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## Faith Today

### It's a long, long road to Capernaum...

By George Tombs  
NC News Service

Just after my wife, Angeline, and I got married, we made a journey to the Holy Land. When we arrived, Brother Daniel, a Carmelite, led us to the ancient site of Capernaum.

There on the shores of the brilliant blue Sea of Galilee, the sick from miles around had come to be healed by Jesus. We said a prayer among the sun-bleached ruins of an ancient synagogue. Then we walked to an eight-sided building archeologists had uncovered. Brother Daniel told us that scholars were sure this was Peter's house.

A breeze was stirring in the trees and the heat made the flowers between the stones smell sweet.

We imagined the faith and hope that had brought the sick to Capernaum. Jesus restored them to health and strength. He laid out his hands and comforted them.

His love enabled them to become new people and to do what others said was simply impossible.

Being in Capernaum had special meaning for Angeline and me, but not because we were gravely ill. Arriving in Galilee after a long pil-

grimage on foot, we could see for ourselves the biblical places and scenes we'd heard about all our lives.

We had walked from northern France across the snowy Alps and down to Rome, then across Greece, where we finally took a ship to the Holy Land.

Each country offered its own challenges, as we slowly followed country roads and hiking trails toward Rome and Jerusalem.

In France we trudged through three solid weeks of rain. Our feet were often covered with blisters, which Angeline treated each night. Our ankles became swollen.

Sometimes the going was rough. We were making this pilgrimage as an act of hope, and also as a sign of lifelong commitment to each other. Angeline did the cooking over a portable stove. I did the sewing and mending and each night I put up a tent, which I carried in my backpack.

Even in June it was cold high in the Swiss Alps as we trudged along glaciers and sometimes through snow. But once we had crossed the Alps on foot, we felt we could tackle any challenge. It was a real pleasure

to come down the other side of those giant mountains.

But then in Italy in July the problem was heat. It was more than 100 degrees for two full weeks. We started walking before sunrise and at midday we tried to find shelter from the burning sun. People were amazed to see us walking in such hot weather!

Fortunately it finally cooled off.

When we arrived in Rome, it meant leaving the silence and peace of the countryside for the crowds of people in the eternal city, many of them pilgrims like ourselves.

Just knowing we had made it to Rome made us happy. But Angeline and I doubted we had the strength to continue. We felt exhausted. We had left the security of home and work in Canada. We had been living in a tent for three months.

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What could we do but pray for strength and talk it out? In the end, confidence in Jesus, in each other and in the importance of our pilgrimage got us going again, toward Jerusalem.

When we hiked across Greece, we hardly noticed the heat anymore, because we

swam in the Bay of Corinth a few times a day.

At last we went by sea to the Holy Land. And like the people of Galilee, we went to Capernaum.

We pictured how Jesus had walked out of a synagogue in the old town, and come over to Peter's house, how he healed the sick as the sun was setting over the bare hills of Galilee.

As we looked at the ruins, Angeline and I began to reflect. Were all the long months of walking, all the exertion and work, worthwhile?

After all, we had just gotten married before starting to hike. Why undertake anything so difficult, when we could have been enjoying life back home in Canada?

But we weren't that different from the Galileans who walked to Peter's house in Capernaum because they'd heard Jesus was here.

*(Tombs is a writer and radio broadcaster in Montreal, Quebec.)*



Lenten Series

Why on earth would a newlywed couple undertake an arduous journey, on foot, across Europe to the Holy Land? For the same reason, writes George Tombs, that ancient crowds descended on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

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