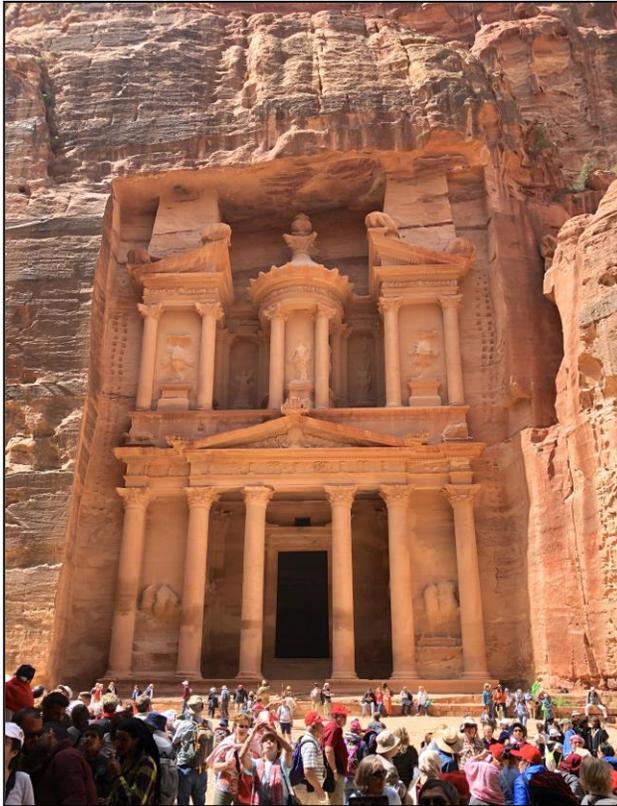


WHAT A PRIVILEGE

Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm



The Treasury of Petra, Jordan

In March I had the privilege of leading a group of pilgrims through the **Holy Land**. Two of our ten days were spent in **Jordan** to visit **Petra**. What you see above is carved by hand into solid red stone and is just one building within canyons that housed thousands of people of the **Nabataean** civilization. The entire city is carved and built within canyons of beautiful strata of stone. The Nabataeans were renowned for being a major link in the ancient trade routes from the Middle East all the way to India and even China. Imagine! 400 years before Christ they built royal tombs, homes, a huge theater, baths, churches and a water conveyance system that are marvels of engineering to this day. **Petra** is astounding to see and visit.

I was thrilled to visit this UNESCO World Heritage Centre and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. I'd read about it long before the Treasury was featured in the third *Raiders of the Lost Ark* movie. To reach the city it takes at least 90 minutes of walking downhill, an hour to walk through the city and

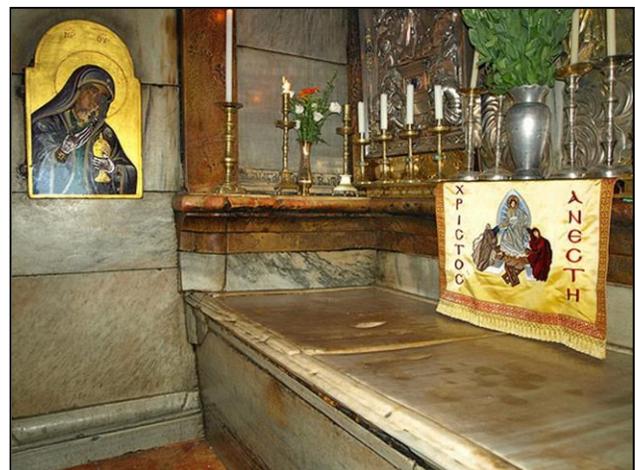
another 90 – 120 minutes walking uphill to our waiting bus. Strenuous, even exhausting for some pilgrims, but so worth the effort and the energy! **Petra** is a grand monument to human ingenuity, skill and passion. I wish I could offer you more photos of just the geological strata alone in which one can see seismic disturbances, erosion, iron flows and centuries of Mother Earth's brilliant displays. Read about this marvel and you'll appreciate it.

