

Egeria – on the Ascent of Sinai

On Saturday evening we proceeded onto the mountain, and, arriving at some monastic cells, we were received very hospitably by the monks dwelling there, and they offered us every courtesy. Since there is a church there with a priest, we stopped there for the night. Early on Sunday morning, accompanied by that priest and the monks who lived there, we began climbing the mountains one by one. These mountains are climbed with very great difficulty since you do not ascend them slowly going round and round in a spiral path, as we say, but you go straight up all the way as if scaling a wall. Then you have to go straight down each of these mountains until you reach the very foot of the central mountain, which is properly Sinai. By the will of Christ our God, and with the help of the prayers of the holy men who were accompanying us, I made the ascent, though with great effort, because it had to be on foot, since it was absolutely impossible to make the climb in the saddle. Yet you did not feel the effort; and the reason it was not felt was because I saw the desire which I had being fulfilled through the will of God. And so at the fourth hour we reached the summit of the mountain of God, Holy Sinai, where the Law was given, at the place, that is, where the Glory of the Lord descended on the day when the mountain smoked.

In this place there is now a church though not a very large one, because the place itself, the summit of the mountain, that is, is not very large. Yet this church has great charm all its own. When through God's will we had reached the mountain top and had arrived at the church door, there was the priest who was assigned to the church coming forth from his cell to meet us. He was an old man, beyond reproach, a monk from his youth, and, as they say here, an ascetic; in a word, he was a man worthy of being in this place. Then the other priests and all the monks who dwell there by the side of the mountain, that is to say, at least those who were not impeded either by age or by infirmity, came forth. Indeed, no one lives on the very top of that central mountain, for there is nothing there save the church alone and the cave where the holy man Moses was. All of the proper passage from the Book of Moses was read, the sacrifice was offered in the prescribed manner," and we received Communion. As we were about to leave the church," the priests gave us gifts native to this place, that is, some fruit which grows on this mountain.¹

Egeria – on Good Friday liturgy

On arriving in Gethsemani a suitable prayer is first said, followed by a hymn, and then the passage from the Gospel describing the arrest of the Lord is read. During the reading of this passage there is such moaning and groaning with weeping from all the people that their moaning can be heard practically as far as the city. And from that hour everyone goes back on foot to the city singing hymns, and they arrive at the gate. at the hour when men can begin to recognize one another. From there, throughout the center of the city, all without exception are ready at hand, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, every-one; and on this day especially no one withdraws from the vigil before early morning. It is in this fashion that the bishop is led from Gethsemani to the gate, and from there through the whole city to the Cross...

... After this, following the dismissal from the Cross, which occurs before sunrise, everyone now stirred up goes immediately to Sion to pray at the pillar where the Lord was whipped. Returning from there then, everyone rests for a short time in his own house, and soon all are ready. A throne is set up for the bishop on Golgotha behind the Cross, which now stands there. The bishop sits on his throne, a table covered with a linen cloth is set before him, and the deacons stand around the table. The gilded silver casket containing the sacred wood of the cross is brought in and opened. Both the wood of the cross and the inscription are taken out and placed on the table. As soon as they have been placed on the table, the bishop, remaining seated, grips the ends of the sacred wood with his hands, while the deacons, who are standing about, keep watch over it. There is a reason why it is guarded in this manner. It is the practice here for all the people to come forth one by one, the faithful as well as the catechumens, to bow down before the table, kiss the holy wood, and then move on. It is said that someone (I do not know when) took a bite and stole a piece of the holy cross. Therefore, it is now guarded by the deacons standing around, lest there be anyone who would dare come and do that again.²

¹ *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, Chapter 3.

² *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, Chapters 36 & 37.