



TERRA SANCTA COLLEGE  
KEREN HAYESOD STREET  
P.O.B. 871  
91008 JERUSALEM - ISRAEL

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Feast of St Josaphat

Mr. Richard J. Sontag, Jr.  
Director  
Tekton Ministries  
9924 Cedar Ridge Drive  
Carmel, IN 46032

Dear Richard,

If there are any people who are having second thoughts of coming on pilgrimage to the Holy Land from now until the next 6-8 months, I would like to assure them that these present and few incidences that people are reading about in their newspapers in the U.S. are all crime related incidences that have nothing to do with the everyday life and stability of day to day living in the Holy Land. Sadly many of the media in the U.S. have a tendency to magnify anything that happens over here. There is no political upheaval, no mass fighting in the streets, no intifada! It is simply political rattling. Ask my group of pilgrims who recently were here during that timeframe. We were not affected in any which way. We had Mass at the Holy Sites; we walked safely through the Old City, etc., as did thousands of other pilgrims who were here. (As the saying goes: "You can fool some of the people some of the time but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.") We don't know what the ruckus was?

I truly feel that those pilgrims who are now hesitating to come on pilgrimage to the Holy Land are being misguided and misinformed by over-exaggerated entities. It is and continues to be very safe and secure. Why would I want to say the opposite? If it was not safe and secure I would be the first to tell your pilgrims not to come. But more importantly, as a spiritual guide, I truly feel that anyone who is coming to the Holy Land and whether they know it or not, are truly being called by God to be in here this month, this week or this year.

A pilgrimage is not a TWA getaway... it is a calling to leave your work and activity, your friends and family to seek the Divine in a special way by walking in the footsteps of Jesus. These Holy Sites of Christendom are the places by which He wants to touch you, heal you or guide you when you visit Calvary where He died for us, to visit the Tomb of Christ where He gave us new life, or to visit the Grotto of Bethlehem where he came down from heaven to become our Savior.

Hence with all this said, I have to admit that I find it strange that people who are planning to come to the Holy Land several months from now are making a decision not to come simply based on what they are reading in their newspaper today! No one knows the future. Where is the trust in God who has called these individuals and who signed up to come over and are now hesitating? Those He has called, He has chosen. Why are they afraid? What does scripture says "The Lord is my light and my salvation - so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me for danger, so why should I fear? Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid." Psalm 27: 1-3

Thus as a Franciscan friar and guide to the Holy Land, I would encourage any of your pilgrims to be more positive and trusting in God's providence and not to be swayed by small incidences that occur over here or in any country. If He has called you to come...come! It is safe and secure in spite of what you may hear or read and watch the blessings that will come to you when you do visit the Holy Sites which Christ made holy as you walk in His footsteps. Most importantly, as He says: "BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD."

Sincerely in Christ and St. Francis,

Fr. Peter F. Vasko, OFM