

GO!

Your Mother is Calling!

JOHN M. HAFFERT

Why This Book?
Why GO?
Where?



The Pope says it all!

*Places of pilgrimage, statues, and pilgrimages are all means which the Church and popular piety offer us so that, with their help, we can **deepen** our own **personal spiritual lives** our **prayer** and **union with God and the saints**, and make our daily Christian witness **fruitful**.*

*Fatima (like some other great Marian shrines) is made more holy by the apparitions of God's Mother, through which she herself chose this place for her sanctuary. Here she is especially close to the desires and needs of people, and approaches God's throne with her powerful intercession on behalf of all those who turn to her in a **faithfilled and trusting visit** to this **special place of graces**. At the same time Mary addresses her "Message of Fatima" to all pilgrims, her urgent invitation to penance and conversion, and to ceaseless prayer for the conversion of sinners and the world, which today more than ever is in need of God's mercy and forgiveness.*

Do not let this pilgrimage to Fatima be a passing event, which ends with your return home. Rather, make this pilgrimage *a new beginning for your spiritual life*. Continue what you began again in Fatima in your personal, family, and social life. Continue your interior prayer to the Mother of God, asking for the grace of penance and conversion for yourselves, and for all people and nations.

—Pope John Paul II

Address to German Pilgrimage to Fatima in special audience, May 3, 1986 (Osservatore Romano).

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Contents

1. Why This Book?.....	5
2. A New Idea.....	9
3. Why Go?.....	15
4. Where?.....	19
5. Let's Go to Portugal.....	31
6. Let's Go to Spain.....	43
7. Let's Go to Italy.....	55
8. Let's Go to France.....	63
9. The Gateways:	
Porto, Loreto, Lyon.....	74
10. Ireland—England.....	81
11. Apparitions Now.....	87
12. Shrines Near Home.....	97
13. The Pilgrim.....	105
14. The Pilgrimage Apostle.....	111
Appendix.....	117



Above: Pope John Paul II at Fatima.

“It has been my custom to make *pilgrimages to Shrines of Our Lady*, starting with my earliest youth. I know very well that *every people, every country has its holy places: Places of special encounter between God and human beings*; places in which Christ dwells in a special way in our midst. If these places are *so often dedicated to His Mother*, it reveals all the more fully to us *the nature of His Church*.

— Pope John Paul II

Chapter 1

Why This Book?

Now, past seventy, and anxiously considering what there is of greatest importance which might require further effort on my part, I asked myself:

1. Do the dozen books I have written say all that I have felt was important?

2. Am I satisfied with the structure of the World Apostolate of Fatima, will it endure and grow?

Perhaps a synthesis is needed to tie together my most important books on the *Morning Offering*, the *Rosary*, the *Scapular*, the *Eucharist* . . . to show more clearly that these “*devotions of the Two Hearts*” provide a *formula of holiness*.

The books say much, but many people do not read. And even then, only the Holy Spirit can enable those who do read to understand.

So I ask: Is there not some other *single device or practice* which might serve to *instruct and inspire the apostles of the future*?

And it appears to me that there is one.

There is something which *in just one or two weeks* can transform an average person into an ardent apostle, as happened to St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius Loyola and so many others.

That something is a *Pilgrimage* to places of “special contact with Heaven” to experience the divine reality in a *personal way*.

Our Lady said, for example, that those who would come before the altar at the *Rue du Bac* in Paris would have *graces poured forth upon them* . . . there where She showed Herself as Mediatrix of Grace.

But while Our Lady made this promise to those who “come to the foot of this altar,” the same is also true about

so many other places where Our Lady has appeared, where She continues to manifest herself in a special way to those who make the sacrifice of “coming” to visit their Mother.

What can equal the *personal* experience of the *Holy House* of Nazareth? It is now enshrined in a great Basilica on the Adriatic coast, over one of whose doors a Pope inscribed the words: “Tremble all ye who enter here, this is the holiest place on earth.”

To what can we compare the personal experience of *touching the rock* of Lourdes, or the *personal encounter* with saints in the places where they lived, worked and are buried . . . sometimes where their incorrupt bodies still speak to us with miraculous realism?

Yes, a pilgrimage requires travel . . . effort . . . money.

But most of us today do all three just for a two week summer vacation. And a Pilgrimage can be the greatest vacation of all!

Who Would Do It?

It is not a question of visiting *any* Shrine, and certainly not a question of a “haphazard” meandering from one Shrine to the other.

Our Lady Herself has set a pattern of intervention, of “visitation” to our modern world. It began in Paris in 1830, reaching a climax at Fatima, and *continuing now* in many other parts of the world.

After more than thirty years of experiencing the wonderful fruits of Pilgrimages, I decided to take time out to write this book about it, to plan a comprehensive Pilgrimage.

