

Deacons write about their pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Deacon Sam Burregi: Thanks for a well planned trip to the Holy Land. The way everything flowed from day to day made it a delight. **The hotels and the food was something to look forward to each day after touring the sights. I never felt threatened at anytime in any of the areas we visited. The people were friendly.** It was a real blessing for me to experience all the holy sites and to walk the areas where Jesus walked. I will never forget it. **It is just the religious education I needed to add to my diaconate training.** I still cannot believe I actually preached on the Mount of the Beatitudes, overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

Deacon Harold Vincent: Everything was memorable!!! **I enjoyed the trip the way you planned it - from Old Testament to the New - Birth to Death of Jesus - with the Old City of Jerusalem at the end.** This was most memorable and moving. The daily masses were the highlight of the day. I felt all of the beautiful moments and places experienced came together in the Mass. I appreciated Monsignors Hebert and Legendre, but also the way the deacons made everything so spiritual and beautiful.

I felt we were blessed with a beautiful group of people - all with the same feelings. **The Bible has become more precious. The trip was the Bible come to life, walking in the footsteps of Christ - awesome! As far as the value received for the cost of the trip, we received *more!* The trip was more than I ever dreamed of. The hotels and meals, the itinerary and schedule, the tour leaders and guides were excellent. Don't change anything.**

Deacon Les Vincent: **To my brother deacons:** Having just returned from the Holy, **I strongly recommend that you consider making a similar trip in the future. The experience of seeing, smelling, tasting and feeling the country side that has so affected our lives is indescribable.** To stand on the hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee at the Mt. of Beatitudes, listening to the birds sing and participating in a Eucharistic celebration or to give a homily at Gethsemane produces emotional feelings that can only be experienced, they cannot be described.

Deacon Joe Mamou: **It was an AWESOME experience - a wonder - that words alone can never capture! Every site we journeyed to made such a positive and lasting impact on my life! I felt honored to deliver my first homily at Petra.** It was the icebreaker and prepared me for God's double anointing when delivering my second homily on Mt. Carmel! I was totally fascinated at the historical sites and ruins! I was honored to travel the Sea of Galilee . . . wet my feet in the Jordan River . . . journey in the desert . . . Walk the road of calvary . . . and so much more! **Spiritually, I received a most unusual, but unique, anointing that was so evident to others when I arrived home.** It has changed the manner in which I proclaim God's Holy Word!. My spiritual insights into the holy scriptures has deepened. Oh, how blessed we are and how we take so much for granted!

Educationally, I received a wealth of knowledge . . . I consider this an asset, especially during homily preparations. I strongly encourage all to make a pilgrimage! This is a journey that one will have to go on and experience for themselves! **It is my sincere prayer that ALL DEACONS - better yet - everyone, has an opportunity to experience the "WONDERS OF THE HOLY LAND!" IT IS A JOURNEY WITH JESUS THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET!** Jerry, when I shared my experience with Mary she said, "Honey, you have to go back! There's more God has for you to receive. HE HAS A PLAN! HATS OFF TO YOU, DEACON JERRY, FOR PUTTING TOGETHER SUCH A WELL ORGANIZED PILGRIMAGE! What a wonderful group of individuals to have traveled with! I encourage you to continue making such pilgrimages available! Likewise, I pray that the response is OVERFLOWING!

Deacon Mike Cantrell: **The highlight of my trip was the mass on Mt. Nebo. While I was reading the gospel and preaching I had chills up and down my spine. I can't explain it any better than that.** I don't remember all that I said while preaching. I do remember a wonder and a desire to see as Bartimaeus saw. As a deacon I wish to bring back to our people a strong desire to know Jesus - not only book knowledge, but

knowledge that can only come from the heart. **I know I will have a better understanding of the Gospels when I proclaim them at mass.**

Deacon Jose Sierra: I have to tell you that when you first brought this idea to the Class of '96, I had some reservations about whether I should or should not join you on this trip. I had some preconceived ideas and I questioned why we were going to Jordan first. **But, when I stood on the top of Mount Nebo looking at the "Promised Land," I saw myself as a living part of the Old Testament and from then on I felt different. I realized what a wonderful and heart-filling experience this was. You had skilfully arranged and scheduled visits to all the holy places in a manner in which I saw myself walking with Jesus.** It was a great learning experience and the trip has helped me tremendously to take a different look at the Scriptures. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all of your efforts. **I will continue urging our brother deacons to make this journey and I am sure they also will have an experience that will last a lifetime.**

Deacon Bob Beaumont: Before we began our journey, we had discussed the idea of celebrating Mass as many days as possible. **But, it wasn't until we began to experience the emotion of places in which we celebrated Mass that I felt what it meant to be walking in the footsteps of those who began the walk of Christianity almost 2,000 year ago - Christ, His family, the Apostles.** The feeling became deeper as we entered the desert. I understood the cost our Faith ancestors paid to keep the way of God alive in the hearts and minds of people for those many centuries before Christ - To rest in the spot where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son, Issac; to walk in the sand of the desert where Moses led God's people; to experience the dryness; to appreciate what it meant for the Holy Family to flee into the desert for fear of their lives.

The sights and sites of antiquity were inspiring. But, most of all, was the feeling among the 80 pilgrims who looked forward to and were inspired by our liturgies of the Eucharist. **The homilies at each mass added to the feeling and I heard many comments from the laity that the daily mass greatly added to the beauty of the trip.** We grew from a group of strangers into a community of friends who brought home many pictures and memories and new friendships.

Deacon Ray Richardson: **It was an experience that I will never forget. A journey that everyone, if they can afford it, should take.** In Jordan and Egypt I saw the wonders and beauties of God's and man's creation. I felt humble and small, yet proud and bursting with gratitude that God granted me the opportunity to be there. I was awed by the beauty of God's handiwork and by what man can do with what God has given him.

I wanted to see the holy places . . . I could see in their faces the joy of being there and seeing . . . all the places where we walked in His footsteps. I feel that all clergy should go to the Holy Land and see and experience and be aware of the places of our faith heritage. It was an opportunity I shall never forget. It was a wonderful feeling when all of us vested and when I assisted at the Church of the Annunciation, or walking the Via Dolorosa, or sailing the Sea of Galilee. I found a profound closeness to God in seeing the mountains, the deserts, and the Dead Sea in their stark beauty. I found the love of fellow man in the eyes of a young child selling corn, in the eyes of 6 or 7 year old children at the carpet school. I saw God's love at work with Jordanian women with their children and with the outward love of the men of Jordan for children. I could feel the faith and determination of a People's love for God at Masada. I came back with much more than I went with and it wasn't excess baggage. **Great value for the cost of the trip! No, unbelievable value!**