



Journey of THE SOUL

The Transformative Power of Pilgrimage

By Fr. Ziemowit Janaszek

THE CONCEPT OF pilgrimage is deeply rooted in the Bible. From the very beginning of the Old Testament (Ex 23:14-17; Dt 16:16), and throughout the New Testament

(Lk 2:41-42; Acts 2:5-11), we see the people of Israel journeying to Jerusalem, regularly traveling to the temple. In our faith, the idea of pilgrimage is significant because, as the Church, we are a pilgrim Church. We are on a journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven. Our life in this world is a kind of wandering – it is not the end, but merely a transitional stage on the way to eternal life. So, the concept of pilgrimage is truly beautiful and theologically rich.

Growing up in Poland, I would often see pilgrims passing through my hometown, making their difficult journey to Częstochowa where there is a sanctuary with a miraculous image of the Black Madonna. It was a tradition to go out and watch the pilgrims walk by, sometimes offering them water and supporting them along the way. It was a beautiful witness, especially for those who do not believe, but also for those who believe yet may not be physically

able to undertake such a demanding journey themselves.

My own experience with pilgrimage came after I was grown up, at the age of 32. For me, a pilgrimage represents the beginning of a new life. I embarked on my first pilgrimage in 2016 as a lost and lonely individual, someone who struggled to understand why happiness seemed out of reach and why so many aspects of life felt uncontrollable. Despite having everything seemingly in order on the outside, I was

empty and broken inside – a person crying out from the depths of

my soul but feeling unheard. This was my state when I set out on my journey.

A pilgrimage is not only a matter of your physical capacity: A pilgrimage requires self-denial and confrontation with the deepest and most significant weaknesses of one's heart. On the pilgrimage, you reach a point where you feel utterly exhausted, and the only thing that keeps you moving forward is your intention. People embark on their journeys with various intentions, often praying for their vocation, a good spouse, health for themselves and their families, conception, conversions; others pray for priests, the Church, the country. Most embark to draw closer to God and to live the Gospel through their lives. The stronger your motive, the better, because it becomes the source of your strength. Your intention is what enables you to take the next step. Moreover, when you are on a pilgrimage, there is a sense of detachment from the world. While walking, you focus solely on survival, having enough water to drink, food to eat, and finding a good place to pitch your tent. You cling to God and trust entirely in his grace and providence. Without his grace, even the first day would seem impossible. Even though you may be marching with thousands of other people, there is time for personal reflection and contemplative prayer. Moments of silence on the pilgrimage allow you to reach places in your heart that would be inaccessible amidst the noise and distractions of everyday life. It feels as though you leave your ego at home, setting out with a backpack of intentions, dedicating this journey to God, yourself, and others. This is how something as simple as walking can change someone's life profoundly; this is why people have gone on pilgrimages for millennia.

One of the most profound moments I experienced on my pilgrimage was during a meditation on the prophet Ezekiel (36:26-27). In this reflection, God promises, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

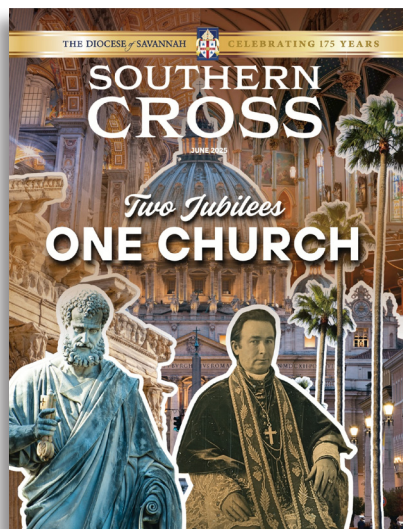
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This reflection perfectly captured my experience: God transformed my hardened heart into a new one, vibrant with life and filled with love. Upon returning, I was a changed person, and I received the call to the priesthood from him. Reflecting on my life, what hurts me most is my past when, as a young person, I strayed from the Church, believing I could find happiness elsewhere on my journey. I see young people today searching for fulfillment, love, and happiness everywhere except in the Church and Jesus Christ. This breaks my heart, but pilgrimages bring me hope.

As you walk through Poland towards

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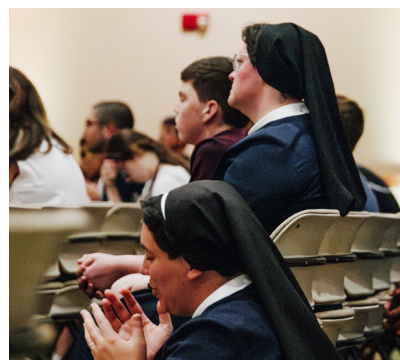
Częstochowa, you pass through villages where people come out of their homes to wave and greet the pilgrims. Many of these people are moved to tears – not just because they cannot join, but because they see young people still walking, still on the path to salvation. It gives them hope that the country is not lost because, as Pope John Paul II often said, young people are the future of the world and the hope of the Church. The path to salvation is arduous, demanding sacrifices and the dedication of our entire selves – body, heart, and strength – to take each step forward, always looking ahead and upward to God.

I dream of the day when, looking toward my future priesthood and ordination, I can take young people from the United States on this pilgrimage to show them the power and strength of this devotion. The pilgrimage is a symbol of the health of the Catholic Church. It is a rich tradition that should not only be maintained but actively promoted. More and more young people should experience this spiritual transformation, which will impact their future in this world and shape their eternal life.

Fr. Ziemowit Janaszek is a new priest of the Diocese of Savannah. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 7.

JUBILEE DAYS

June 22–July 19, 2025



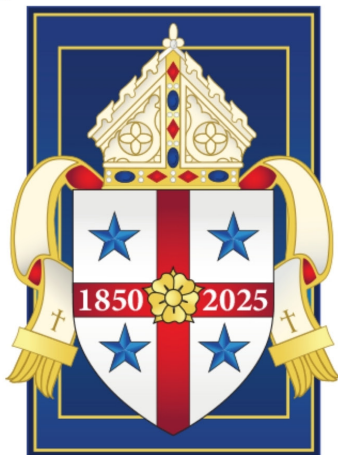
Join Bishop Stephen D. Parkes and the faithful from across the Diocese of Savannah on these Jubilee Days of Pilgrimage, from the Solemnity of Corpus Christi on June 22 to the 175th anniversary of our founding on July 19.

Be sure to save the date for the Diocesan Jubilee Gathering in Warner Robins on October 11!

July 19

The Cathedral
Basilica of St.
John the Baptist

11am Mass



YOU ARE INVITED TO A
**Birthday
Party**
THE DIOCESE OF SAVANNAH
IS TURNING

175

www.diosav.org/jubilee

October 11

Sacred Heart,
Warner Robins

All Day
Festivities