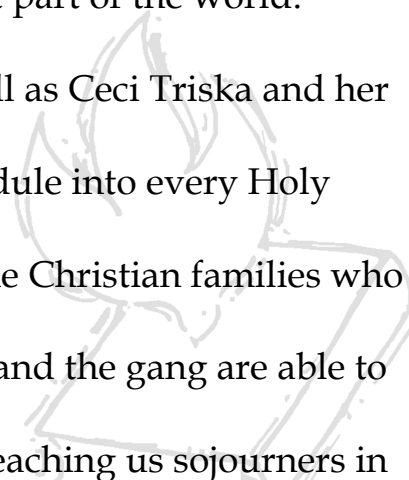


Homily
Holy Family - B
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 26-27, 2020

Sir 3: 2-6, 12-14
Ps 128: 1-2, 3, 4-5
Col 3: 12-21
Lk 2: 22-40

As I preached at my Christmas homily, the last day when we departed from the Holy Land was a difficult one. With the announcement that the United States Embassy would be moved to Jerusalem, much violence and anger came as a result. As our group was departing Tel Aviv hours before the chaos ensued, I spent a good deal of time praying during our flight for the good people we met of every faith tradition in Israel, many of whom becoming victims of the political ordeal that ensued.

Lost in the political landscape was the plight of the Christian families who represent only 1% of the population in that part of the world. Thanks to **SELECT INTERNATIONAL TOURS** as well as Ceci Triska and her **"JOURNEYS OF FAITH" PILGRIMAGES** which schedule into every Holy Land journey an evening to break bread with the Christian families who live in that part of the world. By doing so, Ceci and the gang are able to support the Christian cause in the Holy Land, teaching us sojourners in



the process about the difficult lives these Christians endure to support their families and community.

As part of this special evening, our assembly of forty-five pilgrims were split into smaller groups that were driven to these homes for a night of a home-cooked meal and stories about the faith. When we returned from our pilgrimage, I asked the group to share their experiences in the homes of these holy families on this Holy Family weekend so that you may learn of their stories as well. As you will see, what these families have to endure is very similar to what some in our own community have endured as well, the difference being that our plight often is an emotional, spiritual or financial one; theirs often involves the type of discrimination and social rejection that we may not experience in such a radical way (or maybe we do - it all depends on our own particular dispositions in life).

For those families who felt comfortable, we have provided their addresses for you to contact them. On a parish level, we will figure out a way for our parish organizations to offer some type of support on our

behalf to these families in the Holy Land; perhaps you may choose to do so on your own. As we remember on this particular weekend the efforts that St. Joseph and our Blessed Mother extended themselves for the sake of their son and family, perhaps in our hearts we can do the same for those who seek out our prayers and support, both in our local community and throughout the world.



This all said, I would like to begin with the family I visited in the Holy Land. A group of us pilgrims visited the family of **SAMI &**

JUMMANA ISHAK. Married with four children (aged nine months to about fourteen years old), Sami and Jummana were extremely gracious to all of us who visited, serving us a Palestinian dish called **MUSAKHAN** (a pastry shell filled with “sumac” browned chicken, sautéed onions and Palestinian spices).

During our visit, we learned that Sami was born on the Jewish side of Israel, while Jummana was born on the Palestinian side. Even though both were Orthodox Christians and attended services on a regular basis, nevertheless Jummana often is not permitted to enter the Jewish side of town without an escort (we even found out that the license plates in Jerusalem have two specific colors - one for Jews and one for Palestinians; Palestinian cars are not permitted to drive on Jewish roads). The Ishak children attend a private, Christian school where both Christian and Muslim children learn together in the relative safety of Jerusalem (which the children have to travel an hour a day, each way!). The kids were absolutely wonderful during our visit - the nine-month old kept taking all the dates from the candy tray and presenting them to me (what kid doesn't like to touch all the candy?), while the middle daughter was shy but very excited when Julie shared pictures of her pets from the states with the kids. All the kids in the family speak Arabic and Hebrew; they are learning English in school as well.

You can write to Sami Ishak at the address - Jaffa Gate, Old City - P.O. Box 14281 - 91142 Jerusalem, Israel.



(By Alicia Tocwish - St. Patrick's, Joliet & Lori Janek - St. Joseph's on the Brazos Catholic Church, Brazoria, TX) "The 'Sharing the Bread' dinner was an incredible

experience which allowed us a glimpse into one family's daily life and culture. Seven of us had the privilege of sharing a meal with **JAWDATT, JEANY, MAGGIE AND MAGGIE (GRANDMA) FACOUSEH**. We were greeted at the door by Maggie, an energetic two-year-old that was ready to entertain and greet us into her home.

Gathered around the table we shared a meal, told stories and there was a lot of laughter! This allowed us to not only see firsthand our unique cultural differences, but more importantly, what we all have in common. Jeany prepared a scrumptious meal that consisted of vegetable soup, salad, rice and the most amazing fish casserole. The conversation was as lively and diverse as you can imagine when you have that many

women together (the men in the group were definitely outnumbered). Jeany is a stay home mom and her husband is an artisan and musician. We talked about the importance of family, education, religion, music and politics. Grandma Maggie said she felt isolated during her month-long visit to the United States; she said that we are all too busy to enjoy each other's company.

