



Santiago de Compostela

Oratory Pilgrimage

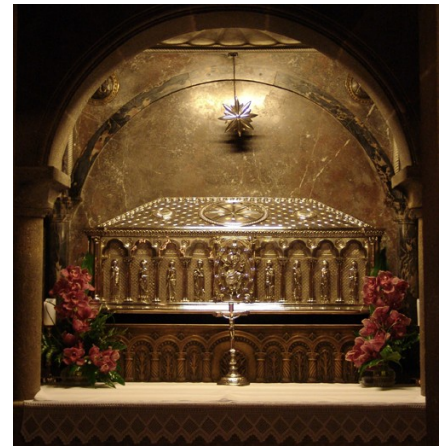
May 4 - 17, 2009

Saint Philip Neri never left Rome, but that did not stop him from going on pilgrimages to the "Seven Churches". It was a time to pray, to reflect on the truths of the faith, to sing, to enjoy the company of other pilgrims, and to be refreshed by the beauty of the city's architecture and by the landscapes on the way to the churches in the outlying regions of Rome. In 2007 and 2008, approximately twenty teen-aged youths, walked from Colgan to Martyrs' Shrine in Midland, a distance of 120 km in five days. We chose to start in Colgan, because the church there is dedicated to Saint James the Greater and it was always our intention to do at least part of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. God willing, we will get there this May.

What is Santiago de Compostela?

In the ninth century, a hermit in Galicia (in the north west of Spain) was led to a field (campo) by a star (stella) to the tomb containing the relics of Saint James (Santiago), the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve Apostles. Although James had been beheaded in 42 AD in Palestine, Christians fleeing westward before the Muslims in the seventh century probably brought the relics to Galicia. Soon after the discovery of the relics, Saint James miraculously appeared in the midst of the battle of Clavijo. He was riding on a white horse, wielding a sword, and led the Christians to victory over the Muslim Moors. From then on, Christians in Spain became devoted to "El Matamoros" (Moorslayer); and Christians all over Europe started to make their way to Galicia to venerate his relics. A cathedral was built and then rebuilt -- the present one dates from the twelfth century. And Santiago de Compostela became the third great medieval pilgrimage destination, after the Holy Land and Rome. Saint Francis of Assisi walked the route twice.

Dante Aleghieri was there. And more recently, Pope John Paul II was there to host World Youth Day in 1989.



The reliquary of Saint James in the Cathedral. Note the star.



The Cathedral in Santiago. The inset shows a detail of a statue of the Apostle above the main doors.

There are many routes to Compostela, but the best known is the "French Route", which begins at the Roncesvalles Pass over the Pyrenees and goes through Pamplona, Burgos, and Leon, until it reaches Santiago some 800 km later. This is the route that the French pilgrims took on the way to the tomb of the Apostle and it has many churches and monasteries along the way that catered to the needs of the pilgrims over the centuries.

The pilgrimage has seen a revival in recent years. There are now about 50,000 people arriving in Santiago each year and four times that many in the years when July 25, the Feast of St James, falls on a Sunday. Unfortunately, most of these people forget that the pilgrimage is about spiritual renewal through penance and a more fervent practice of the Catholic Faith on the way to the sacred destination. They have lost the sense that our whole life here is a pilgrimage to our heavenly homeland. But the Camino (Road) to Santiago can still awaken the sense of faith. And many who begin it as hikers or tourists arrive at the tomb as pilgrims.

Who are the Oratory pilgrims?

We are a group of twenty three Catholics -- thirteen teen-aged youths and ten adults -- under the leadership of Fr Martin Hilbert. Many of us, though not all, have taken part in the walking pilgrimages to Martyrs's Shrine in Midland.

Why are we doing this?

The main purpose of the pilgrimage is to grow in faith and love. We plan to have Mass every day. We will pray most of the Divine Office together as well as the Rosary. We will learn about our faith as we encounter its monuments along the way. Although each pilgrim will have his own intentions, as a group we plan to pray especially for vocations and for the culture of life. The pilgrimage will give the younger members of the group plenty of opportunities to pray about their own vocation. Beyond that, the pilgrims themselves have revealed some of their private motivations:

- Penance for past sins.
- Opportunity to be free of possessions.
- Walk in the footsteps of previous pilgrims.
- Pray for families, friend, and benefactors.
- Walk in a foreign land with people of one's own age.
- See great sights. Have fun. Become Saints.



How far are we walking?

We fly directly to Madrid and then take a train to Leon, where we will celebrate Mass and stay overnight. The next day, we will visit the cathedral in Leon and then proceed by bus to Villafranca del Bierzo and from there by taxi to Valcarce. From there, we will walk about 175 km to Santiago, where we hope to arrive on May 14.

What are we doing for lodging and food?

This is a low budget pilgrimage. We will stay in pilgrims hostels, sleeping in bunk beds with up to 100 other pilgrims in a large room. We plan to buy most of our food at grocery stores along the way, although from time to time we will stop at a restaurant. We will carry everything that we have on our backs. On the pilgrimages to Midland, we had a support vehicle. In Spain we will be on our own.

What is the cost of the trip?

The core cost of the trip is \$2,200 per person, including airfare, trains, buses, lodging, food, and entrance fees to museums. The adult pilgrims will pay this price, but the younger pilgrims will benefit from their own fund raising efforts such as the making and selling of shell-shaped Rosaries, chocolates, and soap. In addition, any money donated to the Oratory for the purpose of subsidizing the trip will be divided among the youth.

How do I find out more about this pilgrimage?

More details are found on the Oratory's web site (www.oratory-toronto.org) under youth activities.

How can I be a part of the pilgrimage?

We don't have any more space this year, but we consider our benefactors as one of the pilgrims. Prayers and financial assistance are always appreciated. And, God willing, this will not be the last such pilgrimage. So if you are interested, please get in touch with Fr Martin Hilbert at the Oratory.

The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri

1372 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6K 1H3

416-532-2879

www.oratory-toronto.org mail@oratory-toronto.org

