

RESURRECTION



Salt of the Earth: Palestinian Christians in the Northern West Bank

Study Guide (leader version)

<http://www.saltfilms.net>

Summary: This session looks at resurrection and rebirth. We will meet Fr. Firas, a young priest who has re-opened the Melkite (Greek Catholic) church in Zababdeh after nearly two decades of neglect.

Supplies: Everyone should have a Bible. Bring copies of this session's student guide.

5 min *Prayer and introduction*

Greet everyone. If your class is following the Daily Walk, you may invite people to share any reflections they may have from the previous week.

Hand out the student guides and introduce today's study: *Today, we will meet Fr. Firas (fi-RAHS), the new priest for the Melkite (also known as Greek Catholic) church in Zababdeh (za-BAHB-deh), a majority Christian town in the West Bank. We'll talk about resurrection and rebirth.*

If you have a map, point out the location of Zababdeh on it.

Invite someone to open the session in prayer or use the sample prayer at right.

Sample Prayer

God of power and might, open our hearts and minds to comprehend the miracle of resurrection.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

5 min *Scripture*

Invite someone to read Mark 5:35-43 aloud.

Invite someone else to read Luke 24: 1-12 aloud.

15 min *Questions*

In groups of 2 to 4 discuss:

In these scriptures, how do people react to resurrection or the prospect of healing from death? Place yourself in the stories and imagine how you might respond.

15
min

Film

Show “Resurrection” segment of the film.

Leader Notes film

The film opens with a tour of the Melkite (Greek Catholic) church in Zababdeh. The Melkite Church is one of the Eastern Rite Catholic churches, which 1) have their own laws, customs, and liturgies (often indistinguishable from the orthodox churches from which they separated), 2) are subject to their own patriarchs, and 3) are in full communion with the Pope in Rome. The church in Zababdeh has been abandoned for 17 years, hence its very poor condition. The singing is the traditional Easter hymn, “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and bestowing life on those in the tombs.”

Fr. Firas introduces himself as the Melkite Greek Catholic priest in Zababdeh. He walks through his family’s olive groves on hills near Zababdeh. He points out that Zababdeh is the only majority Christian town in the northern West Bank. He was born in the town and studied there through 9th grade. In 1982 he went to study at seminary, and completed studies with Silesian Brothers in Beit Jala, a predominantly Christian town near Bethlehem.

We meet his family at Christmastime, gathered around their decorated tree. He and his wife Doris have an older son Boutros and twin toddlers, Qais and Qusai. Melkite priests, like most Eastern rite Catholic priests, are permitted to marry, although bishops and monks may not. Fr. Firas sings hymns to the twins as they dance and try to sing along.

Fr. Firas shows renovations being made to the church grounds. He explains that his grandfather, Fr. Stephanos, was the last Melkite priest to serve in Zababdeh. He died in 1985, after which there was no priest or services and the Melkite flock scattered to worship in other churches (Zababdeh has three other churches: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican). Fr. Stephanos was ordained in the 1940s. As Fr. Firas talks about his grandfather, footage of him and other town clergy in 1969 is shown. Fr. Firas recalls that his grandfather lived in the church compound for 50 years. He recalls spending the night with him, on a cushion on the floor.

After Fr. Stephanos died, many people asked the bishop in Haifa for a replacement priest. He would tell them that he was waiting for Firas to complete seminary to ordain him to the church. When Firas completed his studies at Seminary, he returned home, got married, and started working in a sewing sweatshop where pay is little and hours long. Before the current *intifada* (which started September, 2000) such sweatshops were very common in the West Bank, where Israeli companies could get cheaper labor than within Israel. Due to restrictions, closures, and economic decline, most of these have closed in the past several years. The footage shows Firas (before his ordination) demonstrating his work in the sewing shop. He spoke with the bishop periodically about ordaining him and was told to be patient. He says, “I was patient for seven years.” Because Zababdeh is small, he says, it was given little importance and hence the delay in ordaining him and reopening the church. Also a complicating factor is the fact that Zababdeh is the only one of the diocese of Haifa’s parishes that is in the West Bank; all the others are in Israel.

