

RCIA: SESSION 28
Mystagogia - Pilgrimage
Week: 01/05/23 – 07/05/23

Catechism Reference:

2691 The church, the house of God, is the proper place for the liturgical prayer of the parish community. It is also the privileged place for adoration of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The choice of a favourable place is not a matter of indifference for true prayer.

- Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer. For pilgrims seeking living water, shrines are special places for living the forms of Christian prayer "in Church."

Church Documents

The Pilgrimage in the Great Jubilee

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_19980425_pilgrimage_en.htm

Jubilee Year of Mercy

21 January 2016 – Pope Francis outlines the importance of pilgrimage.

What is a Pilgrimage?

A pilgrimage is a devotional journey that one undertakes to a holy or sacred site and which is often associated with a saint or religious place of local or international significance.

At the core of pilgrimage is a journey that carries within it a deep spiritual meaning and an opportunity for personal growth and conversion of heart. The word pilgrim comes from the Latin word peregrinum which conveys the idea of wandering over a distance. A pilgrimage is a focused and intentional journey with a higher purpose and that purpose is, specifically, to honour God.

One of the earliest uses of the word can be found in the works of Saint Augustine of Hippo. In his text, *Peregrinatio*, he describes a Christian spiritual journey as the pilgrim's self-imposed exile in which he searches for God's truth.

A pilgrimage will often carry personal, moral, and spiritual significance for the pilgrim. Generally, it involves embarking on a journey to a shrine or site that the Church considers important.

For Catholics, a pilgrimage usually involves:

- journeying, alone or in a group
- reaching a destination
- encountering special rituals, objects and architecture
- enjoying particular experiences and benefits
- returning home

The Importance of Prayer

Intentional prayer over the pilgrimage experience fosters a keen sense of God's ever-abiding presence. Prayer is always the key that unlocks the space wherein God can speak to us as our very best friend.

An Act of Sacrifice and Penitence

Pilgrimages are steeped in religious history. They can be traced back to the period 957 BC when the temple was first built in the holy city of Jerusalem. Subsequent Jewish Law stipulated that every adult male was obliged to present themselves at the temple for the three major feasts of the Jewish calendar such as the annual celebration of the Passover meal. After the death and resurrection of Jesus and the spread of Christianity to what is now Asia and Europe, Christians were inspired to physically follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Apostles.

Pilgrimages became a significant part of the Catholic tradition in the 4th century when Christians started to travel to the various holy sites that were associated with Jesus' life as well as to the tombs of the early martyrs and

saints. Many devotees would visit these locations even during time of religious persecution. This act served as a deep expression of their reverence for God and his holy ones who had witnessed to their Christian faith in both their way of life and even in their mode of death.

Christian pilgrimages became very popular in the Middle Ages. Pilgrims in this period carried external 'symbols' with them which marked them out as pilgrims and included items such as the baptism-oriented scallop shell or penitential rocks. The most sought after pilgrimages at this time were those that had as their destination the sacred sites in the Holy Land. For these pilgrims, embarking on a pilgrimage outside familiar areas in Europe was not only financially challenging, it was also potentially life threatening!

From time to time, pilgrimages were required as an act of penance when someone committed a grave sin. Going on a pilgrimage involved great hardship because the sinners had to beg for his food throughout the journey.

Pilgrimage in History

In the Christian tradition the practice of pilgrimage has always been linked to the saints. They are honoured in churches and shrines, especially those that preserve their bodies and tombs.

Pilgrimage has been an important aspect of Catholic faith since AD 328. It is recorded that, in this year, Saint Helena travelled to the Holy Land. During the Middle Ages, pilgrimage to the Holy Land became very popular. Most pilgrims travelled by foot, meaning these pilgrimages took years. There were many special sites and shrines along the pilgrim route. Pilgrimage was seen as a way to show true commitment to God and a way to be forgiven of sins.

Rome became an important destination for medieval pilgrims and remains so today. There also is Santiago de Compostela, in north-western Spain, where

pilgrims walk along the famous *Camino*. It also is still a popular destination, where the relics of St. James the Great are venerated. There are many official routes from all over Europe, with specific hostels along the way for pilgrims to rest and meet one another.

From the 11th century or so, indulgences became intertwined with pilgrimages. There was an indulgence reserved for the Crusaders departing to the Holy Land with arms to protect pilgrims.

Why do Catholics go on Pilgrimage?

(i) To ask for a favour

Pilgrimages were often made with special requests in mind.

(ii) Seeking Forgiveness

By the thirteenth century, the idea of the pilgrimage as penance had developed and taken root in the church as was recognised as a legitimate form of penance.

(iii) Healing

The modern pilgrim may seek healing; for example, many thousands of pilgrims flock to Lourdes each year.

(iv) An Opportunity to re-evaluate

The journey of a pilgrim is a useful spiritual exercise, reminding one of the nature of our journey on this earth. It can be a way of making sense of our physical and spiritual journey. The time and space offered on a physical journey can help an understanding of the corresponding spiritual progress.

