

Pilgrimages have been made since the beginning of time, even before there were the organized religions that structure our lives today. They predate Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Thomas Merton, Modern Catholic Pilgrim's unofficial saint of our pilgrims, wrote, "Man instinctively regards himself as a wanderer and wayfarer, and it is second nature for him to go on pilgrimage in search of a privileged and holy place, a center and source of indefectible life." It is a form of prayer as ancient as the men who first roamed the world.

The project uses this definition of pilgrimage from Iso Baumer, a theologian, to guide it: "an individual, or, more often, a group, sets forth on a journey to a chosen place in order to ask God and the Saints – at that particular place – for aid in a variety of concerns. Afterwards, one returns to one's everyday world." With that definition as our baseline, we interact with our pilgrims and hosts with the idea that a pilgrimage is a physical demonstration of a belief in the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ. Merton writes, "The geographic pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out of an inner journey...One can have the one without the other. It is best to have both." Through MCP, one can easily have both.

He contends that the practice began in the 4th century A.D., noting that St. Helena, the mother of the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine, made her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 326. It was then that she discovered the True Cross. Jerusalem became the main destination for pilgrims due to its prominence in the life of Christ. Merton writes, "Pilgrimage brings continuity between the natural and supernatural. It is a tribute to the realities perceived in the very structure of the world, and of man, and of their being – a dialogue between man and creation." By travelling to a site such as Jerusalem, the believer is professing an acceptance of the reality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. In the Introduction to the Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage, Larissa Taylor writes that up until the 16th century, going on pilgrimage was one of the most important and rigorous events in a man or woman's life

Merton describes the practice of Irish monks called peregrinatio: going forth into strange countries. Ireland being an island, walking to the Holy Land would be a bit difficult, so the Irish took a different approach. Solitary monks would get into little sailboats and set off, trusting that wherever the wind and waves took them was where God wanted them to be. I certainly would consider that to be a rigorous event in my life. The practice of the Irish calls to mind those immaculate lines from Christ in Matthew's Gospel: "Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do

not work or spin. 29 But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil." Those crazy Irish demonstrated their utter and absolute faith in such a Father. Our project is not quite as extreme, but we are hoping that the Modern Catholic Pilgrim will allow people to travel to holy sites while not having to worry about tomorrow.

The last observation is that pilgrimages are made throughout the world for all faiths, especially the Catholic one. Some of you may have traveled to Lourdes or Knock or walked part of the Camino de Santiago in Spain or you may know people who have done so. But, have you ever made a pilgrimage here in the United States? Has the Faith not been here long enough for holy sites to be developed?

- from a parish presentation by Will Peterson