

## LAKE OF GALILEE

We all arose after our first nights stay at the Golan Hotel in the heart of Tiberias. Every pilgrim commented on the breathtaking view from the hotel which surveys the Sea of Galilee in anticipation of the events of the day, the first of which will begin by going on the lake itself.

Sea of Galilee (also know in scripture as the Sea of Tibe'ri-as c.f. Jn 21:1)

Outstanding in natural beauty, the North is distinctive and different from the South where later this the week we will make our way, as Jesus does in Matthew, Mark and Luke, to Jerusalem.

*'Duc en altum'* – Put out into the Deep'

Jesus, we are told by our spiritual guide Fr John Farrell OP, avoided the privileged Tiberias in favour of those in the hill country and the shore, from Magdala to Capernaum, be they the poor or fishermen.

We embarked on a boat on the Sea of Galilee and after a rousing flying of the Union Jack and the National Anthem we were left for a few moments of silence. From the vantage of the boat we were directed to observe the hills, the landscape or typology of discipleship, 'what you now see, He saw!' From the feeding of the 5000, the Sermon on the Mount, the calming of the waters; the atmosphere is saturated in the Gospel.

The water of the Sea is home to 27 types of fish with all except one of them being Kosher, we are told (incidentally its the Catfish as it has no fins and scales). The water's motion described as 'hypnotic' by one Pilgrim, makes one feel more and more at ease as we glide along. However we are reminded in our reflection of the turbulence that life can often bring. As we reflect, Fr John uses Psalm 107 to help us to consecrate those moments of our lives stricken with doubt and fear, much like the disciples in a similar boat centuries earlier, to trust in the Lord whose word can just as easily calm our storms.

One pilgrim joyfully expressed how apt it is to start our Pilgrimage here: 'its great to start here as it is relatively unchanged since the time of Jesus, its authentic.'

## CAPERNAUM

Here Jesus taught and preached extensively, cast out demons, performed miracles of healing and even sat down to dinner with Peter and his mother-in-law. As before, Jesus seems to prefer this place for its poverty, its poor houses of basic materials, but this conceals a deeper truth. Caper'na-um, we are told is 'by the sea and in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali' (Matthew 4:13). It is here in this border town between two tribes that the evangelist Matthew sees the fulfilment of the Prophet Isaiah: 'The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light' (Matthew 4:15). These Galilean regions were the first to be ravaged by Assyrian invasions from 733 to 732 B.C. (2 Kings 15:29). Jesus seems to target Galilee as the place to begin reversing the tragedies of Israel's history by restoring the 12 tribes in the New Covenant (cf. 15:24; 19:28; Rev 7:4-8).

We meditated on the story of the paralysed man (Mark 2:1-12) being lowered through one of these very roofs, which would have been wooden and so easily torn apart. We are reminded Jesus 'saw their faith' (Mark 2:5) i.e., the faith of the four men who carried the paralytic and we

were invited to, like these men, bring our desires and troubles - be they families members, friends who are ill or away from the faith - to Jesus in the same trust and confidence.

'Look at the stones and see the story they tell,' our guide tells us. The excitement of the day is growing. We speak to one pilgrim who tell us this is her fourth time, when asked why she keeps coming back she simply and passionately explains 'to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.'

## MOUNT OF BEATITUDES

We arrived at the Mount of Beatitudes where Jesus proclaimed perhaps his most famous sermon (Matthew 5:48), a sermon of *Beatitudo* (blessed or happy), in a similar spirit of beatitude we begin Mass where Cardinal Vincent appropriately gives us his own sermon on the Beatitudes on the very same mount they were first proclaimed.

