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Saxum Visitor Center: a personal encounter with Christ

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JERUSALEM - A visit to the holy places is always meant to be a life-changing experience. But how can

people get the most spiritually out of their visit to the Holy Land?

This was the challenge presented to the 17 Philippine delegates, together with their counterparts from 12 other countries, who participated in the international workshop *In the Footprints of our Faith* held last month in the Saxum Conference Center in this city.

To address this, participants attended a guided presentation on making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was held in the newly-inaugurated Saxum Visitor Center in the village of Abu Ghosh, 13 kilometers west of Jerusalem.

Visitor center for pilgrims

Blessed on March 1, 2019, by the apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, the Saxum Visitor Center helps

pilgrims deepen their knowledge of the Holy Land through different multimedia resources to enrich their Holy Land experience.

The Visitor Center's main offering is a multimedia tour, explaining the historical, geographical, and biblical events of salvation history. Aside from museum-type displays and artifacts, the Center has an auditorium for special lectures and events, and a chapel where pilgrimage groups can have Mass and other spiritual activities.

Those who want to relive Jesus Christ's encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus will find a starting point at the Saxum Visitor Center. Abu Ghosh is one of three towns in the suburbs of Jerusalem considered to be the Emmaus referred to in the Gospels.

'Saxum'

According to Saxum Visitor Center Director Almudena Romero, St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, longed to visit the Holy Land to “follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ”.

“He always recommended to those who sought his advice to imagine oneself as one more character in the scenes when reading the Gospel,” Romero said.

She explained that Escriva used the name ‘*Saxum*’ – Latin for ‘rock’– to refer to his closest collaborator and first successor, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, because of “his faithfulness and his fortitude.”

In 1994, Bishop Álvaro made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land where he celebrated his last Mass on earth in the Church of the Cenacle in Jerusalem. That same year, inspired by Saint Josemaría’s wish, and in memory of Álvaro del Portillo, the

Prelature of Opus Dei, together with cooperators and friends, started working on the establishment of the Saxum Conference Center and Saxum Visitor Center in the Holy Land.

Taking part in the Bible scenes

“The Visitor Center hopes to help pilgrims to have a more personal encounter with Christ in His land by offering them a chance to take part in the Bible scenes. It is open to all, so we invite everyone to contact us at the Saxum Foundation website or Facebook page,” Romero said.

After completing the workshop, Elvira Sabado of PAREF Rosehill School proposed *Saxum* as either the pilgrims’ first or last stop “because it serves as an introduction to the Holy Land at the beginning or, after having visited the holy sites, it is a fitting encapsulation and conclusion.”

Evelyn Sindico, Principal of Wadeford School in Kalibo, Aklan, summed it up saying, “Saxum helped me to appreciate fully the holy sites. More than a cultural-historical tour, I ended up doing a pilgrimage.”

[Read here: Opening of the Saxum Visitor Center](#)

Father Mickey Cardenas

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