Jeany explained to us the challenges of being a Christian woman in Israel. This made us think of how lucky we are (as women), to be able to go running at any time of the day or to be able to enjoy movie theaters and many other liberties we take for granted.

As our two-hour visit with the family came to a close, we exchanged gifts and email addresses. We learned that, at the end of the day, no matter which side of the globe we are on, Christians everywhere desire the same things and hold on to the same fundamental beliefs. It was a unifying experience and I'm so grateful that we can stay in touch with our family through social media."

You can write to Jawdatt Facouseh at 225 Manger Street - 00970 Bethlehem, West Bank.



(From Dan Wojnarowski, pictured top left, parishioner of St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Joliet as well as Steve & Kathy Joutras, parishioners

of St. Joseph's Church, Manhattan and Mike & Kathy Lawler from St. Mary's Church of Vernon Hills). A group of us were hosted by **SALIBA SAFAR** (second to the left) and his mom **NADIA** (center). Saliba & Nadia are Syriac Orthodox Christians who fled Syria and moved subsequently to Bethlehem. The family often prays at the local Catholic Church since it's a block away. Saliba is twenty-seven years old, earned a degree in hotel management but can't find a job in that field. He works at the olive wood store we visited.

Saliba told us that in 2003, Israeli soldiers took over their house for over a month while the wall separating the Jews from the Palestinians was being built. Several years ago the Israeli army took over their house for nine months. The family of five was relegated to staying in one

room, not even being allowed to use the bathroom. Saliba was genuinely scared about the current political situation, knowing it will slow tourism, which he depends on for his livelihood. He said he does not know what he will do if he loses his job or his home because he has little savings.



Six years ago, his father was having a heart attack and when they went to the hospital, they wouldn't let them in unless they

paid upfront. His father subsequently died at age fifty-three - a very sad time for the family. Nadia receives no widow benefits, insurance, or pension; her adult children care for her. Saliba had to quit going to college after his father died to support his mother. He moved into her apartment so as to pay only one rent. Despite their hardships, they were gracious hosts. Saliba asks that we pray for them and be ambassadors on their behalf in America. (Also with this group was Thad Stewart from St. Patrick's Church, pictured below to the far right.)

Saliba can get mail c/o Jerusalem New Souvenir Store. P O box 22198, Mt of Olive - Alsuwanch Street - Jerusalem, Israel 91241



(From Mark Cotter, *third from the left, bottom* - from St. Anne's Church in Pittsburgh)
I visited the family of **LAURA FAIRUZ**. She is divorced, not

by her own choosing but because her husband went out of the country to Venezuela and was prevented from returning. Because of his length of stay, he is no longer able to be admitted back to Bethlehem. The mother and her children live with her mother (the grandmother) along with her sisters. I recently got an email from Laura, who wrote the following: *How are you? Thank you for this nice message and also for the pictures. I will also send you the pictures I made. Responding to your nice mail, it was also a great pleasure to meet you. You are now part of our family, you should know that you have now a second home in Bethlehem and you will be in our prayers. The Lord be with you and your family, Wishing you a Merry*

Christmas from the birth place of our Lord Jesus, the city of Bethlehem. Laura & family

Each of these families have a story to share; we all have a story to share. When we actually *sit down* and talk, when we spend time with each other, when we learn from each other, when we *love* each other as families united together by this bond of God, we understand and reflect this image of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. I ask you first of all to pray for those families who suffer, whether they be from Israel or other parts of the world. So many families suffer much worse than we do here in the states. I ask you to spend time with your own family – to gather around the dinner table, to *talk* to one another, to listen, to love and even to pray with the people who live under our roof.

Let us always remember *never* to take our families for granted – our moms, dads, brothers, sisters and so on. May we learn that this gift from God is the one with whom we often forget and neglect to spend time. May we realize that those living under our roof shine forth the image of the Holy Family. Let us learn how the Holy Family endured so that we

may do the same with those who live under our roof and for all people
that we meet. This is our prayer.

Un grupo de peregrinos visitamos a la familia de **SAMI & JUMMANA ISHAK**. Casados con cuatro hijos (de nueve meses a unos catorce años), Sami y Jummana fueron extremadamente amables con todos los que nos visitaron y nos sirvieron un plato palestino llamado **MUSAKHAN** (una cáscara de hojaldre rellena de pollo dorado con zumaque, cebollas salteadas Especies palestinas).

Durante nuestra visita, supimos que Sami nació en el lado judío de Israel, mientras que Jummana nació en el lado palestino. A pesar de que ambos eran cristianos ortodoxos y asistían a los servicios de manera regular, sin embargo, a menudo a Jummana no se le permite ingresar al lado judío de la ciudad sin una escolta (incluso descubrimos que las matrículas en Jerusalén tienen dos colores específicos: uno para judíos y otro uno para los palestinos; los automóviles palestinos no pueden circular por las carreteras judías). Los niños Ishak asisten a una escuela cristiana privada donde tanto niños cristianos como musulmanes aprenden juntos en la relativa seguridad de Jerusalén (¡donde los niños tienen que viajar una hora al día, en cada sentido!). Los niños fueron absolutamente maravillosos durante nuestra visita: el niño de nueve meses seguía tomando todos los dátiles de la bandeja de dulces y presentándomelos (¿a qué niño no le gusta tocar todos los dulces?), Mientras que la hija del medio era tímida pero muy emocionada cuando Julie compartió fotos de sus mascotas de los estados con los niños. Todos los niños de la familia hablan árabe y hebreo; también están aprendiendo inglés en la escuela.