'Let us lay a foundation stone', the Cardinal begins as he elegantly paints the image of the trip as he sees it, one of a diocesan family on behalf of many others at home brought together in the life of the Lord. 'This Mass will be unforgettable,' he explains, 'not because it is any different in substance, but because of the place'. The Cardinal then invited all the pilgrimage, young and old, red coach and green coach, to allow this awareness of the place to permeate our whole awareness. We are invited to reflect first of all on 2 points:

- The Beatitudes, as we see presented in Scripture 'probably weren't dictated word for word, the congregated must have been spellbound. Instead we have a crystallised version, distilled and preserved through the lively oral tradition of the Jews. A very precious treasure.'
- When Jesus came down from this spot, people were waiting for him, and he healed them. The words were affirmed and made valid by his actions.

The Beatitudes, we are told, can be seen as a summation of the Christian Faith. In the same way we may often have had difficulty in trying to sum up in a mission statement the ethos of a school or company, but see how necessary they are. 'The Beatitudes is our mission statement', the Cardinal emphatically says, 'and it's a wonderful one. It brings together our joys and longings, whatever state of life we are in it speaks to our hearts, it is truly inclusive. Whether we are mourning, striving to be pure in heart, merciful etc, we must allow the Beatitudes to speak to our lives.'

The Cardinal, having giving us these 'foundation stones' proceeded to advise us of two concrete tasks as we sat in this place of sublime beauty and significance:

- Make these words your own as the disciples did. Ask yourself, if I had to distil them, what would be most important for me?
- We must take our reflections and as Jesus did convert them into action, into virtue.

Peter was referred to earlier in the day as our 'hero' by Fr John Farrell OP and Cardinal Vincent used this motif, as well as the fortunate coincidence that we celebrate in the universal Church the Dedication of the Basilicas of Sts Peter and Paul. We must, the Cardinal encouraged, like St Peter emulate his heroism to face the challenges we face day to day. Perhaps in this regard silence is more important than words. The Cardinal then invited us for a moment to listen to God 'whispering to our hearts' about the pattern God wants to make in our hearts.

## TABGHA

Tabgha, derived from the Greek *Heptapegon* meaning 7 springs, is the site of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. This is the only miracle, besides the Resurrection, that is recorded in all four Gospels. On this site Jesus took 5 loaves and 2 fish and shared them with 5000 men. The place is one of striking simplicity and beauty. The Benedictine Monastery bears the famous mosaic of the multiplication of the loaves, synonymous with pilgrimage with the Holy Land, and under the altar has the rock traditionally said to be the place where this miracle occurred. Although a short visit, there was a profound and striking contrast from our other encounters of the day, making it a memorable experience in its own right.

#### PRIMACY OF PETER

When Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi he announced: 'on this rock I will build my Church' (Matthew 16:18). After the Resurrection beginning in the 21st Chapter of John, Jesus reveals himself clandestinely. Reminiscent of an earlier account in the Gospels, Simon Peter was fishing on the lake with some of the disciples, when Jesus called out to them to cast their nets for a catch on the right side of the boat catching fish of such quantity 'they were not able to haul it in' (John 21:6). Jesus then challenges Peter to live up to his own words, since he earlier declared that even if the other disciples should fall away from Christ, his commitment would never falter (Matthew 26:33). 'Feed my lambs', Jesus says entrusting to Peter the task of shepherding his entire flock. The Primacy of Peter is affirmed and he is to be 'chief Shepherd' (1 Peter 5:4).

We saw the Church with the main feature being the *Mensa Christi* (the Table of the Christ) where Jesus said 'come and have breakfast' (John 21:12) and was the third time that Jesus revealed himself to his disciples. The day ended with a poignant reflection led by Fr John Farrell at sunset facing out toward the Sea of Galilee. Imagine, we were told, looking at the mountains of Bashan (now the Golan Heights) and consider that Jesus glanced on the very shore on which we were standing. We should, like the beloved Disciple, confess 'It is the Lord', and like Peter when that recognition is made fly toward with total disregard of self that comes from love. We thus, beginning this momentous journey in the footsteps of the Lord ended with a litany of the 'hero of the day' St Peter, Prince of the Apostles.