

The Sacred Journey of Paula by Saint Jerome

Introduction. The Most Holy Sanctuary in the World

In the *Mystical City of God* by Mary of Agreda, we read that when the Virgin Mary was 67 years old, the angel Gabriel came to her on August 13 and told her that her earthly pilgrimage would end in three years, and that she would enter into eternal glory. She spent the remaining three years of her life, in order to prepare for her entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem. At that time she lived in Jerusalem with St. John. The *Mystical City of God* reads thus:

The devout Queen resolved to take leave of the holy places before her departure into heaven, and having obtained the consent of saint John She left the house with him and with the thousand angels of her guard. Although these sovereign princes had always served and accompanied Her in all her errands, occupations and journeys, without having absented themselves for one moment since the instant of her birth; yet on this occasion they manifested themselves to Her with greater beauty and refulgence, as if they felt special joy in seeing themselves already at the beginning of her last journey into heaven. The heavenly Princess, setting aside human occupations in order to enter upon her journey to the real and true fatherland, visited all the memorable places of our Redemption, marking each with the sweet abundance of her tears, recalling the sorrowful memories of what her Son there suffered, and fervently renewing its effects by most fervent acts of love, clamors and petitions for all the faithful, who should devoutly and reverently visit these holy places during the future ages of the Church. On Calvary She remained a longer time, asking of her divine Son the full effects of his redeeming Death for all the multitudes of souls there snatched from destruction. The ardor of her ineffable charity during this prayer rose to such a pitch, that it would have destroyed her life, if it had not been sustained by divine power.

Thereupon her divine Son descended in person from heaven and appeared to her on this place of his death. Answering her petitions He said:

"My Mother and my Dove, Coadjutrix in the work of human Redemption, thy petitions have come to my hearing and have touched my heart. I promise Thee that I shall be most liberal with men, and I shall dispense to them continually the helps of my graces and favors, in order that with their own free will they may merit the glory earned for them by my blood, if they do not of their own accord despise this happiness. In heaven thou shalt be their Mediatrix and Advocate; and all those that shall obtain thy intercession I shall fill with my treasures and infinite mercies." This promise therefore was renewed by the Lord on the very place on which He had redeemed us. The most blessed Virgin, prostrate at his feet, gave Him thanks and there begged Him by his precious and bloody Death, to give Her his last benediction. The Lord gave it, ratified all his royal promises, and then returned to the right hand of his eternal Father. Comforted in her loving anguish, the most blessed Mary pursued her devotions, kissed and worshipped the ground on Calvary, saying: "Holy earth and consecrated spot, from heaven shall I look upon thee with reverence, bathed in that light, which manifests all in its fount and origin and from whence came forth the divine Word to enrich thee in his immortal flesh." Then She again charged the holy angels to assist Her in the custody of those sacred places, to inspire with holy thoughts all the faithful who should visit them with devotion, so that they might know and esteem properly the admirable blessing of the Redemption wrought thereon. She charged them also with the defense of those sanctuaries; and if the temerity and the crimes of men had not demerited this favor, without a doubt the holy angels would have warded off the profanations of the heathens and the infidels. Even as it is, they defend them in many ways to the present day.

The Queen asked also the angels of the sanctuaries and the Evangelist to give Her their blessing in this last leave-taking; and therewith She returned to her oratory shedding tears of tenderest affection for what She loved so much upon earth. There She prostrated Herself with her face upon the earth and poured forth another long and most fervent prayer for the Church; and She persevered in it, until in an abstractive vision of the Divinity, the Lord had given Her assurance that He had heard and conceded her petitions at the throne of his mercy. In order to give the last touch of holiness to her works, She asked permission of the Lord to take leave of the holy Church, saying:

"Exalted and most high God, Redeemer of the world, head of the

saints and the predestined, Justifier and Glorifier of souls, I am a child of the holy Church, planted and acquired by thy blood. Give me, O Lord, permission to take leave of such a loving Mother, and of all my brethren, thy children, belonging to it." She was made aware of the consent of the Lord and therefore turned to the mystical body of the Church, etc. [end of quote]

Comment by Editor. It is related that the Virgin Mary prayed for the faithful, who should devoutly and reverently visit the memorable places of redemption, during the future ages of the Church. We present here the history of the pilgrimage of blessed Paula, who received so many admirable graces and favors, when she visited the sacred sites of redemption.

