

Take a Vacation? Or Make a Pilgrimage?

By Christina Semmens

The end of summer and the beginning of the academic year seems to result in the inevitable, “What did you do this summer?” questions. Personally, I enjoy hearing the stories of people’s travels to different places and how the break from the normal routine usually adds many memorable moments of beauty, love and laughter to their lives.

However, I have noticed that for many people, most of those memories are quickly forgotten, and they seem to be as stressed and harried as they were before their vacation within a week or two of their return. This saddens me for it becomes evident that their vacation did not truly restore their hearts, minds, souls, and bodies. And that is why instead of a vacation, I make pilgrimages.

Pilgrimages can be of any length, a day or two, a week or a month. Whatever the length, pilgrimages help us to experience God’s care for us more deeply. The One who *is* truth, goodness and beauty. By immersing ourselves in an environment and experience that nourishes our minds, hearts *and* souls, pilgrimages end up nourishing us not simply for a day or two, but for many weeks and months to come.

Additionally, while vacations tend to be for ourselves or our immediate family, so we can “get away from it all,” pilgrimages are best when made *with* others, in particular, our brothers and sisters in Christ. By surrounding ourselves with other people who are also striving for holiness, we allow ourselves to be transformed by their gifts and talents in addition to receiving the graces and blessings that God wishes to shower upon us during the journey. We also come to know more deeply that a holy life is not only possible, but we remember that *this* is exactly what we were created for.

For the enjoyable and transformative moments we experience on pilgrimage remind us that although this earth is wonderful and beautiful, there is something even more awaiting us. That our goal in this life is union with God in Heaven, and we are merely passing through.

On pilgrimage, you still go to magnificent and beautiful places, but your focus is upon experiencing God’s providence, rather than simply indulging your own desires. And when we set aside what we think we want, God, in His goodness, love and mercy, gives us what we truly *need*.

So, the next time you find yourself looking to “go on vacation”, I encourage you to consider making a pilgrimage instead. That upon your return, you may have received not simply beautiful moments to reflect upon, but good and nourishing spiritual food that will sustain you for the journey to holiness in the months and years ahead. For the ultimate pilgrimage is the journey to heaven—to become a saint!

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