FOLLOWING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

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Bríd Ó Reilly

REALISING ANY ambition is a very satisfactory experience and for my husband and myself a trip to the land where Jesus lived and died was very rewarding indeed. In Autumn 1999 we travelled to the Holy Land—an opportune time, as the Millennium was to be celebrated a short few months later.

Leaving behind all the commotion and tedium of Dublin, Heathrow and Tel Aviv Airports we were at last on our way. There was an air of suppressed excitement among all our co-travellers as we headed out into this unique and beautiful land.

In the centre of this land is the Sea of Galilee into which flows the River Jordan, It was in this area Jesus spent time with His friends. On our boat trip on the Sea of Galilee it was very easy to visualise the small fishing boats plying the waters 2000 years ago. Surrounded as it is by mountains, sudden squalls rise up and the wooden boats of the fishermen must often have been in danger.

To renew our Baptismal promises while standing in the Jordan river was a special privilege as was the renewal of our marriage vows in Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle—changing water into wine.

The stories of the Bible came alive in a special way as we watched the shepherds leading their sheep, the Bedouins living in the caves in the hillsides, the miles of bleak desert, the beautiful oasis in the wilderness, which is Jericho, the Inn of the Good Samaritan, the Kidron Valley where many believe the Final Judgement will take place, Capernaum where Jesus lived for a time and from whence he would travel to preach and heal the sick.

The Kidron Valley separates the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount and the old City of Jerusalem. He would have crossed over the Kidron Valley many times on his way to visit his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Ancient tombs dot the landscape along the sides of the Valley and monuments have been carved into the indigenous rock, and include pillars and stone carvings.

The Old city of Jerusalem is surrounded by walls which contain eight gates—seven of which are still open and lead to different quarters of the old city. The eight Gate, Golden Gate was sealed by the Muslims many years ago. Jesus would have taught in the Temple there and would have walked the cobbled streets as we did. Outside the walls of the old city, the new city has developed into a bustling metropolis. It is one of the most interesting cities in the world. Jerusalem stone has been used on the exterior of all the buildings in the new city and in this way the modern Jerusalem, safeguards the historic character of the old city. One of these fine buildings houses the Knesset — the Parliament of Israel. Nearby is the Knesset Menorah—a seven-branched candelabrum — the official symbol of the State of Israel.

Part of the Israel Museum is a separate building especially constructed to house the Dead Sea Scrolls and is named *The Shrine of the Book.* The scrolls were found in caves near the Dead Sea and we visited the place where they were found. They included books of the Bible, commentaries on scripture and extra-Biblical Literature. Many believe that a Jewish sect—the Essenes —were responsible for copying and composing the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some say that, just like John the Baptist, members of the group considered themselves to be called to the wilderness to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. The dome of the building which houses the Dead Sea Scrolls resembles the lid of one of the earthenware jars in which the scrolls were hidden.

One of the many memorable parts of the pilgrimage was carrying a cross along the 'Way of Sorrow' — the Via Dolorosa. The sorrowful journey ends at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which stands in the centre of the Christian Quarter of the City. There were so many places to see and all so very important when Jesus lived that it would be impossible to describe the feelings of a pilgrim as one travels through this wonderful land. It was indeed uplifting to see the Magnificat in the Irish language on the wall at Ein Kerem where Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, to sit beside the well where Mary and Jesus came for water every day in Nazareth, to career up to the top of Mount Tabor by taxi where the Transfiguration took place and to stand overlooking Lake Galilee at the spot where the Sermon on the Mount was preached. One of the most spectacular sights in Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock with its Golden Dome. Work on the Golden Dome was carried out by a company from Northern Ireland.

Several small rivers flow into the River Jordan and one of the most picturesque and interesting is the Wadi Qelt. It enters the Jordan near Jericho. Because of its many springs a rich variety of vegetation and wildlife have evolved around the Wadi. The abundant supply of water and the natural caves along

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the route made the Wadi a popular crossing between Jericho and Jerusalem. Along the edge of the Wadi, a Roman road leads up to the Mount of Olives. Along the stream are remains of aqueducts, fortresses, palaces and monasteries from different periods. One monastery was built on a sheer cliff edge and according to tradition this is where Elijah the Prophet hid and where the ravens brought him bread and meat. The place is also connected with the parents of Mary who were Joachim and Anne.

Archaeologists have been excavating the ruins of past civilisations and many significant historical artefacts have been uncovered. ***The secrets of thousands of years are coming to the surface*** as one traces back to Roman and Byzantine ruins. Ancient cities have been uncovered dating back to 2000years BC.

A visit to the Holy Land as well as being spiritually uplifting is historically interesting in many ways. The landscape is so remarkable in many areas and the culture and lifestyles of the inhabitants so different from our own that experiencing the Jewish and Greek Orthodox ways of life is very interesting. The phenomenon of the Dead Sea is exciting and when we relaxed on its shores we watched as others in our group 'floated' on the water.

We were amazed at the numbers who prayed at the Wailing Wall, enjoyed having photographs taken with the Bedouins and their gaily ornamented camels, listened avidly to our Jewish guide and to our spiritual leader, prayed earnestly at all the holy places and returned home delighted at having had the opportunity to make this very special journey of a lifetime.

D J & MARY: LEITRIM CONNECTION IN CUBA

PICTURED IN CUBA after completing 100 km sponsored walk for The Irish Heart Foundation are, Mary Corrigan, from Newtowngore and D J Carey of Kilkenny hurling fame. D J's Grand Parents came from Drumshambo.