

WHY PILGRIMAGES?

by John M. Haffert

While Our Lady Herself asked that Her statue be carried in procession at Fatima, and many wonders have resulted, Lucia (only living one of the three who saw Our Lady of Fatima) said: "People would do better to stay home and fulfill their daily duty than to go to Fatima."

She didn't mean that it was not good to go to Fatima. She meant that some persons who don't go to the Sacraments think they make everything right by making a foot pilgrimage to that holy Shrine. And this is a terrible delusion.

St. John Chrysostom, who longed to make a pilgrimage to Rome, said: "There is no need to cross the seas or fare upon a long journey; let each of us at home invoke God earnestly and He will hear our prayer." And Saint Gregory Nazianzen saw so many abuses by pilgrims to the Holy Land (persons going out of curiosity and the pleasure of travel rather than for holy purpose) that he advised such persons to stay home. And Saint Jerome . . . the pilgrim who stayed in Jerusalem after his second trip there . . . warned others that living in Jerusalem was not worthy of praise, *but living well* . . . whether in Jerusalem or elsewhere.

Perhaps most pilgrims today go to Lourdes. What are they seeking? Cures? Curiosity? Honor Our Lady? Make Reparation?

Whatever purpose the pilgrim has in mind, his experience at Lourdes will most probably be a deeper appreciation of the Blessed Sacrament, a deeper faith.

Religious Instinct

We should put, at the top of the advantages of any pilgrimage, the *graces that a pilgrimage obtains* by honoring Our Lord, Our Lady and the Saints through honor of their holy places.

There are also the *indulgences and privileges* attached to the holy places . . . obtainable only on pilgrimage.

But graces can be obtained at home . . . The Mass said by Father Pio in ecstasy is essentially the same as the Mass said in our parish church this morning. The stations of the cross in my own parish can have the same merit as when made on the Via Dolorosa.

That is why we list the deepening of faith as the first great advantage of a pilgrimage. For even though Our Lord said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and who have believed," how fortunate St. Thomas was! And

what person, regardless of the depth of his faith, can ever again be quite the same after seeing a wonder like the liquefaction of the blood of Saint Patrizia?⁸ or who ever again could not have a new appreciation of the Wonder in the tabernacle after assisting at Mass in the "pit" where, after instituting the Blessed Sacrament, our Lord spent His last night on earth?⁹

Saint John Chrysostom, whom we quoted against the pilgrimage racket above, emphasized the efficacy in arousing devotion of visiting even the "lifeless spots" where the saints lived (In Phil., 702-3). He said: "If I were freed from my labors and my body in sound health I would eagerly make a pilgrimage merely to see the chains that had held St. Paul captive and the prison where he lay."

Above all Saint John Chrysostom . . . like so many other saints . . . longed to go to Rome. He longed even to gaze on the dust of Saint Paul . . . "the dust of the lips that thundered, of the hands that had been fettered, of the eyes that had seen the master."¹⁰

This desire to make a pilgrimage is a religious instinct.¹¹

Other Advantages

Perhaps no man is qualified to speak categorically of a devotion so deeply rooted in nature and so complicated by experience, so enriched by the Church and so often debased, so beneficial to souls and so often misunderstood.

At the end of the fourth century Saints Paula and Eustochium wrote: "Whosoever is noblest in Gaul

8) *Vita di S. Patrizia*, by Rev. Vincenzo Petrillo, published 1939 by APE, Naples. See Chapter XII. (Imprimatur by Archdiocese of Naples).

9) *S. Petrus in Gallicantu*. This "pit" is of recent discovery and was probably not even known when St. Helena built first Church here in fourth century. Its existence was known from Scripture. While he was being led to this prison from the judgment hall of Caiphas, Peter betrayed Our Lord, hence name of Church.

10) See No. 4

11) "Instinctive motion of the human heart . . . found in all religions." "Granting then this instinctive movement of human nature we should expect that in Christianity God would Himself satisfy the craving He had first Himself created."—Rev. Bede Jarrett, O.P., B.A. (Oxon.), S.T.L., in *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Appleton, 1913), Vol. XII, pg. 85. In reference to this matter, please note qualifying statement at conclusion of this article, marked by ref. No. 17.

comes hither (to the Holy Places). And Britain though divided from us yet hastens from her land of sunset to these shrines known to her only through the Scriptures."¹²

St. Augustine tried to settle a dispute by sending two persons, who were arguing, on a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Felix of Nola. Pilgrimages were given as actual penances in the Sacrament of confession, particularly to the Shrines of St. James of Compostella, in Spain; St. Thomas's body in Canterbury, England; the relics of the Three Kings in Cologne, Germany; and the Tomb of the Apostles at Rome.¹³

In the past hundred years there have been several major appearances of the Blessed Virgin, and many wonders performed at the places of apparition. Most of us look upon this as fulfillment of Saint Grignon de Montfort's prophecy of the Age of Mary. And these places of apparition have become places of major pilgrimage today.

