

**Guided Travel to the Land of the Scriptures Using the Lens of Archaeology to  
Encounter the Peoples, their History, Traditions, Landscape, Cultures,  
Languages, Belief Systems, Hospitality and More Importantly to Encounter  
The Human Experience of Faith in a New Way, By Pulane**

This past month I had the fortune and blessing to join 19 others on a Biblical Study and Travel Program organised by Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago, where I'm currently studying for a Masters of Arts degree in Biblical Ministry. I was one of several theological students taking this particular course for credit but there were some among us who were auditing the course as a precursor to taking up future study at CTU, some were just interested in making an in-depth pilgrimage, all were participating for the opportunity to deepen their faith life with a view to also enrich their ministries in different settings around the world. We were a cohort of mostly religious men of different congregations two priests amongst us, 4 religious women 1 lay woman, an age range from 20s to 60s and representing about 5 countries!

One of the women was Marianne Tavares, a Religious of the Sacred Heart who worked in St Gemma's for years with Brigid Murphy! Our fearless leader and guide, Professor Laurie Brink, OP, who had a very rigorous program for us indeed. We had to start each day early in order to complete our full itinerary and each day there was a student assistant to help keep us together and ensuring we never left anyone behind. We had come to be a community indeed and it was fun learning each other's personalities, stories, favourite meal choices. We also prayed and played together, some took early morning runs, some swam and all of us shared our reflections and research. Those of us taking the course for credit had to present to the group a question of scripture connected to a site we visited that we were researching on and share what we had uncovered thus far. My presentation was about the scene of Jesus walking on the water of the sea of Galilee – which is actually just a large inland lake that was important in the life of the peoples who settled around it.

One thing about people of the Ancient Near East, they were built different for the distances they travelled and the stoned staircases of cities built on mountains they climbed! Even at my age, I cannot fathom making some of the treks we made just to fulfil pillars of my faith! Especially when you can be turned away if found unworthy because an animal, you'd brought for offering didn't respond to a prompting from the priest or spiritual leader! I also had respect for the people in these countries who work to preserve and look after these sites to support the tourism it brings and compassion for the ones who lost their livelihoods due to the closure of borders and restrictions brought on by the pandemic. I feel that there was an enthusiasm that I could relate to from similar circumstances in my country. I was surprised to also learn of the land policy in Israel-Palestine that is like the land policy in my country regarding ownership and leasing. Like in Botswana, it is a problem no matter what your status is, whether citizen or foreign resident. The other similarity with Israel was the distribution of water. They have a good irrigation system and a National Water Carrier, like the pipe project that was started in my country but often has challenges with distribution.

The most unique adventure, though, was receiving hospitality, plenty of food in all three countries, and going to the toilet! You cannot wipe your bottom and flush the paper in the toilet: you have to throw that in a bin next to you. This was a HUGE adjustment for me because in Botswana you keep cleanliness of the kitchen, bathroom and toilet strictly. If you have no water connection, rather than telling people not to flush used toilet paper, you keep a pit latrine some distance from the house on your plot so that you don't use water for flushing. Instead, you keep a place for washing up after use

of the pit latrine and regularly clean the latrine area. Saved many a household and still does today. It was entertaining using the squat toilets, if your knees didn't give way.



My Traveling Community on pictured on the Mount of Olives facing the Holiest site in Jerusalem currently sat on by the Mosque of the Dome on the Rock. The present wall is the one built by Suleiman the Great in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.



The Women Standing Defiantly in the Sanctuary Where Women Were Banned from Entering the Inner Sanctuary by the Council of Laodecia



All of us were amazed that Greece is 80% mountainous area. This was the highest point I could climb in my favourite location of Delphi. I learned that the famous Oracle was a girl until, scandal necessitated a minimum age limit of at least 50 years. And this Oracle was not required to be a woman of any particular class or stature: She just had to be Greek. I learned a lot in Greece I had not been aware about even if it was mentioned in a movie or quoted in a book.

## **Personal Powerful Encounter: At the Foot of the Cross – Looking for the Silver Lining whilst Dealing with Constant Anxiety**

On this trip, we were often encouraged to take time for ourselves to pray and reflect. I had a powerful experience at the outdoor chapel on the beach of the grounds of the Benedictine cloister in Tabgha, Israel near Caphernaum by the lake in Galilee. I asked to capture this photo as I was positioning myself on the rocks and then captioned my snapshot reflection photo At the Foot of the Cross, in my personal album on Facebook.

### **Where Am I In This Scene? Situating Myself**

My favourite way to experience of the When I was younger, imagination putting character in the scene drawing or picture! It youth.

In my faith journey too, been sharing one's respect you because their story; they will about your own. One experiences. Usually, it times of uncertainty.



pray with the scriptures is also reflect and make sense of my world: using visualization. we were taught to use our ourselves as the other as if we were there, by way of helped in my childhood and

the most powerful tool has testimony. People don't you know their problems or respect you for "being real" can learn a lot by sharing helps one navigate life and

### **When the Gift Seems to Stop Giving**

The best and most unexpected compliment I ever received from anyone was from one of my friends, Alice. That day – I'm not sure what was going on - she said "You know what, Puli, I really admire your optimism! I don't know how you do it but it's a gift! Keep it up!"

I had a personal reflection here about a pattern in my inner life, of late: Normally, this bare cross at the top, with no bloodied or pierced body, is a symbol of triumph over death, of "joy in the morning after the suffering and grief of a dark night". All you have to do is look up to see it. But to me, at that moment, I realized the anxieties I had been dealing with for a while have finally caught up with me and I can't look up yet... I just need to stay down for some time. Just to see, feel, and acknowledge the unusual, newness, maybe even confusion, sometimes ignorance, brought on by the reality that is hard to process ... before finding the energy to look up again and feel the optimism so as not to let it get me down.