(v) Prayer

A pilgrimage is an opportunity to deepen one's prayer-life, to deepen that relationship with the Lord.

Examples of International Places of Pilgrimage

Rome, Italy

Holy Land, Israel, Jordan, Syria

Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Rue de Bac, Parish – Shrine of St. Catherine Labouré

Examples of Pilgrimage sites in Ireland

Croagh Patrick, Mayo

Lough Derg, Co. Donegal

Knock, Co. Mayo

Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly

Glendalough, Co. Wicklow

Our Lady's Island, Co. Wexford

St. Brigid's Way, Co. Louth

Examples of Marian shrines:

- Loreto in Italy, where the Holy House of Nazareth is kept;
- Lourdes in France, where the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous and many experience physical healing;
- Fátima in Portugal;
- Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico
- The Shrine of Aparecida in Brazil
- Knock, Ireland

Pilgrimage in Scripture

The idea of a pilgrimage has an incredibly strong foundation in both the Old and New Testaments. The spiritual importance of pilgrimage is manifested often in physical journeys and trials — from Abraham's journey of faith all the way to the missionary journeys of St. Paul.

In Genesis, we observe how God specifically summons Abram to trust Him — to leave his country, to come into God’s land, where he will inherit God’s promises that will make his innumerable descendants into a great nation. Later, in the Letter to the Hebrews, more is said about Abraham’s pilgrimage: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God” (11:8-10).

Fifteen of the Psalms were written specifically for pilgrimage to Jerusalem or “Zion”(see Ps 120-134). They are called the Psalms of Ascent, as the Jews would climb the steep grade up to Jerusalem, the city on the hill. The prophet Micah says, “Many nations shall come, and say,

‘Come, let us climb the Lord’s mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
That he may instruct us in his ways,
that we may walk in his paths” (Mi 4:2).

The pivotal pilgrimage in Scripture is the Exodus — the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt — through the desert, trials, temptations and sin, ever journeying toward the Promised Land. This episode has become one of the primary models of the relationship between journeying and the life of conversion and faith.

In the New Testament, we likewise see a pilgrimage’s importance, not so much in the sense of a physical journey, but in the idea of living our current, earthly lives in a way that brings us closer to the eternal.

Even mysterious and enigmatic figures like the Three Kings are pilgrims who appear in the Gospel of Matthew after the birth of Jesus: “Behold, magi from

the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage’” (2:1-2).

The Infancy Narratives include an account of a pilgrimage taken by the Holy Family: “Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom” (Lk 2:41-42). The 12-year-old Jesus stays behind in the Temple, unbeknownst to His parents, and speaks of His Father with the scholars.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the third volume of his “Jesus of Nazareth” trilogy: “The Wise Men of the East ... represent the setting out of humanity towards Christ, they inaugurate a procession through the whole history. They are not only the people who have found the way to Christ. They represent the interior desire of the human spirit, the encountering of religions and human reason with Christ.” With this perspective, one can see that any religious pilgrimage takes on a Christian meaning, as humanity searches for God, knowingly or unknowingly.

After the inauguration of Jesus’ public life — following His baptism in the Jordan — His entire ministry unfolds as a pilgrimage back to Jerusalem, day after day, along the roads of Palestine.

Christ’s death on the cross has a massive effect on the evolving definition of pilgrimage. His sacrifice introduces the idea of redemption, and the temporary nature of what we experience, as we journey toward heaven.

After His passover from death to life at the Resurrection, the community of Jesus’ first disciples, animated by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, travel throughout the world to spread the Gospel. After their martyrdoms, their tombs immediately become places venerated by the ancient Christians — most

notably those of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rome. “In fact, if you want to go to the Vatican or along the way to Ostia, you will find the trophies of those who have founded this Church,” the famous Church historian Eusebius writes about A.D. 200.

Fruits of a Pilgrimage

Ultimately, Jesus us the Way and the Fruit of Pilgrimage.

Gospel Reflection: Sunday 07/05/23 is the Fifth Sunday of Easter and the Gospel reading is John 14:1-12. The text of the reading is below. 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?

GOSPEL READING

Reader: The Lord be with you.

Response: And with your spirit.

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Response: Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples:

'Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God still, and trust in me.

There are many rooms in my Father's house;

if there were not, I should have told you.

I am going now to prepare a place for you,

and after I have gone and prepared you a place,

I shall return to take you with me;

so that where I am

you may be too.

You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said:

'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

No one can come to the Father except through me.

If you know me, you know my Father too.

From this moment you know him and have seen him.'

Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me?

'To have seen me is to have seen the Father,
so how can you say, "Let us see the Father"?

Do you not believe

that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself:

it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work.

You must believe me when I say

that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;

believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason.

I tell you most solemnly,

whoever believes in me

will perform the same works as I do myself,

he will perform even greater works,

because I am going to the Father.'

