

## Jacinta Burns

Due to the incredible generosity, of the BJ Hickey foundation, I received a scholarship to go on a two-week immersion experience in Israel. The immersion experience was apart of a unit I was undertaking at the University of Notre Dame, called Special Topics in Theology. This unit had three main focus areas; the Gospel of John, the socio-political context of Israel and my experience of being a pilgrim in the biblical land. The two main parts of the immersion experience involved listening to lectures primarily by Dr Scott Lewis and going on different excursions to the holy sites, which linked to the lectures we heard. This enriched our studies and helped us understand the context of the holy site we were visiting. Besides going for my studies, I was also looking forward to a time of both personal and spiritual growth, so that I could bring something back into the different ministries I am involved in.

Our pilgrimage experience took part at the start of Holy Week, which allowed for a whole new experience and encounter with the land. This became particularly insightful for understanding what it means to be a pilgrim in the biblical land. For me, I loved going to the places that brought the biblical narratives to life. An example of this was on Palm Sunday, my pilgrimage group and thousands of other Christians, journeyed up the Mount of Olives. We then processed down the Mount of Olives waving palms and rising into the Old City of Jerusalem. It was such a remarkable encounter and such an honour to do it with a group of inspirational people from all over the world.

Dr Scott Lewis' lectures on the Gospel of John helped me move from unfamiliarity to a richer understanding of the theology and themes. I was very captivated by Father Scott's passion and love for cutting to the heart of what exactly was happening in each narrative. He continually stressed the fact that we need to approach scripture with new eyes, to see what is happening and to interpret it correctly.

Through the socio-political context, I was able to encounter the uniqueness of Israel through eye-opening and confronting experiences. As we spend most of our time in the Old City, it was great to have it all explained to us by Jared, a Jewish tour guide, who helped us unpack the history of the four quarters. Through all our encounters with the different guides, we were able to receive a respectful and honest account about the different situations that are occurring all over Israel.

It was so fantastic to be hosted by the Sion sisters at Ecce Homo. The sisters were so warm, generous and eager for us to have a pilgrimage that made us aware of the different beauty's, struggles, challenges and blessings facing Israel. The scholarship was such a precious gift that allowed for such an incredible opportunity. It has not only transformed my continuing studies in Theology but my faith life as well. The impact this trip has had on my faith is overwhelming and one that is still touching me so deeply.