The Sacred Journey of Paula by St. Jerome

AFTER Paula departed from Rome, she went up to Antioch where she was entertained for a time by the holy confessor Paulinus. Here, this noble woman, who had once been carried about in a litter by eunuchs, travelled about sitting on a donkey, warmed by the ardour of her faith even in the middle of winter. I will say nothing about her travels in Coelo-Syria and Phoenicia (for it has never been my purpose to itemise her complete itinerary), but will mention only such places as are named in the sacred books.

Leaving behind the Roman colony of Berytus and the ancient city of Sidon, she came to Sareptha, where she worshipped the Lord in Elijah's upper room (1 Kings 17.19). She went on by way of the sands of Tyre, where Paul had once knelt (Acts 21.5), and arrived at Coth, which is now called Ptolemais. From there she went through the plains of Megiddo where Josiah had been slain (2 Kings 23.29) and entered the lands of the Philistines. Here she admired the ruins of Dor, at one time a most powerful city, and by way of contrast, the tower of Strabo, rebuilt by king Herod of Judea and renamed Caesarea in honour of Augustus Caesar. Here she saw the house of Cornelius (Acts 10.1), now turned into a Christian church, and the humble dwelling of Philip and the rooms of his four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21.8-9). She next arrived at Antipatris, a small half-ruined town named by Herod after his father, and Lydda, now known as Diospolis, famous for the healing of Aeneas and the resurrection of Dorcas (Acts 9.32-41).

Not far from there is the little village of Arimathæa, the home of Joseph who buried the Lord (Matthew 27.57), and Nob, formerly the city of the priests, where now their slaughtered bodies still rest. Joppa also is quite near here, the port to which Jonah fled (Jonah 1.3), and also (if I may introduce something from the fables of the poets) the place where Andromeda was turned into a rock.

Taking up her journey again, she came to Nicopolis, formerly called Emmaus, where the Lord was known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24.30). The house of Cleopas there has been dedicated as a church by the Lord. From there she went up to both lower and upper Bethoron (2 Chronicles 8.5), cities founded by Solomon, but later destroyed by several devastating wars; to the right she would have looked out over Ajalon and Gibeon (Joshua 9&10), where Joshua the son of Nun fought against five kings and commanded the sun and the moon to stand still, and where he ordered that the Gibeonites should be hewers of wood and drawers of water as punishment for their treachery. At Gibeon also, now completely ruined, she stayed a while, meditating on the sin of the killing of the concubine, and how she was cut in pieces, and how three hundred men of the tribe of Benjamin were saved (Judges 19&20), thus ensuring that the apostle Paul might be called a Benjamite (Romans 11.1)

But let us move on. Leaving on the left the shrine of Helen, queen of the Adiabene, who sent corn to the people in the time of famine, she arrived at Jerusalem, that city of three names: Jebus, Salem and Jerusalem, rebuilt from its dust and ashes by Aelius Hadrianus and renamed Aelia. [Jerusalem was razed to the ground by the Roman army in the year 70, and rebuilt by Aelius Hadrianus in 131.] The proconsul of Palestine knew her famous family, and ordered his stewards to prepare his residence for her, but she preferred a humble little cell. She went round visiting all the holy places with such zeal and devotion that she could hardly have been persuaded to leave any of them if it had not been for her desire to visit the others. She prostrated herself in front of the cross, and adored it as if she could really see the Lord hanging there. She went into the sepulchre and kissed the stone of the resurrection which the Angel had rolled away from the door of the tomb. And like a thirsty person seeking water, she laid her mouth on the place where the Lord's body had lain. All Jerusalem can testify to the tears she shed there, the sighs she uttered, the grief which consumed her.

