

Chronicle VI of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem

By Martin Hoegger

Jerusalem, Thursday, January 25, 2023.

On the way together

Thanks to our friend **Andraous Jarshan**, we are invited to visit the Sabeel Centre, in the north of Jerusalem. <https://sabeel.org>. Its director, **Omar Haramy**, welcomes us in a very friendly way. The conversation turns to the theme of the "popular faith" which is close to his heart. According to him, it should not be despised, but serve as a springboard for sharing the Gospel. He gives as an example the recipes for cooking on Christian festivals. A video on this topic was very successful

<https://cmc-terrasanta.org/en/media/terra-santa-news/18780/traditional-dishes-with-religious-symbolism>



The aim of Sabeel is to be close to the people in the churches and to listen to them. "Our movement is based on three pillars: inclusion, the search for justice and non-violence," says Omar. "I had a conversation with my four-year-old son's schoolteacher about three pillars. He said to me: 'Oh, but you are a Kindergarten teacher, because our work with children is based on these three values!'"

Regarding the JC2033 initiative, he likes the idea of "walking together towards 2033". "Sabeel" means "path" in Arabic. He also sees the need to revitalize faith in the risen Christ: "The Church, is hung up on Good Friday. We are not an Easter Church. The resurrection of Christ does not animate our life always!"

Omar also tells us that the people of the Churches do not like the unhealthy division over the date of Easter. He is happy that JC2033 wants to create a popular movement to celebrate the Risen One. This is what Sabeel also wants. "We can start walking together on this path, hand in hand," he says, concluding our conversation.

We then take part in a time of prayer that brings us together around a story from Matthew's Gospel in which Jesus impressively denounces the injustice of the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida (11:20-24). We note the closeness of this text to

the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity text, with its call to seek goodness and justice and to put limits on those who practice injustice. (Isaiah 1:17-18).

We are happy to discover in these brothers and sisters a living faith in Jesus who has united us in Him, through prayer and meditation on His Word during this blessed time, concluded by a good meal.

Crush injustice!



In the afternoon we go to the Cenacle at Mount Sion where the Benedictine community of the Abbey of the Dormition (just next door) has invited Christians to an ecumenical celebration. I love this place where Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples, where he appeared to them on Easter evening and where he poured out the Holy Spirit on them. It is reached by climbing narrow stairs, hence its other name of " Upper Room ".

Father **Nikodemus Schnabel** gives a meditation on Psalm 137 which laments exile in Babylon, on the banks of the river. The enemies of the Israelites cynically speak to them of peace and harmony, but there is no peace. This psalm ends with the terrible invective addressed to Babylon: " *Blessed are those who seize your young children to crush them against the rock!* ". The preacher dared to comment on it by saying that this rock is Christ; this psalm speaks of us and calls us to break all injustice against Christ! The absence of peace will not have the last word, it is Jesus who gives it by saying to his disciples, in this place, after his resurrection: " *peace be with you* "!

Jerusalem, Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 January

I conclude the chronicles of this rich week with the last three celebrations in which we participated: in the Ethiopian Orthodox, Evangelical and Greek Catholic Churches. Three different traditions that speak of the richness of the life of the Churches in Jerusalem! Each time, we had the opportunity to get to know new people and to tell them about the " *ecumenical pilgrimage towards 2033* ", by giving them a card that presents it. (You can discover it at the end of this column)

Courage

I have great admiration for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Its members are able to pray all night, from six in the evening to eleven in the morning, singing the 155 psalms by heart (there are five more among them). Participating in one of their liturgies guarantees you a radical change of scenery. On Saturday evening, we attend their prayer for unity in the cathedral in Ethiopia Street.



Among the many biblical texts read during this celebration, this call to courage strikes me: “*Think of him, of how (Jesus) endured such opposition from sinners. And so you won't be discouraged*” (Hebrews 12 ,3). Striving to do good and seeking justice requires courage. Following Christ and through the power of his Spirit, it is always

given to us again if we trust him and walk his path. At the end of the celebration, dances are performed by an intergenerational group from the church.

Enthusiasm

The next day Daniel and I take part in the service of the “*Evangelical Alliance Church*”, an evangelical Church established in Jerusalem since 1890. The service begins with a long period of praise led with enthusiasm by a young singer. The drummer is none other than the pastor **Mazen**



Nasrawi who gives a no less fiery sermon on the call to a coherent Christian life, based on the letter to the Ephesians (4,17-24). “*In the Christian life there are things to be renounced, to take off the old garment of our selfishness and to put on the new garment of Christ. But we can only be transformed in the presence of God and we have to learn to enter into it*”, he says. At the end of the service, we drink a coffee with him explaining to him the reason for our visit.

“**Artoclasia**”



The last celebration in the Greek Catholic Church, presided over by Archbishop **Yaser Rasmi Hanna Al - Ayyash** ends with an "artoclasia" », the blessing of five loaves and wine, given to the people.

The sharing of bread and wine at the end of the celebration (photo: Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem)

It is also shared in expectation of a full Eucharistic communion...for which Christians in Jerusalem and throughout the world have prayed during this week.

During snack time I meet Archbishop **Adolfo Tito Yllana** , "Apostolic Nuncio to Israel and Cyprus and Apostolic Delegate to Jerusalem and Palestine". I explain to him that in 1933 the Catholic Church celebrated the first "Jubilee of Redemption" and again in 1983 and that it would be nice to prepare an "Ecumenical Jubilee of Redemption" in 2033.



Soberly, he answers me that it is now that we must begin this preparation by giving Christ a place among us: he will enlighten us and lead us where he desires.



With great joy, I saw again Msgr **Jules Joseph Zerey** , the Greek-Catholic Archbishop Emeritus. We visited him when we came to Jerusalem in 2017.

<https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/106-jerusalem-en4.html>

He immediately shared his passion for unity with me again: "My mother was Greek-Orthodox and my father Greek-Catholic. I have suffered from the division of the

churches for more than 60 years. Every day I pray the Jesus prayer for unity and I ask the Holy Spirit to hasten the realization of unity "

My prayer is also that the march towards 2033 will help reconcile us around the living Christ who will one day break bread and drink new wine with us in his Kingdom. Already now he unites us in himself because he knows the ways of our hearts to put his peace there. May we know how to give visible signs of his peace and bear witness to it together... "so that the world may believe"!

Martin Hoegger