

Sunday, March 15th, 2015.

Al Huson, Jordan.

Dear brothers and friends,

peace be with you, and hope from the beautiful land of Jordan, where the wanderings of patriarchs and prophets prepared the way for Christ who, crossing the river, chose to be baptized in these places before beginning His Lent in the desert. I am grateful for having the chance to write to you, and it is with joy filled spirit that I wish to share news about the mission in the small town of Huson, and precisely in the Parish of the Immaculate Conception, where I've been serving as assistant pastor during the last eight months.

Al Huson is located about 25 miles Southeast of the Sea of Galilee and 14 miles away from the Syrian border; it is less than five miles' distance from Irbid, the largest city in the north of Jordan. Christians, once the majority in Al Huson, now make up less than a third of the town's 24,000 citizens. The parish comprises over 300 families and it has a generally "young" air about it; there is a school with over 830 students. The feeling one gets here is that spirit of place familiar to small boroughs: people are welcoming, warm and ready to meet others; everyone is truly hospitable and ever ready to offer a foreign *abuna* (priest) a good cup of Arabic coffee!

Even so, the tragic outcomes of the last few months, and especially those acts of war that have involved the Kingdom of Jordan, have left deep albeit well concealed shadows of fear and uncertainty in the eyes of local Christians. The arrival of numerous Syrian refugees over the past few years has impacted the local economy and daily life. Even here secularization and dominant ideologies reach the under armed minds of the youth through mass media. There is absolute need to announce the hope that comes from the Spirit of the Risen Christ!



In Anjara with the pastor (2nd from left) and two priests of the Institute of the Incarnate Word.

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Together with the pastor we are trying, through different kinds of initiatives, to follow Christ's example, and, in the measure we can, to help both the flock entrusted to our pastoral care and people of other religions who find themselves in need due to the war. One such wonderful initiative is a joint project with Caritas Jordan: the parish schoolrooms have been made available so as to meet the basic educational needs of refugee children and with the help of parish college students (who've become Math, Arabic and English teachers), hundreds of children, who would have otherwise been bereft of education, are learning to read and write.



A soccer game between Syrian children in the parish courtyard.

There is much to do inside the parish school as well; students come from different situations and many have experienced real suffering in their own families. In this context, the years of formation in the *Redemptoris Mater* Seminary of Galilee (besides being a truly wonderful time) are showing themselves as golden talents which I am to invest for the salvation of souls in this mission. What I've learned through theology and philosophy helps me on a daily basis to answer the many questions of the over 100 religion students I teach. Often the questions are existential and very deep, for example: days ago the 11th graders and I asked ourselves what might be the meaning of life... after 40 minutes none of them and managed to find a valid answer, but rather they branded the world's and religiosity's answers as unsatisfactory. They were happy to discover that human beings live because of love, and that Christ has come to manifest and give that love to those who wish to welcome it.

Besides school, I'm involved with the over 500 youth who are part of the Scout movement and of the youth group; pastoral work with the youth certainly is not lacking, but things are going well, thanks to both groups' leaders. Last week I had the grace of participating in a pilgrimage of parish women who gather to pray the rosary and to help

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the poor. As we visited Thisbe, birthplace of the prophet Elijah, I reflected on the mission the Lord is entrusting the Church throughout the world: today the spirit of Elijah is needed - a spirit willing to adhere to the Lord even at the risk of losing everything.



With parishioners in Thisbe, birthplace of the prophet Elijah.

Some musical initiatives which began last year are continuing; three small groups of youth are learning to play guitar, the recorder flute and the piano. One of the fruits of this experience is that for the first time our Christmas concert was accompanied by live instrumental music. Another fruit is that some of these young musicians, Christian and Muslim together, have formed a small band and are going to play in a local music contest.

There would be many more things to write, but I wouldn't want to be too long; so I'll conclude by thanking you for your prayers for this mission, and by asking you to pray in support of the work which the Lord is doing here in the Holy Land.

With love,

Davide Meli, presbyter