

## **Meditation at Majma, 2025**

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Late last week, Fr. Wadie walked into my office and asked me if anyone had mentioned that I would be giving the meditation today at Majma.

“Uh—no” I said.

He then rattled off the Scripture readings that I in turn scribbled on the back of an envelope.

Which I promptly misplaced.

“No problem,” I said to myself. I whipped out my handy lectionary app and looked up the readings for today. Then I spent the entire weekend praying and meditating on those words to prepare for my remarks this morning.

But then two days ago I found the envelope—and the readings were different than the app!

Nevertheless, because I found the readings in the app so compelling to our situation today—as you will soon understand—this morning you will hear me speak about a merger of the two Gospel readings—a hybrid as it were.

And so we begin. The first passage—the one from the app—comes from Luke’s Gospel. It’s one that I’ve never preached on before, and maybe no one else in this room has either, because I don’t think the first part of it shows up on Sunday morning.

It’s where the Pharisees, of all people, warn Jesus to run away because Herod was seeking to kill him.

Now that was a very serious warning indeed. As we all know, by this point, Herod had already beheaded Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist. In fact he did that here in Jordan less than an hour’s drive away at the Macharus fortress just outside of Madaba.

So this was truly a serious threat against Jesus’ life.

Yet in spite of that, our Lord’s reply was calm and even defiant. It was the opposite of the fear and worry that we might expect.

And here begins the compelling part. For Jesus begins his reply by saying to the Pharisees, “Go and tell that fox something for me!”

And here I say compelling, because I can imagine that, if our Lord were standing here today, he might well have said those very words to any number of our current world leaders.

I’ll leave it to you to fill in the blank!

So what is our Lord’s message to “that fox”?

“Listen, he says. “I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.”

He then goes on to utter his famous lament: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. But you were not willing.”

Now there is more to the passage, but I think we have enough with which to work.

For the warning that the Pharisees issued Jesus was a political warning. It was about the powers and principalities of this world. And whatever their motivations, the Pharisees saw Jesus as about to be caught up in a massive power struggle.

Maybe, they thought, they could save his life while at the same time scaring this pesky Rabbi off so that they wouldn't have to deal with his troublesome teachings.

Whatever the reason, Jesus' response was telling. While recognizing the cold, hard reality of the situation, he didn't stoop to the political level.

On the contrary. He continued to emphasize the work that he was doing throughout his earthly ministry: Healing the sick. Confronting evil. Preaching the word.

And then he hinted at the final work that he would accomplish.

As he cleverly put it: "On the third day I finish my work," he said.

For he knew that, like the prophets of old, he would indeed also meet his death in Jerusalem. But unlike them, on the third day, the hand of God would turn the world suddenly upside down. Maqluba!

And here is where the first of the Gospel passages meets the second. For in his parable, Jesus confronts us about what foundation we will build our houses upon. Will it be a foundation of sand—or will it be a foundation of rock?

Especially in view of the earlier Gospel encounter, his meaning is clear. If we stick to the level of earthly things, then disaster will eventually come. Put differently, if we focus on the powers and principalities of this world and build the foundation of our lives on it, then everything will eventually collapse from beneath us.

On the other hand, if we focus on his words about God's work and the building up of God's kingdom, when the rain falls and the wind blows and the floods rise, our house will indeed stand firm.

This is in fact what Jesus did. He refused to retreat from his ministry, even with the Pharisee's warning of death. Moreover, he refused to even play the powers and principalities' game. Indeed, he took that game and, as I said, he turned it upside down. He faced suffering and death on our behalf and came out glorified on the other side. And in so doing, he opened for the entire world the door to eternal life through which to follow.

So what does this say to us today? With all the death and destruction of the past two years; with all the power plays and political moves that the powers and principalities around us have made; with all of these, we must take care to keep our focus. We must be sure to turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face.

Yet while this may make the things of the earth grow strangely dim, as the old hymn says, it will not make the troubles of the world go away.

On the contrary. In some ways they will come more sharply into focus. For just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, we will continue to weep over Gaza; we will continue to weep over the West Bank; indeed, we will continue to weep over all in our region who have suffered so sorely over the last 24 months.

But we shouldn't heed the temptation to play their game. We must remember to build our house, our church, our diocese on the rock of the Gospel—on the firm foundation of our Jesus Christ our Lord.

As the Nassar family at Tent of Nations so boldly states, while we resist evil, we must refuse to become enemies. We must refuse to become victims. We must refuse to fall into the primitive tribalism that has become such a mark of our present age. We must understand the meaning of being a good neighbor in a tough neighborhood, as our Lord taught us, and model that behavior for others to see.

Although she is not a Christian, a Palestinian-Israeli doctor who works in the ER in Be'er Sheva recently captured the true divide between us in a recent statement quoted in Haaretz.

She said:

“In the midst of all the blood and horror . . . I realized: the real divide is not between Arabs and Jews or Palestinians and Israelis. The actual divide is between those who believe that violence is the answer to this conflict and those who believe in saving lives. The divide is between those who believe it is OK to kill people for a higher purpose and those who believe that every human life is sacred.”

As we know from Archbishop Hosam's inaugural Scripture verse, our Lord came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. By continuing to build our foundation on the rock of our salvation, we as Christians and as a diocese will continue to advance that mission, driven by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit.

May God give us all the grace to hold fast to that vision and persevere in the midst of all the many adversities that continue to surround us. Amen.