Coming out from there she ascended Mount Sion, a name which

signifies either "citadel" or "watchtower". David captured this city and built it up. Of this city it is written, 'Woe, woe to the city of Ariel (that is, the lion of God), the most strong city, which David besieged' (Isaiah 29.1). And on the subject of its rebuilding, 'Her foundations are upon the holy hills; the Lord has loved the gates of Sion above all the tents of Jacob' (Psalms 87.1-2). Not those gates which we see today reduced to dust and ashes, but the gates against which Hell shall not prevail, and into which enter the hosts of those who believe in Christ (Matthew 16.18). She was shown the pillar, stained with the blood of the Lord, to which he was bound before being whipped. It now supports the doorway of a church. She was shown the place where the holy Spirit came down upon the souls of a hundred and twenty believers (Acts 1.15 & 2.3), fulfilling the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2.28).

As far as her means would allow she distributed money to the poor and her fellow servants, before going on towards Bethlehem. On the right hand side of her route she stopped at Rachel's tomb. Here, as she lay dying, Rachel wished to call her son Benoni, that is, "son of my pain", but his father in a spirit of prophecy called him Benjamin, that is, "son of my right hand" (Genesis 35.18). She went into the Saviour's cave, and saw the Virgin's sacred inn and the stable where the ox knew his owner, and the ass his master's crib (Isaiah 1.3), in fulfilment also of the saying of that same prophet, 'Blessed is he who sows upon the waters, where the ox and the ass do tread' (Isaiah 32.20). I have heard her say very emphatically that as she looked on these places with the eye of faith she could see the infant wrapped in rags crying in the manger (Luke 27), the Magi worshipping as the star shone overhead (Matthew 2.11), the virgin carefully nursing the child, the shepherds coming by night to worship the word made flesh (Luke 2.15). Even then those shepherds were declaring the beginning of John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was made flesh' (John 1). She also saw the savagery of Herod in the slaughter of the innocents (Matthew 2.16), as Joseph and Mary fled into Egypt. Mingling joy with her tears, she proclaimed:

"Hail, Bethlehem, 'house of bread', in which was brought forth that bread which came down from heaven (John 6.33). Hail, Ephrata, land of fruitfulness and plenty. Your fruit is the Lord himself. As the prophet Micah said, 'You, O Bethlehem, house of Ephrata, are not the least among the thousands of Judah. For out of you shall come a ruler in Israel whose goings forth have been from

the beginning, and from everlasting days. Therefore you will give them up until the time when she will bring forth. And when she has brought forth, the remainder of the brethren shall be turned back to the sons of Israel' (Micah 5.2-3). And again, 'In you a ruler has been born, begotten before the daystar' (Psalms 110.3, Vulgate), born of the father before all ages. And the springs of the tribe of David continued in you until the virgin brought forth, and the remnant who believed in Christ turned back to the children of Israel and freely proclaimed, 'It was right to preach the word of God to you first, but since you rejected it and shown yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we have turned to the Gentiles' (Acts 13.46).