But still Rome and the Holy Land remain, and will always remain, THE principal magnets of Christian faith . . . and of wandering Christian feet.

Even to Die

Saint Marcius brought his wife Martha and his two sons all the way from Persia to visit Rome in 269; Saint Paternus came from Alexandria in 253; Saint Maurus from Africa in 284. When Saint Constantine and Saint Victorian arrived in Rome they went straight to the tomb of Saint Peter, where soldiers caught them and put them to death. Saint Zoe also was found at the tomb of Saint Peter and martyred.¹⁴ The religious instinct of pilgrimage, if we may presume to call it this, was so great that it did not deter men from death.

We have by no means covered

the subject. But in closing we would like now to offer four ideas, based on experience, which might tend to make a pilgrimage most advantageous:

Other Advantages

1) *Have a definite goal.* Just to set out wandering, with the idea of visiting Holy Places, is a waste. We should know where we want to go, and what grace . . . specifically . . . we hope to obtain. We may have many motives, but we should have *some* that are good, and *definite*. To choose one example from many:

If we are going to Loreto (to the Holy House . . . "the holiest place on earth") — one of our motives should certainly be to experience the wonder and reality of the Blessed Sacrament, as Saint Therese of Lisieux experienced it there.¹⁵ We may want to make reparation for sins of impurity, for lack of faith. We may have a dozen good reasons. But we should not go just because it is a famous place.

2) *Take advantage of the trip to orient worldly life to spiritual life.*

When we make a pilgrimage from America we will most likely take a prolonged trip because it costs so much to cross the Ocean. To the average person it is a "once in a lifetime" experience and therefore should include as much as possible. Consequently this trip which may last a month *creates a unique opportunity to orient one's spiritual life to daily living* . . .

If we make a retreat, we cut ourselves off from the world altogether. When we go to Mass we do the same. When we make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or make a Holy Hour, again we shed the outside world for a given time . . . and when the time is over we return to the world again.

But on a pilgrimage, we are constantly in a spiritual atmosphere even when we are doing worldly things. The aura of the pilgrimage pervades our lives . . . riding along in the coach and enjoying scenery, singing, eating foreign delicacies,

enjoying social contacts and recreational activities.

This may be *the* most important side effect of the entire pilgrimage. It can bring a new dimension into our entire lives. Today when Americans have so much more leisure, so much more time and money for recreation, the "problem" of bringing God into recreation is urgent. On a proper pilgrimage, with a group properly conducted, one learns that only when our laughter finds echo in the Presence of God within us are we *truly recreating* . . . are we truly finding happiness, deep and lasting and more wonderful than we would ever have dreamed.

This step towards God in our daily life can become a leap into the depths of Divine Love to carry us to that total perfection in which everything of this world (including the places of pilgrimage which so helped us) pale into nothingness.

3) *Knowledge is power*, in more ways than one. The more we learn on our trip, from first hand experience, the richer will the rewards be when we get back home. In conversation and prayer and living we will be able to draw on the knowledge as from a precious bank account. So we should prepare for the trip by reading as much as possible before we go, and we should take cryptic notes and photos to refresh our memories when we get back.

4) We should *pray* from the first moment we decide to make a pilgrimage for two things:

a) The grace to give us as much glory to God by this pilgrimage as He expects of us;

b) The grace to come as close to Him on this pilgrimage as He intended when He inspired us to perform this holy devotion.

The Main Advantage

Our patrons are perhaps the most famous of all pilgrims: The Three Kings.

For their long journey (thought to be almost 1,000 miles) God sent them a guiding star; for their perseverance: "Entering in they found the Child, with Mary His Mother."

12) Ep. xlvI, P.L., XXII, 480-90.

13) Bede Jarrett, ref. No. 11

14) *ibidem*.

15) "This was a blessing straight from Heaven; no words can do justice to our feelings."—Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, Ronald Knox edition: XX, page 163.