

## Reflection for Lent 2016

By Nora Carmi

Lent is the liturgical period of forty days preceding Easter, the commemoration of The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate, in Jerusalem. It is the time when Christians are given an opportunity to repent, meditate and aspire to truly become human beings created in the image of God, and for doing His will on earth. No wonder Christian thoughts turn for inspiration, spiritual strength and renewal of faith towards Jerusalem, the heart of a land destined to be holy and sacred, and significant for all faiths.

For centuries, the hill of the Lord mentioned in Psalm 24 has been opened for “[t]hose who have clean hands and pure heart, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord” (Psalm 24:4-5). Our forefathers, the ancient Christian prophets and Isaiah in particular, have guided believers on the way to do God’s will. *“Make yourselves clean,”* Isaiah said; *“remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to be good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”* (Isaiah 1:16-17) Human beings, however, continued to violate moral laws and committed evil. No wonder that our Lord and Savior wept, saying: *“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”* (Luke 19:42-44)

Those of us whose lives are anchored in the Savior and Jerusalem [current day Jerusalem? Occupied Jerusalem?] can still hear the continuous cry of our Lord chiding us: You still have not recognized the things that make for peace and you wonder why there is so much chaos in my land! Some of you persist in being evil, causing injustice and oppressing orphans, widows and children. You destroy homes, grab land, steal water resources and uproot olive trees; you incarcerate, torture and dehumanize brothers and sisters, separating families and confining them behind walls or burning and killing children; you desecrate religious sites and defile the sanctity of life. You destroy God’s creation, claiming a monopoly of divine rights! What have you done to my commandment of love? The peace that I promised you is based on justice, equity and respect for all.

So many years, so many Lents, and hearts have not changed! Can 2016 be the year when we humbly ask for God’s forgiveness and commit ourselves to make of His Land a **promising land** where the oppressed are liberated and the oppressor regains, once more, his humanity so that we can avoid further annihilation and disaster as foretold in Luke 19?

From Palestine, I am calling for prayerful actions to bring an end to injustice and pave the way in faith, hope and love for the harmonious life that God has intended for all His children. Let us during this Lent tangibly practice the message of Christ of social justice and dignity for all, daring to speak out and resist nonviolently against all forms of oppression. Let us do the will of God. To witness in faith is a costly discipleship, but only then can we be worthy to proclaim that **Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed!**

*Nora Carmi is a Palestinian Christian peace activist who was born in Jerusalem just months before the creation of the state of Israel. She has worked with the Jerusalem YWCA, Sabeel Liberation Theological Centre, and Kairos Palestine, and speaks and writes prolifically in pursuit of a just peace in the Holy Land.*