"For the Lord has said, 'I am not come except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15.24). At that time the words of Jacob also were fulfilled, 'A prince shall not be lacking in Judah, nor a leader born of his loins, until he shall come for whom it has been prepared, and he it is for whom the Gentiles wait' (Genesis 49.10). Truly did David swear, truly make a vow: 'I shall not go up into the tabernacle of my house or go into my bed, I shall not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, or rest to the temples of my head, until I search out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob' (Psalms 132.3-5). And immediately with the eyes of prophecy he spoke of the consummation of his desires, foretelling the coming of him whom we believe now to have come: 'Behold we heard of him in Ephrata and found it in the woods' (ibid 6). The Hebrew word, *vau*, used here, as I learn from your lessons, [Jerome had taught her Hebrew] does not mean her, that is, Mary the mother of the Lord, but him. Therefore he speaks confidently, 'We shall go up into his tabernacle, we shall worship in the place where his feet have rested' (ibid.7), "And I, miserable sinner that I am, have been found worthy to kiss the manger in which the infant Lord lay, to pray in the cave where the virgin was and brought forth the Lord. 'Here is my rest, for it is the land of the Lord. Here shall I dwell, for it is the choice of the Saviour (ibid. 14). I have prepared a lamp for my Christ' (ibid 17, Vulgate). 'My soul shall live for him, and my seed shall serve him' (Psalms 22.30)."

At a short distance from here she then went to the tower of Ader, that is, "of the flock", where Jacob pastured his sheep (Genesis 35.21), and the shepherds at night were found worthy to hear 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to people of good will' (Luke 2.14). As they went about the task of keeping their sheep it was given to them to find the Lamb of God, with the pure white

fleece which was filled with the dew of heaven while the earth round about remained dry (Judges 6.38), and whose blood takes away the sin of the world, and stayed the hand of the exterminator in Egypt when smeared on the doorposts (Exodus 12.23).

With eager steps she then set out on the old road which leads to Gaza, where she was able to meditate silently on the power and resources of God, whereby the Ethiopian eunuch, as a forerunner of the people of the Gentiles, changed his allegiance, and from reading the old Testament discovered the wellsprings of the Gospel (Acts 8 27-38). Moving off to the right she came past Bethsur to Escol, which means "cluster of grapes". It was from here that the spies brought back a wonderfully large cluster of grapes as proof of the fertility of the land (Numbers 13.24-26), and as a symbol of him who said, 'I have trodden the winepress alone and there is none with me' (Isaiah 63.3). Not long after this she came to the home of Sarah and saw the birthplace of Isaac and what was left of Abraham's oak, under which he saw the day of Christ and was glad (John 8.56). Going on from there she went to Hebron, formerly Kiriath-arba, or the City of the Four Men, that is, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the great Adam, whom the Hebrews suppose (from the book of Joshua son of Nun) to be buried there (Joshua 14.15). [The Vulgate here has "Adam", which in Hebrew is the same word as "man".] There are others, however, who think the fourth man to be Caleb, and he is commemorated by a monument at one side.

After seeing these places she was unwilling to go on to Kirjath-Sepher (which means "city of letters") for, despising the letter that kills, she had found the spirit that gives life. She much preferred to admire the upper and lower springs which Othoniel the son of Kenaz the son of Jephona took possession of, to adjoin the southern land with no water (Judges 1.13-15). By these means he watered the previously dry fields of the old covenant, typifying the redemption from sin to be found in the waters of Baptism.

Next day soon after sunrise she stood on the brow of Caphar Baruca (which means "house of blessing"), the place where Abraham bargained with the Lord (Genesis 18.23-33). Spread out before her was the desert land which had once been Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, and she beheld the balsam vines of Engeddi and Segor, which is the place of the heifer of three years old (Isaiah 15.5). It was formerly called Baia, which translates into Syrian as Zoar, that is, "little". She called to mind the cave in which

Lot found refuge, and with tears in her eyes warned the virgins who were with her against wine, which gives rise to lust, from which arose the Moabites and Ammonites (Genesis 19.30-38).

