

28. Pilgrimage

To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe. (Benedict XVI)

Key terms:

- Pilgrim:** a person who travels to a holy place as a religious act.
- Pilgrimage:** A pilgrimage is a journey a pilgrim makes to a sacred place for the purpose of venerating it or to ask for heavenly aid, and ultimately to come to know God better. A pilgrimage is a metaphor for the spiritual journey undertaken by each person seeking deeper understanding, connection and enlightenment.
- Witness:** (i) Noun: A sharing of one's personal experience with Jesus (1Jn. 1:3).
(ii) Verb: engaging in activities to share the abundant life of God with others (liturgical practices, acts of justice, healthcare, education etc)
- Sacrifice:** (i) To make an offering by way of worship or expiation.
(ii) To endure physical challenges, demands and hardship so as to unite ourselves more closely with Christ and prepare us to live in the presence of God.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF PILGRIM AND PILGRIMAGE

- “Pilgrim” – “Stranger”, “Sojourner”, “Foreigner” or “Refugee” (Heb.11:13).
- One who stays in a place as a stranger or visitor -the Christian is regarded as a temporary dweller on earth whose final citizenship is in heaven (Heb. 11:13; 1Pet 2:11)
- “Pilgrimage” (Gen.47:9; Ps. 119:54) means to “reside temporarily” (Ex. 6:4).

REASONS FOR CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

- Christians seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ: Galilee, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem
- Devotion to places of apparition associated with the Virgin Mary.
- Healing (physically or spiritually) and Forgiveness.
- To request divine assistance or guidance.
- To deepen ones relationship with God
- To renew one's faith.
- To strengthen the community of Christians by journeying and sharing with others.
- As an individual or communal act of worship and devotion.
- To slow down, rest or ‘retreat’ from the everyday.
- As an act of penance.
- To embrace Sacrifice and Detachment.
- As an act of solidarity with ‘Living Stones’.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION ON PILGRIMAGE

Hebrew People

- Heightened sense of a localised divine presence.
 - Ark of the Covenant – God dwelling among His people.
 - Tent of Meeting – following God’s people in the desert.
 - The Jerusalem Temple – a final dwelling place of God’s holiness was reached and became a place of pilgrimage.

The Exodus Story

- Journey from slavery in Egypt toward the Promised Land highlights the connection between pilgrimage and migration.
- The care for ‘foreigners’ -pilgrims – and the hospitality they deserve, is grounded in the Hebrew experience of having been aliens in a foreign land.

Jesus and Pilgrimage

- Jesus journeys to Jerusalem for religious festivals.
- Jesus journeys on pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple for prayer.
- His last supper was the ‘pilgrim meal’ commemorating the Exodus, shared with fellow travellers.
- His Passion and death in the city of Jerusalem at the time of Passover seals the connection between Jesus and pilgrimage.

Early Christians

- Members of early Christian communities were referred to as ‘saints’ showing how God’s holiness was not simply contained in God himself in heaven, but was also present in the believers who followed in Christ’s footsteps.
- Sites associated with Christ (Holy Sepulchre, Garden of Gethsemane, Jordan river) and many places associated with saints became pilgrimage sites, starting with their tombs.
- Relics of saints epitomised the presence and power of the divine and connects pilgrims to their predecessors in the faith, offering guidance, intercession and inspiration.

SPIRITUALITY OF PILGRIMAGE

- **The feelings and attitudes of the Pilgrim**
 - Desire and longing for the Lord and his temple (Ps. 84:1-2; Ps. 122:1-2)
 - Unshakable trust in the Lord (Ps. 123:1-2; Ps. 125:1; Ps. 127:1-2)
 - Courage in the midst of difficulties (Ps. 84:6-7; Ps. 124; Ps. 126)
 - The joy and serenity in the experience of the presence of God (Ps. 131)
 - The experience of brotherhood: we are not alone in our journey (Ps. 133)
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- **Fruits of the Spirituality of the Pilgrim**
 - The pilgrim knows where he is going. (Ps. 84:5)
 - The pilgrim walks with the Lord. (Ps. 127:1-2; Ps. 23)
 - The pilgrim travels light. (Ps. 119:105)
 - The pilgrim walks in hope. (Ps. 61; Ps. 70; Ps. 131)
 - Pilgrims walk together. (Ps. 84)
 - The pilgrim dreams. (Is. 52:7)

PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE IN CHRISTIANITY

- Jerusalem, Israel
- Lourdes, France
- Fatima, Portugal
- Camino de Santiago, Spain
- Rome, Italy
- Czestochowa, Poland
- Knock, Ireland
- Guadalupe, Mexico

EXPLORE!

