



**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 23:
The “Fifth Gospel”
By FR. LUKE SPANNAGEL**



More on the Gospels? This week, for our final Gospel topic, we are going to discuss the fifth Gospel. *Fifth Gospel?! But Father, you went into detail last time about why there are four Gospels!* Before I cause too much confusion, let me clarify that the fifth “Gospel” is not one that is written. It is the place where Jesus lived, the place where he walked on the water and worked miracles, the place where he celebrated the Last Supper with the Apostles, and the place where he carried the Cross and offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to the Father for the forgiveness of sins: the Holy Land.

The Land Where Jesus Walked

A *New Catholic Encyclopedia* article quotes Gino Concetti’s 1974 article in *L’Osservatore Romano*: “The geographical and historical setting...bears a quite special witness (to Christ). It has been said that the Holy Land is itself a Gospel, the fifth Gospel. The judgment is not an exaggerated one. [...] Those places that Christians have venerated, since the beginning, as sacred because sanctified by the Savior, are still able today, 2000 years later, to re-echo his voice and his message” (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 245). Similarly, Pope Francis recently encouraged journalists to “keep telling stories from the Holy Land, calling it the ‘Fifth Gospel,’” a title which “has been invoked by popes from Paul VI to Benedict XVI to describe the Holy Land” (Courtney Mares, *Pope Francis: The story of the Holy Land is the “Fifth Gospel”* CNA, January 17, 2022). The Holy Land is more than a spot on the map half a world away: it is a true witness to the Lord Jesus as the place where he lived and walked and died for our sins!

Since I had the privilege to spend some time in the places where Jesus walked, the words of the four Gospels truly do feel different. Standing by the shore of the Sea of Galilee and feeling the afternoon breeze, it is not hard to see where a large crowd could have gathered to listen to Jesus. Experiencing the dusty, dry environment brings a deeper understanding of the moment Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for a drink. Walking up the stone steps in part of the Old City of Jerusalem, the Way of the Cross is vivid and closer.

Unfortunately, the Holy Land continues to be a place of turmoil and violence. As an important center for three world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), there has been a long history of ongoing tensions. Although leaders have worked together to secure and protect important religious shrines and historical places, the struggle for territory and control has long made the Holy Land a place of unrest and uncertainty. Sadly, this uncertainty has at times prevented many Christians from journeying to Israel and walking in the places and pathways that Christ walked, losing an opportunity to grow closer to him by walking in his footsteps. May our respect for this unique “fifth Gospel” inspire us to pray always for peace and justice and for the opportunity for each soul to freely seek out the true Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.