Chapter X. I linger longer in this land of the noonday, where the bride found her bridegroom resting (Song of Songs 1.7), and where Joseph drank with his brothers (Genesis 43.34). [Rosweyde gives this Biblical reference in the margin, but the drinking session in Genesis 43 takes place in Joseph's house in Egypt. Some confusion here on Jerome's part!] Let us return to Jerusalem by way of Tekoa, the home of Amos (Amos 1.1), and gaze upon the glittering light of the Mount of Olives, where the Saviour ascended to the Father (Acts 1.9). Here each year a red heifer was sacrificed to the Lord and its ashes used to purify the people of Israel. According to Ezekiel it is also where the Cherubim flew up out of the temple and founded the Church of the Lord (Ezekiel 10.18-19). After going in to the tomb of Lazarus she saw the welcoming house of Mary and Martha, and also Bethphage, "the house of the priestly jaws". Here it was that a lusty colt, signifying the Gentiles, accepted the bridle of the Lord, and covered with the garments of the apostle, offered its back for him to sit on.

Taking up her journey she went down to Jericho, turning over in her mind the story of the wounded man in the Gospels, the hardness of heart of the priest and the Levite who passed him by, and the compassion of the Samaritan who put him, half-dead, on his own donkey and carried him off to the safety of the Church. She visited also Adomin, which means "The Place of Blood", so called because of all the blood shed there in the frequent attacks from robbers. She saw also Zachaeus' sycamore tree (Luke 19.2-10), signifying the good work of repentance, whereby he trod underfoot his grievous sins of bloodshed and rapine, and saw the most high Lord from a place on high. And at the side of the road there was the place where the two blind men received their sight (Matthew 20.30-34), foretelling the two peoples who would believe in him.[i.e. Jews and Gentiles]

Then entering Jericho she saw the city which Hiel founded in his firstborn, Abiram, and whose gates he set up in his younger son, Segub (Joshua 6.26 & 1 Kings 16.34). She looked on the fortresses of Gilgal and the hill of foreskins (Joshua 5.3), and the mystery of the second circumcision (Romans 2.28-29). There also were the twelve stones carried up out of the riverbed of the Jordan (Joshua 4.

3&20), which became symbols of the foundation stones of the twelve apostles (Revelation 21.14). She also saw the spring which had formerly been bitter and tainted, the symbol of the old law, which Elisha had seasoned with his wisdom and made sweet and fruitful (2 Kings 2.21). The night had not quite passed when she approached the Jordan with burning eagerness. At sunrise she reflected on the rising of the Sun of righteousness, (Malachy 4:2; Luke 1:78) and how the priests had walked on dry land in the midst of the raging torrent. (Joshua 3.13-17). She thought also of how Elijah and Elisha commanded the waters to divide in two (2 Kings 2.8) to make a pathway for them, and how the Lord by his Baptism purified the polluted waters of the flood, stained by the death of the whole human race.

It would be tedious if I were to tell of the valley of Achor, (which means "trouble"), and the 'trouble and crowds' by which theft and avarice were condemned (Joshua 7.11-26), or of Bethel, "the House of God", where Jacob, poor and naked, slept upon the naked earth with a stone for a pillow (Genesis 28.11). That is the stone which is described in Zechariah as having seven eyes (Zechariah 2.9), and in Isaiah as a corner stone (Isaiah 28.16). And this is where Jacob saw a ladder stretching up to heaven, with our Lord standing above it, reaching out his hand to those who were going up, while the wicked were falling down to the depths. She venerated also the two sepulchres in Mt Ephraim, directly opposite one another, the one being the tomb of Joshua the son of Nun, and the other of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. The one was in Timnath-Serah, on the north side of the hill of Gaash (Joshua 24.30), and the other in Gabaath which belonged to Phineas, Eleazar's son. She was quite surprised to find that he who had had the responsibility of dividing up the land had chosen for himself a portion which was mountainous and rocky. What shall I say about Silo, where an overturned altar is still on view today, commemorating how the tribe of Benjamin anticipated the rape of the Sabine women by Romulus of Rome? (Judges 21.21). Passing by Sichem (not Sichar, as many wrongly say), which is now called Neapolis, she entered the church built on the side of Mt Gerizim around the well where the Lord was sitting, feeling hungry and thirsty, and was refreshed by the faith of the Samaritan woman (John 4.5-30). She had rejected five husbands, by whom are represented the five books of Moses, and also the sixth who was not her husband, representing the heretical sect of Dositheos, [The founder of a Samaritan sect something like the

Essenes] in order to find the true Messiah and true Saviour.

