

“Cross into Macedonia and help us”

This quotation from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 16.9), was the leading-string which guided this group of pilgrims in the footsteps of St. Paul, 24-31 July, 2008. An ecumenical journey to Macedonia. The Monasteries of the Meteors.

Our pilgrimage started from the Basilica of St. Nicholas in Bari. Fraternally welcomed by the Dominican Fathers in Bari and by Sr. M. Consuelo Serafin, organiser of the journey, we soon felt ourselves to be a large, happy family, looking forward to meeting our beloved Orthodox brothers and to following Paul’s itinerary in Ma-

cedonia under the guidance of the Lord and of his Word, and following Paul’s example. After landing in Epiro, we received a fatherly and affectionate welcome from Fr. Rosario Scognamiglio, our spiritual guide during the journey which introduced us to the world of the Greek Orthodox Christians. We came to appreciate and love

these distant brothers of ours, and above all we came to know St. Paul better. We felt we had almost come face to face with him during times of unforgettable catechesis, in moments of prayer, in meditation on some meaningful passages in the Pauline Letters and in those places in Greece where he had preached.

*An overall view of the Meteors monasteries in Thessaly, (Greece)
The monastery of Russano, inhabited by Orthodox nuns*



Our introduction to Oriental spirituality truly reached the highest peaks during our visit to the Monasteries of the Meteors, in Thessaly. Surrounded by steep mountains, on the top of steep rocky peaks, the very air we breathed was light and incense-scented. It was really moving to see those monasteries, tenaciously outstretched towards heaven, and to think of the hunger and thirst for God deeply felt by the souls within. The encounter with a young novice monk and his more than fraternal welcome was indeed unforgettable: his luminous eyes in love with God and his radiant smile seemed to embrace us with simplicity and joy. At the end of our visit the golden chiming of the bells, festively rung by our young monk on the highest pinnacle of the monastery, accompanied us in our descent into the valley, an unforgettable farewell.

The theological depth of the icons and of the Orthodox Liturgy, in contrast with the externally poor and sober Byzantine churches, left us quite astonished and speechless. The roughness of the surrounding landscapes harmonises admirably with the artistic beauty and the spiritual treasure within the monasteries. It is amazing to reflect on how much the Christian faith sustained the Greek people throughout the centuries of Turkish domination.

The emotional intensity became quite indescribable when we arrived in Macedonia. At Philippi we gathered near the Baptistry of Lydia for the celebration of the Eucharist. We renewed our baptismal promises, and medi-

tated on passages from the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St. Paul. We were stirred to unforgettable emotion by hearing again, and reliving, the missionary experience of Paul among the Philippians. Just as in the time of the apostles, we too were able to experience the affection and Christian solidarity which even today animates the hearts of the Philippians.

In Thessalonica we also received an affectionate and fraternal welcome to the famous Patriarchal Centre of Patristic Studies, a centre for the study and safekeeping of precious manuscripts and ancient codices of patrology and Sacred Scriptures. We were deeply moved by the brief moments of prayer in the Church of the Bladaton, the first place in Thessalonica where St. Paul preached.

Our Pauline journeyings and our visits to some of the most prominent places where St Paul preached in Macedonia filled us with new enthusiasm for the Christian life and a deeper love for the Lord. The words which St. Paul addressed to the Philippians sounded closer and more meaningful than ever, 'Imitate me, brothers...' Surely it is up to us to respond to this Pauline invitation! For him, Christ was everything: the Lord, Life, and Salvation. Is it not so for each one of us?

Each of us, in our visit to the tribune of St. Paul in Berea, was able to hear in our hearts the echo of the voice of St. Paul who proclaimed the Gospel in that place. After the Eucharistic celebration, we were cordially received by the Archimandrite G. Chrysostom, in the residence of

the Metropolitan. On this occasion also the Lord granted us a moment of very heartfelt prayer. We felt truly welcomed as brothers and sisters! The prayer that we made together to the Lord through the intercession of St. Paul expressed the common desire that he may grant peace and unity to his Church throughout the world.

When we came back from Macedonia, we carried in our hearts the complete devotion of the Apostle to the Lord Jesus and his Gospel as a beautiful example and a fruitful inspiration. May the brotherly welcome offered to us in Macedonia be an example of love among all Christians, as we await our return to full unity in the one Church of Christ.

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