

PASTOR'S COLUMN

"THE ART OF PILGRIMAGE"

As I write these words, I am still in Poland on pilgrimage. I have led 15 companions through a number of cities, including Warsaw (the Capital of Poland, 85% destroyed during World War II and then rebuilt by its amazing survivors), Jasna Gora (the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Black Madonna), Wadowice (the birthplace of John Paul II), Krakow (the Diocese headed by Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, destined to become Pope John Paul II), Auschwitz (hell on earth, a reminder of the evil of which humanity is capable), Torun (the birthplace of Mikolaj Kopernik, Nicholas Copernicus, the astronomer who literally turned the Universe upside down), Poznan (the first Capital of Poland dating back to 966 C.E.), and Gdansk (the city of Lech Walesa and the beginnings of Solidarity and the endings of Communism).

Our tour has been a pilgrimage of the heart that has taken us through history and into the midst of current events that are still unfolding.

Each day we have celebrated the Eucharist which has helped us to focus our attention upon the people and places we have encountered and strengthened us as we journey in this multi-faceted land and people.

During these days, I have been reading and reflecting upon the thoughts of Phil Cousineau taken from his book, "The Art of Pilgrimage."

His words remind the reader that life itself is a journey and that each of us is on a pilgrimage of faith:

"All our journeys are rhapsodies on the theme of discovery. We travel as seekers after answers we cannot find at home, and soon find that a change of climate is easier than a change of heart. The bitter sweet truth about travel is embedded in the word, which derives from the older word 'travail,' itself rooted in the Latin 'tripalium,' a medieval torture rack. As many a far-ranging roamer has suggested, there are moments in travel that are like being 'on the rack.' For the wandering Bedouins, 'travel is travail.' The ancient Greeks taught that obstacles were the tests of the gods, and the medieval Japanese believed that the sorrows of travel were challenges to overcome and transform into poetry and song. Whether we are on vacation, a business trip, or a far-flung adventure tour, we can look at the trying times along the road as either torment or chances to 'stretch' ourselves.

But what do we do if we feel a need for something more out of our journeys than the perennial challenges and pleasures of travel? What happens if the search for the new is no longer enough? What if our heart aches for a kind of journey that defies explanation?

Centuries of travel lore suggest that when we no longer know where to turn, our real journey has just begun. At that crossroads moment, a voice calls to our pilgrim soul. The time has come to set out for the sacred ground - the mountain, the temple, the ancestral home - that will stir our heart and restore our sense of wonder. It is down the path to the deeply real where time stops and we are seized by the mysteries. This is the journey we cannot not take.

On that long and winding road, it is easy to love the way. Listen. The old hermit along the side of the road whispers, 'Stranger, pass by that which you do not love.'"

As Disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are reminded through Word and Sacrament that we are a pilgrim people, that life is a journey to the Father.

At times our travel is travail. At times we do not know where to turn. It is then that we must be people of Faith, trusting that Jesus the Good Shepherd is leading. We must continue to search for the deeply real and allow ourselves to be seized by the mysteries!

In two days, my pilgrimage in Poland ends and I will rejoin you, the pilgrims of the Church of St. Thomas More. I look forward, with you, to continue the search for the deeply real and to be seized by the Mystery that is God.

My prayer for you is the traditional farewell for those going on pilgrimage:

"Be safe and well. Peace. Love. Courage!"

Fr. Mike