There were many other privileges on our journey and I want to highlight just a few for you because we are celebrating the **Triduum** as I write this month's article. This was not my first visit to the Holy Land but you know as well as I that revisiting a place allows you to see things you may have missed the first or even second or third time.

It is a joy and a thrill and a privilege to celebrate the Eucharist in these holiest places of Christianity. Let's start with the center of Christian faith: the very **Tomb of Christ Jesus**.



The Edicule in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher



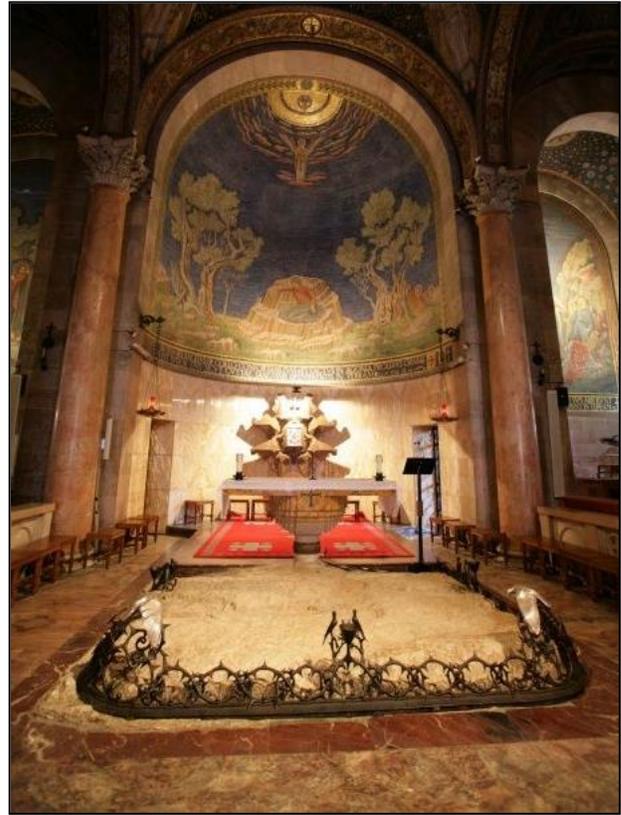
Inside the Edicule there is an antechamber and through a very low door, on the right, is the marble slab that held the body of Jesus.

When Mass is celebrated inside the tomb only the priest can fit and people must squish into the antechamber. They also place a wooden surface above the marble slab (where the candles are) to serve as an altar. I cannot express in words what it feels like to celebrate the Eucharist in this Holy of Holies. Overwhelming. Tearful. Unforgettable. A sense of connectedness with over 2,000 years of faith in the Resurrection! Pilgrims come from all over the world and wait in long lines to kiss this marble slab and our little group was sealed inside the **Edicule** with exactly 30 minutes for Mass. 30 minutes lasted about 30 seconds, it seemed, but it was heavenly time.

In 2016 researchers were given just 60 hours to investigate the site under that marble slab and they uncovered yet another ancient marble slab with a cross carved into the surface, perhaps the original burial slab for Jesus. This site has been honored as such since at least the days of Emperor Constantine and even before that in the Apostolic Era right after the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection. If you want to learn more about the 2016 renovation, there is plenty available on line. Experts familiar with Jewish burial customs at the time of Jesus have uncovered over a thousand rock-cut tombs in the area around Jerusalem and this one held to be the burial vault of Jesus fits that style. Golgotha was outside the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus but the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is within walls that were expanded long ago.

Why share all this? I'm certainly not bragging about being overseas because travel is a privilege and leading pilgrims is a lot of work. But we touched the very core of Christianity ~ the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Exaltation of Jesus Christ and I want to share these places and experiences with you. I constantly remind pilgrims to "Remember where we are," then let the Spirit take over their prayer and reflections.

