

where Jesus was kept after his interrogation and abuse in the early hours of Good Friday. The cock crowed after Peter's denials because it was the early hours of the morning. After exploring this church, we returned to the bus and made the short drive back to our hotel. Since we had some free time, I brought a group to some of the shops in the old city in the Christian quarter. We looked around a fantastic religious goods store that had plenty of antique icons and beautiful chalices. Since I couldn't afford anything in the store, I convinced the store owner to take out a beautiful painting of Abraham and Sarah hosting the three angelic visitors as accounted in the Book of Genesis. I took some quick pictures of the painting, and I am hoping that I can have it printed and framed for the old church as some point in the future. That might cost \$150 for the printing and framing, as opposed to the \$4,000 they wanted for the original! Also, Amer saw pictures of a chalice that I wanted, and he started to make some negotiations. He hopes to bring it as a Christmas gift for our cluster in December 2018 when he visits the United States.

I also went on a search for the Judgment Gate and the "eye of the needle" which Jesus mentions in the Gospels. We found it and went inside and prayed at this site. This place was important because there are two opposing views of where Jesus was condemned to death and therefore, which path Jesus took on his way to Calvary... but both of those paths converge at the Judgment Gate and follow the same path to Golgotha from there. So to pray at the threshold of the Judgment Gate is to pray where Jesus definitely walked on the His way to Calvary. We ate a buffet dinner and turned in early this evening, as tomorrow would begin very early.

Our trip really had its culmination on **Sunday, September 9th**. The hotel gave us all a wake-up call at 4:30 am. We met downstairs at 5:15 and boarded the bus. I turned to Ella Bourgeois who handed me a book, and I smiled gratefully at her. Ella brought my version of the Stations of the Cross with her to the Holy Land, and what a privilege it would be to pray the Stations this morning as we walked the Via Dolorosa. As we left the hotel, I read the introduction to the Stations as David drove us around the walls of the old city. We quickly departed the bus while it was still dark, and silently walked into the old city into the Muslim quarter, near the remains of the Antonian fortress—one of the two spots where theologians and archaeologists believe Jesus would have been scourged and condemned. This is where we began the Via Dolorosa walk in the wee hours of the morning. Amer gave me his portable microphone and we all put on our headsets. I then led the group in the Stations. We paused at different places in the city where bronze markers on the wall told us to read each Station. By 7:00 am we had completed the Stations at the tomb of Jesus in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. Amer brought our group to the anointing stone (where Jesus' body was prepared for burial), to the Cave of Adam (where Adam was presumably buried), and we climbed up to the second floor to the level of Calvary. Everyone got on their hands and knees, one at a time, and placed their hand into a hole in the rock. This was the place where Jesus' cross stood as He hung there, dying for our salvation. The blood ran down the cross and pooled in this hole. To be there and place your hand into that hole made Good Friday very real. We also went to see the chapel of St. Helena, where the True Cross was found in the fourth century. We visited the column of the scourging. And then, we went to the spot where St. Mary Magdalene encountered Jesus on Easter Sunday morning, where she thought that He was a gardener/worker. All of these places are under the roof of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

We then gathered on the right side of Calvary to celebrate Sunday Mass. What a unique privilege to celebrate Mass on the rocky cliff where Jesus died for you and for me. I was very nervous to be there, and I had to take my shoes off here, too. HOLY GROUND! Deacon Leon's legs were burning, but he had his shoes laced so tight that he couldn't remove his, but also knew that he was standing on holy ground. After Mass, we were given free time for the rest of the day. Almost all of us waited in line to enter the Holy Sepulchre to see the burial tomb of Jesus and pray within it, and to witness that it was empty. It was Sunday, and it was the day to focus on the RESURRECTION. Some of our group went shopping after we finished touring the basilica, and some of us went to the "wailing wall" or Western wall of the ancient Jewish Temple. I went back to the Judgment Gate with those who wanted to see it, and we purchased a chalice from the Russian Orthodox nuns to be used at St. Stephen. About eight of us enjoyed a really good lunch at Nafoura Restaurant at the Jaffa Gate. Mitch Caronna and I went to see the archaeological remains of Herod's Palace, where the other half of theologians, archaeologists, and scholars believe that Jesus was condemned to death. We had a great dinner that night and Amer, Leon, Denise, and I had a good discussion on the terrace that night and Amer discussed his plan to get the chalice that I wanted.