



FINDING *Renewal* IN THE RUINS

Words by Joy Adan

Even those who aren't familiar with St Paul's mission establishing the early Church will know at least some of his writings. Whether it's the passages about uncompromising love in his letter to the Corinthians, or his encouragement to pray without ceasing in his letter to the Thessalonians, St Paul's epistles are often quoted and shared – thousands of years after they were first written and read.

"All his words and sayings are quite special," says **Lillian Ayoub**, whose curiosity about St Paul's conversion and interpretation of the Gospel message led her to cross the globe to follow his missionary path through Greece and Turkey.

Though a seasoned traveller, travelling with Harvest was Lillian's first experience on an organised pilgrimage. "I've done lots of tours before but I've never experienced anything like this," she says. "It's a spiritual and historical journey, and you get to experience it all. It was a perfect balance and was really very uplifting."

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By boat and coach, Lillian travelled under the bright blues of the Mediterranean skyline, starting out at Corinth and exploring sandstone ruins and towering pillars in multiple ancient cities. "It made me realise we are incredibly blessed to have had so many people walk before us who paved the way," she says.

Having the opportunity to explore the north of Greece and walk leisurely through smaller towns along the way to major historic sites, was a highlight for Lillian. "It was great to visit Philippi, Thessaloniki too; the archaeological sites, the mosaics – all places and things I just wouldn't think to go and see."

Among those hidden treasures was the humble, stone cottage on top of the Bulbul mountain, in Turkey. "The House of the Virgin Mary," explains Lillian. "That place was very special." As a mother herself, Lillian discovered a new dimension to her faith in that Marian sanctuary.

It was also her first time travelling by herself, and after decades of working as a nurse and caring for others first, the trip was a welcome opportunity to focus on her own spiritual experience. "I had downtime to focus on what was happening around me, to do a lot of reflecting and meditation, and I could engage with people when I wanted to.

Meteora





House of the Virgin Mary

Everybody was understanding and shared a deeper knowledge of the different things they had experienced."

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I've never travelled on my own before and I was surprised and proud of myself for having done it. It was really special," she says. "Engaging with the group was fantastic as well. I never felt alone. Travelling with like-minded people was really special; you feel that warmth and love of Christianity.

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Among Lillian's group of travellers was **Michael Vainauskas**, who was travelling with his wife on their third pilgrimage. "The priest we travelled with prepared us before we would arrive at the historical sites, extracting bits from the Bible that we might have heard at home during Mass. It helped join the dots," he explains. "Unless you're really into history you wouldn't be prepared to create those links yourself - but bringing it to life was something quite amazing."

The tour group traipsed across the ruins in Ephesus, soaking in the colossal remains of the Temple of Hadrian and the Library of Celsus. They stopped where the Third Ecumenical Council proclaimed Jesus as one person, both human and divine, and Mary as the Virgin Mother in 431AD.

"What brings it to life is when someone says that two thousand years ago, in this very place you're sitting, this significant event happened... it makes you realise those actions had an impact on the world as it stands today. It's very educational, even outside the Christian faith," Michael says. "I didn't go there with the aim of renewal of faith, but after being there you do have that renewal because of the connection you experience."

For Lillian, the spiritual connection with the early Church is one she will carry with her long after returning home. "It opened my eyes and ears to a whole lot of precious things around the world. I would recommend it to anyone who needs their own time and space to grow; I grew so much on this trip," Lillian explains. "I walked with St Paul throughout this journey and learned more about Jesus in so many ways. Visiting the places where St Paul went, and being able to relate these to places I've heard about during Mass, to understand what he and other disciples would have gone through, to walk the path they followed that we now follow today... it was just so amazing."

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Pilgrims share a meal in Greece