La cena “Sharing the Bread” fue una experiencia increíble que nos permitió vislumbrar la vida y la cultura cotidianas de una familia. Siete de nosotros tuvimos el privilegio de compartir una comida con with **JAWDATT, JEANY, MAGGIE AND MAGGIE (GRANDMA) FACOUSEH**. Fuimos recibidos en la puerta por Maggie, una enérgica niña de dos años que estaba lista para entretenernos y recibirnos en su casa.

Reunidos alrededor de la mesa compartimos una comida, contamos historias y ¡hubo muchas risas! Esto nos permitió no solo ver de primera mano nuestras diferencias culturales únicas, sino más importante aún, lo que todos tenemos en común. Jeany preparó una comida deliciosa que consistió en sopa de verduras, ensalada, arroz y la cazuela de pescado más increíble. La conversación fue tan animada y diversa como puedes imaginar cuando tienes tantas mujeres juntas (los hombres del grupo definitivamente fueron superados en número). Jeany es ama de casa y su esposo es artesano y músico. Hablamos sobre la importancia de la familia, la educación, la religión, la música y la política. La abuela Maggie dijo que se sintió aislada durante su visita de un mes a Estados Unidos; dijo que estamos demasiado ocupados para disfrutar de la compañía del otro. Jeany nos explicó los desafíos de ser una mujer cristiana en Israel. Esto nos hizo pensar en la suerte que tenemos (como mujeres), de poder salir a correr a cualquier hora del día o de poder disfrutar de las salas de cine y muchas otras libertades que damos por sentado.

Cuando nuestra visita de dos horas con la familia llegó a su fin, intercambiamos regalos y direcciones de correo electrónico. Aprendimos que, al final del día, no importa en qué lado del mundo estemos, los cristianos en todas partes desean las mismas cosas y se aferran a las mismas creencias fundamentales. Fue una experiencia unificadora y estoy muy agradecido de poder mantenernos en contacto con nuestra familia a través de las redes sociales “.

Un grupo de nosotros fuimos hospedados por **SALIBA SAFAR** y su mamá **NADIA**. Saliba y Nadia son cristianos ortodoxos siríacos que huyeron de Siria y se trasladaron posteriormente a Belén. La familia a menudo ora en la iglesia católica local, ya que está a una cuadra de distancia. Saliba tiene veintisiete años, se licenció en gestión hotelera pero no encuentra trabajo en ese campo. Trabaja en la tienda de madera de olivo que visitamos.

Saliba nos dijo que en 2003, los soldados israelíes se apoderaron de su casa durante más de un mes mientras se construía el muro que separaba a los judíos de los palestinos. Hace varios años, el ejército israelí se apoderó de su casa durante nueve meses. La familia de cinco fue relegada a quedarse en una habitación, ni siquiera se le permitió usar el baño. Saliba estaba realmente asustado por la situación política actual, sabiendo que ralentizará el turismo, del que depende para su sustento. Dijo que no sabe qué hará si pierde su trabajo o su casa porque tiene pocos ahorros.

Hace seis años, su padre estaba sufriendo un infarto y cuando fueron al hospital, no los dejaban entrar a menos que pagaran por adelantado. Su padre murió posteriormente a los cincuenta y tres años, un momento muy triste para la familia. Nadia no recibe beneficios de viuda, seguro ni pensión; sus hijos adultos la cuidan. Saliba tuvo que dejar de ir a la universidad después de la muerte de su padre para mantener a su madre. Se mudó a su apartamento para pagar un solo alquiler. A pesar de sus dificultades, fueron amables anfitriones. Saliba pide que oremos por ellos y seamos embajadores en su nombre en Estados Unidos.

Visité a la familia de **LAURA FAIRUZ**. Está divorciada, no por elección propia sino porque su esposo se fue del país a Venezuela y se le impidió regresar. Debido a la duración de su estadía, ya no puede ser admitido de regreso a Belén. La madre y sus hijos viven con su madre (la abuela) junto con sus hermanas. Recientemente recibí un correo electrónico de Laura, quien escribió lo siguiente: ¿Cómo estás? Gracias por este lindo mensaje y también por las fotos. También te enviaré las fotos que hice. Respondiendo a su amable correo, también fue un gran placer conocerlo. Ahora eres parte de nuestra familia, debes saber que ahora tienes una segunda casa en Belén y estarás en nuestras oraciones. El Señor esté contigo y tu familia, deseándoles una Feliz Navidad desde el lugar de nacimiento de nuestro Señor Jesús, la ciudad de Belén. Laura y familia