Appendix 1.

A Catholic Understanding of Relics

“The religious sense of the Christian People has always found expression in various forms of piety... such as the veneration of relics...these expressions extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1674-1675

The word relic comes from the Latin *relinquo*, literally meaning ‘I leave’ or ‘I abandon’. A relic is a piece of the body of a Saint, an item owned or used by the Saint, or an object which has been touched to the tomb of a Saint.

Traditionally, a piece of the body of a Saint, especially that of a Martyr, may be with the permission of the local ecclesiastical authority used in solemn processions which recall the life or heroic virtues of a specific holy person.

In the 16th Century, the Council of Trent responded to the claims of the reformers that both the veneration of the Saints and their relics is contrary to Sacred Scripture. The Council taught: “Also the holy bodies of the holy Martyrs and of the others who dwell with Christ . . . are to be honoured by the faithful.”

Relics in Sacred Scripture

There are several scriptural passages that support the veneration of relics:

- The Israelites took Joseph’s bones when they departed Egypt (Ex. 13:19).
- The bones of Elisha came in contact with a dead person who then was raised to life (2 Kings 13:21).
- The same Elisha took the mantle of Elijah and fashioned a miracle with it (2 Kings 2:13).
- The Christians of Ephesus, by using handkerchiefs and cloths touched to St Paul’s skin, which resulted in the healing of the sick (Acts 19:12)

Communion of Saints

Venerating the relics of the Saints is a profession of belief in several doctrines of the Catholic faith:

1

The belief in everlasting life for those who have obediently witnessed to Christ and His holy Gospel here in earth.

2

The truth of the resurrection of the body on the last day.

3

The doctrine of the splendour of the human body and the respect which all should show toward the bodies of both the living and the deceased.

4

The belief in the special intercessory power which the Saints enjoy in heaven because of their intimate relationship with Christ the King.

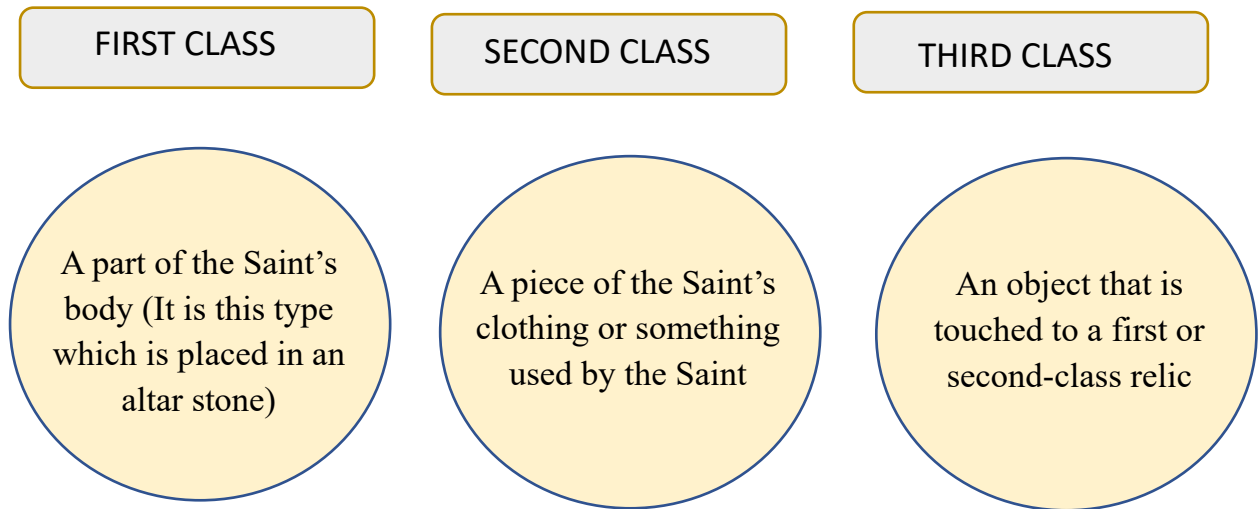
5

Because of our connection in the communion of Saints: we as members of the Pilgrim Church, they as members of the Church triumphant.

The relics of the Saints and their veneration encourage us to appreciate more profoundly not only the heroic men and women, boys and girls who have served the Lord so selflessly and generously, but especially the love and mercy of the Almighty who called these His followers to unending life in His eternal kingdom.

Classification of Relics

There are three classes of sacred relics:



How to venerate a relic?

To venerate a relic, simply spend a few moments in quiet devotion, standing or kneeling to honour the relic. Through the intercession of the saint you bring to the Lord any intention you may carry in your heart.

A person should not genuflect before the relic in a way similar to genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament. This is reserved for Christ alone.

Whatever gesture a person chooses to use to venerate a relic, it must not be done out of superstition, but out of love for the saint and for God.

Venerating the relics of saints is a practice that brings us close to those who walked before us and have now reached the end goal of heaven.