Going on from there she saw the tombs of the twelve patriarchs, and Samaria, which Herod renamed Augusta, or in Greek Sebaste, in honour of Augustus. Here are buried the prophets Elisha and Obadiah, and John the Baptist (than whom there has been none greater born of woman). And here she saw many strange marvels which almost frightened her out of her wits. For she saw demons screaming under various tortures in front of the tombs of the saints, howling like wolves, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like serpents, bellowing like bulls. They twisted their heads backwards till they touched the ground; there were females hanging upside down with their skirts around their faces. She felt great pity for them all and shed tears over each one, begging Christ to have mercy on them. In spite of her weakness she clambered up the mountain to the two caves where Obadiah the prophet hid a hundred prophets during a time of famine and persecution, and fed them on bread and water (1 Kings 18.4).

Her journey then took her quickly to Nazareth, the home village of the Lord, and Cana and Capharnaum, famous for their miracles. She saw Lake Tiberias, sacred because the Lord sailed over it, and the desert where many thousands of people were fed from a few loaves, and twelve baskets representing the tribes of Israel were filled with the fragments left over (John 6.13). She gazed at Mt Tabor, where the Lord was transfigured (Matthew 17.1-9), and saw Mt Hermon in the distance above the wide plains of Galilee where Sisera and his army were laid low by Barak (Judges 4.16). Here the river Kishon divided the land into two parts. Quite near at hand was the city of Naim, where the widow's son was brought back to life (Luke 7.11-16). I would not have the time, let alone the words, to describe all the places through which this venerable Paula wandered with her incredible faith.

I will pass on to Egypt, pausing a little on the way between Succoth and the spring of water which Samson obtained from the hollow of the donkey's jawbone (Judges 15.19). Here I shall moisten my dry lips and go on, refreshed, to see Morasthim, formerly the tomb of the prophet Micah and now a church. Leaving aside the Hittites and Gittites, Mareshah, Edom and Lachish, I shall travel into the vast expanses of the desert through shifting sands swallowing up the traveller's tracks, until I arrive at the river Sior (that is, "turbulent") in Egypt, where I shall travel through the five cities

where the language of Canaan is spoken (Isaiah 19.18), Goshen and the plains of Taphneus where God did marvellous things, the city of No which afterwards became Alexandria, and Nitria, where the pure nitre of the virtues daily washes away the grime of many.

As she came in sight of it, she was met by the holy and venerable bishop and confessor, Isidore, together with a numberless crowd of monks, among whom were many of both the priestly and Levitical class, [i.e. presbyters and deacons] to whom she gave due respect. She gave glory to God at the sight of them, while confessing that she was quite unworthy of being given such honour. What can I tell you about Macarius, Arsenius and Serapion, [Famous names among the Fathers of the desert] and all the other pillars of Christ? Was there one of them whose cell she did not visit, or at whose feet she did not worship? She believed that she saw Christ in each one of them, and she rejoiced that whatever gift she was able to give them she was giving to Christ himself.

What marvellous zeal! What endurance, scarcely credible in a woman! Forgetful of her sex and the weakness of her body, she longed to dwell, along with the virgins who were her companions, among these thousands of monks. They all seemed willing to accept her, and perhaps she might have carried this desire into effect, had not the attraction of the holy places been greater. Escaping from the excessive heat she sailed from Pelusium to Maioma with the speed of a bird. Not much later she took up her permanent abode in Bethlehem, and lived for three years in a tiny little house until such time as she was able to build a monastery, and cells, and guest-houses for the many pilgrims who came seeking shelter by the side of the road where Mary and Joseph found no shelter.

[from *The Life of Paula of Rome*, by Jerome, Presbyter]

atonementbooklets.com