The **Mount of Olives (Olivet)** is sacred to Jews and Christians. Thousands of Jewish graves cover the hillsides around the **Garden of Gethsemane** which is filled with ancient olive trees. The main shrine there is the resplendent **Church of All Nations** where we celebrated Eucharist. In the photo a mosaic above the altar portrays Jesus in prayer on a stone just before



his arrest. That very stone is in front of the altar, encircled by many metal crowns of thorns. On this very spot we learn from Jesus and how he was fully human in all ways but sin. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." (LK 22:42) Hematidrosis is a natural human phenomenon when capillaries to sweat glands rupture due to extreme duress and anxiety and blood exits the body through the sweat glands. Soldiers in battle have experienced this. Jesus surely realized what lie ahead, cried to God for release yet kept going. I know many of us experience moments of great anguish. When we are faced with huge moral choices or monumental life changes we can't sleep well, we can't think straight - our bodies respond accordingly.

Jesus, in this lovely grove of olive trees, bared his soul before God, overcome with fear. Yet he had the faith and trust to continue his mission. In the Gospel of Luke we see a Jesus who never, ever stops praying during the entire Passion Narrative. He prayed here in the **Garden**, he prayed over the women of Jerusalem on the way to Calvary, he prayed that God forgive his executioners, he prayed "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

I believe this is the lesson from Jesus in the **Garden of Gethsemane**: never let go of God, even when you think God isn't present! So often I hear people express frustration or even anger at God because 'God doesn't seem to be very attentive to my needs.' Spend a few minutes in retrospection, remember times in your past when you felt like Jesus in that olive grove. Where on earth did you find the gumption to keep living? Decide to leave an oppressive relationship? Remain in the Church despite all her sins and scandals? Get up to face one more day with chronic pain? You know, don't you? Yes, the same **Source** that Jesus knew when people plotted to kill him, when Judas did what he chose to do, when he sweat blood in **Gethsemane**, comforted women on the **Via Dolorosa**, forgave his executioners, breathed his last. The Jesus of Luke's Passion Narrative never stops praying.

Another part of Luke's portrait of Jesus I find to be a profound personal source of inspiration: while he suffered so much, he continued to think of others' needs. At table he instructed those he loved who would desert him. During the mayhem of arrest he healed the servant's ear. He comforted the weeping women on the way to his own death. He promised one of the criminals crucified with him: "Today you will be with me in paradise." He forgave those who were yelling and mocking him while he slowly asphyxiated and bled to death. The Jesus of Luke's Passion Narrative never stops serving others. Never.

Humble servant. Man of prayer. Faithful son. Lover of all. This is the Jesus I emulate, the Jesus I absolutely love. This is the Jesus we learn from in these holy places in Israel and yet also around our own breakfast table or the halls of a hospital. To pray and serve is to be Christ.

The purpose of a pilgrimage is to allow the place one visits to impact the heart, to bring about a change in the pilgrim's life. During the Middle Ages, for example, the three great destinations for pilgrims were Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago De Compostela, Spain. But millions make a pilgrimage to a neighboring parish as is the custom on Holy Thursday evening. There are places around Chicago in Wisconsin and in Indiana where people go for a day of prayer. In Rome a pilgrim may visit the

four major basilicas: St. Peter's, St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran and St. Paul Outside the Walls. Assisi is the center of our Franciscan world. Again, it's not so much the place but the mindset of the pilgrim that is most important: to allow God to touch one's heart and change one's life. This is why I contend that to lead pilgrims and to be a pilgrim myself are privileges.

This cross is atop **Mount Nebo**, which is 2,330 feet above sea level. Jericho and



Jerusalem are often visible across the parched, arid landscape. Moses saw the Promised Land from this vantage point but didn't reach it. We celebrated the Eucharist here also. This crucifix bridges the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament. The poisonous desert serpent Moses delivered people from is entwined around the form of Jesus, the New Adam, the New Moses who leads us through suffering and death to new life. We are baptized into the Paschal Mystery, our way of life established by Jesus. The rhythm of **Pascha** carries us through our Gethsemane days to those when a tomb is shattered and we reach a new plateau of life. Rejoice because all of life is a journey and our ultimate pilgrimage is to the New Jerusalem, the everlasting Banquet of the Lamb. **Alleluia!**

Thank you for your yearlong support of St. Peter's. We friars walk with you, pray for you and continue to serve you with joy. May God fill you with peace and everything that is good. **Alleluia!**

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