is being shown at the E. Fleg Center in Marseille.

Each of us is ensuring that someone is present during the opening hours throughout the exhibit (November 5-12) so as to respond to the visitors' questions and to enable them to go as far as possible in discovering Abraham.

On the 10th, a round table discussion with Jewish, Christian and Muslim speakers will be



held on the theme: “Abraham, Father of Jews, Christians and Muslims! We, the heirs?”

* In Aubagne's Chapel of the Black Penitents, the “Seven Sleepers”, whose legend and surprising journeys are told in the whole Mediterranean region, are being shown in a beautiful exhibit of photographs, texts and audio documents.

A young researcher, Manoël PENICAUD, went in search of their traces, starting in Ephesus and going to Istanbul and Tarsus, Cappadocia, Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem and even Marseille.

He gathered together touching testimonies, beautiful architectural or pictorial presentations, texts, etc. He was helped by MASSIGNON, who promoted the Sleepers' “resurrection” and whose family he met.

The places with grottoes, of which it is said that the Sleepers lived in them, are places of Islamo-Christian and even of Islamo-Jewish encounter.

Perhaps what makes this story so fruitful is everything that lies beyond the legend.

In this connection, we suggest that you read or re-read the 18th Sura of the Qur'an, “the Cave”.

Let us add that on November 14, Michael LONSDALE will come to the Penitents to read texts honoring L. MASSIGNON.

Geneviève (Aubagne)

Ecce Homo

Young Australian student's pilgrimage - a first.

In our community gatherings we frequently remark on our blessings and the many opportunities that present themselves almost daily living here in Jerusalem.

This week we were fortunate to welcome a delightful group of 14 young Australian students, from four different colleges in Melbourne. Three teachers accompanied them, plus our Mary Reaburn who co-ordinated the pilgrimage. This pilgrimage in the Holy Land was part of the preparation for most of these young students who will study “Text and Traditions” in their respective colleges in the coming year. They began with a two night stay with our Sisters and Brothers in



Ein Karem where they were very warmly welcomed. They then went to Galilee and the final ten days were with us in Ecce Homo.

Just being in their presence was so refreshing, their enthusiasm and readiness to share with each other and on one occasion with us was an absolute joy. On the Saturday evening we joined the group for their Sunday Eucharist in the Lithostrotos, presided over by Fr. Jim Green-a White Father and neighbor on the via Dolorosa. He was able to tune

into where these young people were at. It was a beautiful Liturgy for Gaude Sunday -joy it was - the girls appreciated Jim and he stayed for sup-



per and most of the evening, so the girls were able to discuss more about the celebration of the Eucharist and what it had meant for them. After the main course we invited the group to St. Mary's, not too spacious but we all crowded in and the joy of the evening continued. Before serving dessert the young women shared a little about what this experience in the Holy Land had meant for them. It was so profound and very moving, we felt privileged to have been part of what was truly a gift for us. We, as community, shared a little of our ministry here in Ecce Homo and in Jerusalem. It was a truly blessed and memorable evening and gave us great hope in our young women and the possibilities for the future. Many times during our morning prayer this week we have given thanks for such a privilege of having been touched by their lives as well as deep appreciation of the teachers who accompanied these beautiful young Melbourne ambassadors.

Congratulations Mary Reaburn nds, on your initiative to dare to encourage and bring a small group of students and their teachers to make this pilgrimage and to study "the Gospel of Luke in the Land".

St. Mary's Community Ecce Homo, Jerusalem. December 2011.

