

Removing Obstacles with Faith



TRAVELING WITH DEACON HAROLD BURKE-SIVERS



Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers was born in Barbados, West Indies, and was the first of his family to be baptized into the Catholic Faith. His mother had converted, as a teenager, from her Methodist upbringing.

Deacon Harold's mother steeped her children in the faith. He attended Catholic schools from Kindergarten through college. Even at a young age, he was feeling a vocational calling, which he pursued in high-school, before joining a Benedictine monastery after college.

His stay at the monastery was shorter than expected, Deacon Harold felt called away from the path he was on, and shortly after leaving, met his wife. The newlyweds moved from his boyhood home in New Jersey to Oregon, where he worked in law enforcement and pursued his vocational calling to the diaconate, which culminated in his ordination in 2002.

In 2012, after twenty-three years in law enforcement. God called Deacon Harold to speak and write for the Catholic Faith full-time. 2012 was a year of faith, and Deacon Harold floated the idea of a *Year of Faith Pilgrimage* to some peers who ran with the idea. The pilgrimage to Italy was rewarding and planted a seed that would take five years to germinate fully.

In 2017, Deacon Harold was invited, by the Israeli government, to travel to the Holy Land and learn more about leading pilgrims to its many holy sites. On that trip, he fell in love with the Holy Land and came home to plan his first pilgrimage.

Many pilgrimage companies contacted Deacon Harold, but he was particularly impressed with with Select International Tours' non-profit: Select to Give. "When I went and saw the plight of the people in the West Bank, and how Christians were struggling, Select was one of the few pilgrimage companies that I felt deeply and intimately cared, not just about the situation, but about the people."

Select to Give is the only volunteer administrated non-profit that directly supports Christians living in the Holy Land. One of the most innovative programs is called Sharing the Bread, which invites pilgrims into Palestinian-Christian homes, in smaller groups, to share a meal and learn more about their culture.



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Deacon Harold realized that by introducing pilgrims to Christians living in the Holy Land, it took all the politics out of the equation and helped everyone understand that it was all about the people. "Jesus was a Palestinian Jew! These are the people who are the heritage of Jesus himself. That really moved me deeply."

"I really want to encourage people; people say, I'd love to go, but I can't afford it.' Pilgrimage, for a lot of people, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Start saving, put some money aside every month, if you get some tax-return use that and GO! It really is one of those things that will have a deep and lasting impact on your life. Don't put any obstacles between you and having a deeper, more intimate personal relationship with Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."



How Should a Pilgrim Prepare?

Deacon Harold has some suggestions:

- 1 "Take time to really read the Gospels before traveling to the Holy Land. It opens up your heart and mind to a whole different experience because you now have visuals. So, when you go back to your parish and hear that Gospel, it doesn't hit you the same way anymore."
- 2 "Get ready for some walking!" A little bit of preparation ahead of your pilgrimage will really help you to have a better experience on your pilgrimage.
- 3 "Don't go with ANY expectations! Don't go with what people may have told you. Just be open to receiving everything that God wants to give YOU on that pilgrimage experience."