Leader notes film continued

Bishop Boutros Ma'alim ordained Firas as deacon on August 31, 2002, and as priest on December 14, 2002. The services were held in the Roman Catholic Church, because the Melkite church, which was too small for the crowd, still in a state of disrepair. At the end of the service, his mother's congratulatory cry and the ululating response of the women can be heard. It is typical for women to call out congratulatory cries followed by ululation at the conclusion of weddings, graduations, ordinations, and other celebratory events. With great joy, Fr. Firas shares that the church reopened the first Sunday of Easter, for him a miracle.

He explains that the Melkite church is an Eastern church, with its own patriarch. It is in communion with but not subject to the patriarch of Rome (the Pope). The church in Zababdeh has about twenty families or about 100 to 120 people. Fr. Firas laments that the years of neglect have led to a loss of trust. He comments that Palestine is the land of the Bible: "We are the ones who found the tomb empty and went to tell the news to Syria, to Europe, to the whole world that Christ is risen. We are witnesses to resurrection in the land of the resurrection. If you open the Bible in a town like Zababdeh, you feel as though you are living in the story itself. You become a part of the parable."

In the service, Fr. Firas chants the gospel passage about Jesus healing Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:35-43). He tells his congregation that there is a parallel between the resurrection of this girl and the resurrection of this church and parish. As Jesus takes the girl's hand and tells her to get up, it is like he is taking the hand of this church and instructing her to get up after eighteen years of neglect. Fr. Firas says the role of the church after its resurrection is to preach the gospel. He assures the congregation that they are Christian apostles today in Zababdeh. The film ends with communion.

A good background about the origins of Melkites (Greek Catholics) and other Eastern rite Catholics is at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Rite#Historical_background.

15 min Questions

As a group discuss:
Fr. Firas preaches on the Mark passage. What is the message Fr. Firas delivers to his congregation? What are the ways that this message and this story can speak to you individually and to your congregation?

Leader notes:

Additional/alternate questions:
The re-opening of Fr. Firas' church is a kind of resurrection; has your congregation experienced a kind of resurrection? Is it in need of one?
What situations in your lives/your church/the world need resurrection healing? How do the scripture passages and Fr. Firas' story show us how to live as "resurrection people" in a broken world?

4 min Closing and prayer

Solicit prayer concerns from the group and then close in prayer, using your own or the sample prayer at right.
Remind the group of "Daily Walk" opportunities, and plans for your next meeting.

Sample Prayer

Blessed Lord and Savior, we pray for Fr. Firas and his congregation. We pray for faith and courage to live as "resurrection people" in a broken world. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.

<h2>Daily Walk</h2> <p>An invitation to daily prayer and witness</p>	
<p>Daily Prayer: <i>Frame your daily walk with this series in prayer—feel free to use your own prayer or the one provided:</i> Blessed Lord and Savior, I pray for the unity of your church. Bind us together as your Body, a holy instrument of grace and healing in our world. In your holy name I pray. Amen.</p>	<p>Daily Action: Available online: http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/advent-student.pdf</p> <p>Day 1) <i>Read Scripture:</i> 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26.</p> <p>Day 2) <i>Hear from Holy Land Christians:</i> Easter message from the Patriarchs and Heads of the Christian Communities in Jerusalem. http://www.hcef.org/hcef/includes/news/print.cfm/ID/66.cfm</p> <p>Day 3) <i>Learn more:</i> A description of Holy Week celebrations in Jerusalem. http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/196502/another.easter.htm</p> <p>Day 4) <i>Be inspired:</i> The Middle East Council of Churches. http://www.mec-churches.org/about_mecc.htm</p> <p>Day 5) <i>Share:</i> Take time to tell someone new about how you've been moved this week by this Study Series. Invite him/her to pray with you.</p> <p>Day 6) <i>Act:</i> Worship with a Christian congregation very different (denominationally, liturgically, theologically, socially) from your own.</p>