- What images or words come to mind when you hear the word pilgrimage? What pilgrimage traditions most resonate with or challenge your own heritage or experience?
- Explore with the candidates their own experience of pilgrimage. When have they experienced being a pilgrim? What motivated them to go on the journey? What did they discover? If they are getting ready to go on pilgrimage now, what are they seeking?
- Explore places (local, national or international) of pilgrimage with the candidates. What are the acclaimed characteristics of the pilgrimage site? Are there particular devotions or religious practices specific to each place of pilgrimage?

Pilgrimage — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do people go on pilgrimages? What are they seeking? Are there differences depending on places and pilgrimages?
2. Does the means of making a pilgrimage and getting to a pilgrimage place matter? Is it the journey to a place or the being there that is most important? Or does it vary from pilgrimage to pilgrimage?
3. In what ways can the discipline of pilgrimage be valuable for one's 'discipleship' today?
4. Why is pilgrimage an integral physical and spiritual exercise/discipline in the life of the Church?
5. Why is the journey just as important as the destination of a pilgrimage?

PRAYER

Psalm 84 and Psalm 122

or

Gospel Reflection:	Year A	Jn. 14:1-12
	Year B	Jn. 15:1-8
	Year C	Jn. 13:31-35

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Pilgrimage

Scripture

- Gen. 12:1-9 Abram goes from his country to another land.
Gen. 35:1 Pilgrimages to Bethel.
Ex. 23:14-17 Three times a year the festival is observed.
Zech. 14:16-19 The faithful travel on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths.
2Chron 5:2-3 Solomon assembles the tribes to bring the ark of the covenant in procession.
Jer 6:16 Those seeking the ancient paths of those who walked the 'good way'.
Is. 2:3 Many people go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.
Is. 30:29 In song and music, the people 'march' to the mountain of the Lord.
Mic. 4:2 The nations will go to the mountain of the Lord.
Ps. 84:5 Blessed are those whose strength is in God, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
Ps 119:1-5 God's word is a light for our path.
Ps. 120-134 "Songs of Ascent" or "Pilgrim Songs".
Ps. 122:1-4 Let us go on pilgrimage to the house of the Lord.
1Sam 1:3 The man would go to Shiloh yearly to worship and offer sacrifice.
1Kgs 12:26-30 The people travel to the house of David to offer sacrifices.
1Pet 1:1 Peter addresses the 'pilgrims' of the dispersion into Pontus, Galatia, Asia.
1Pet 2:11 Walk as sojourners and pilgrims in the footsteps of Christ who suffered for you.
Lk. 2:41-42 Jesus, Mary & Joseph make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.
Jn 5:1 A feast of the Jews, requires a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
Jn. 7:14 During the feast, Jesus went to Jerusalem and taught in the temple.
Acts 2:1-11 Jews go to Jerusalem for Passover or Pentecost after "the manner of pilgrims".
Acts 9:2; 19:9 Pilgrims of "the Way".
Heb 11:13-16 The heavenly pilgrimage of the redeemed.
Heb. 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed and went to a place where he will receive his inheritance.
Rev. 21:9-22:5 The pilgrimage that seeks God in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Catechism

- 671 The Church as a 'pilgrim Church'.
675 The pilgrimage of the Church runs through persecution
850 The pilgrimage of the Church is missionary by nature.
1475 The living are on pilgrimage on earth to their heavenly homeland.
2691 Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and a renewal in prayer.
2692 The pilgrim Church is associated with the lives of the saints and their intercession.
2696 The most appropriate places for prayer among others are 'places of pilgrimage'.