One of the reasons I decided to make this effort is because of a particular “wonder” which impressed upon me the joy which Our Lady seemed to take in the sacrifices people make to come to Her Shrines.

Of course there are many other reasons why I decided to take time out from everything else to write a book about the “Great Ave Maria Pilgrimage” and to dedicate whatever time was necessary in order to make this nonprofit, low-cost Pilgrimage available to as many as possible. There have been the *many* wondrous signs of God’s favor personally experienced on pilgrimages over a period of more than thirty years . And I pray that many others will

have similar experiences which may deeply affect their lives. . . and through them invigorate the Apostolate until all the world echoes with the salutation of the Archangel: *Ave Maria!*

Throughout this book we speak of the Shrines as "special places of contact with Heaven." Perhaps Solomon best describes what we mean in the 8th chapter of Kings.

The Ark of the Covenant had just been solemnly transported from Mt. Sion to the new temple where God now manifested His Presence by a cloud.

"Is it then to be thought," the great and wise Solomon exclaimed, "that God should indeed dwell upon earth? For if heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built!"

Solomon then proclaimed that the cloud of God's Presence symbolized the fact THAT HERE IN A SPECIAL WAY GOD HEARD PRAYERS. . . "That Thou mayest hearken to the supplication of Thy servant . . . Whatsoever they shall pray for *in this place*, and hear them in the place of Thy dwelling in Heaven."

Today we have the true and real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist in our local churches. But still *there are special places* to which we can apply the words of Solomon:

"Here in a special way God hears prayers."

And perhaps even more, we might add: Places where in a special way we experience the Divine Reality.

For this reason the Ave Maria Tours were founded. For this reason the airline, Skystar International, was formed. And finally, for the same reason, I have written this book which covers most of the major shrines. . . *all* of which are now available at low cost to anyone who wishes to go on the "great Ave Maria Pilgrimage."

So when you read this book you are not reading about remote places which you may never hope to visit. You are not reading about places of which you might only dream. The non-profit Ave Maria pilgrimage puts it all within your range!

Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, says: "One of the signs of our times is the announcement of Marian apparitions multiplying all over the world. For example, reports are arriving from Africa and from other continents at the

section of the congregation that is competent to deal with such reports.”

Towards the end of the book we speak of the apparitions in Africa, and also of Garabandal, Medjugorje and other current apparitions.

I believe with all my heart in the title of this book: **GO! YOUR MOTHER IS CALLING!**



Cardinal Ratzinger.

Chapter 2

A New Idea

The first Ave Maria Tour began in a very unusual way thirty-two years ago with a tragic accident.

The late Msgr. Harold Colgan and I had started the Blue Army as an international organization in 1950. We wanted a representative group from the United States for the blessing of the cornerstone for our international Center at Fatima.

Since Fatima was little known at that time we planned a pilgrimage to include Pompeii, Rome, Loreto (the Holy House of Nazareth), LaSalette, Paray-le-Monial, Nevers (St. Bernadette), Lourdes, Paris, among others. We called it the “Great Marian Tour” of the Marian Year, 1954.

To our disappointment, the best cost-price we could obtain from a principal travel agency (American Express) was almost \$3,000. We felt reasonably sure most of our people could not afford so much money (quite a fortune back in 1954!).

I happened to know that in Rome the Jesuits had a full-time office for handling travel arrangements for Jesuits all over the world (including 5,000 missionaries). So I wrote and asked the Brother in charge if he could arrange an inexpensive trip to all our Shrines on an “at cost” basis. We did not want to make any money. We were doing this solely to get people to Our Lady’s Shrines and especially to Fatima for the blessing of the cornerstone of the Blue Army International Center.

The Jesuit Brother in charge of the office agreed and his agent set up the entire tour for less than \$1,000!

Our Blue Army members were delighted. One-hundred-and-twenty-five signed up!

We collected the money and sent it to Rome, down to the last penny.

And something *incredibly* tragic happened!

Two weeks before we were to leave New York, the agent who had arranged the tour was killed in an automobile accident. All the information about the trip (and all the money) was locked in his safe which was promptly sealed by the police pending settlement of his estate!

What were we to do? Where would we get buses and hotels when *we did not even have the hotel list?*

The solution to this problem affected my life to a great extent . . . and the lives of many thousands of others who have subsequently taken the now famous "Ave Maria Tours."

Fortunately, I spoke the languages of each of the countries we were going to visit. So a few days before the tour, I arrived at each place to deal with hotels, restaurants and guides "on the spot."

When the trip was over, not only had all the expenses been covered for a most successful trip, but we got the money from Rome and there was about \$2,000 left over.

The "Special Effect"

That extraordinary tour in 1954 ended at Fatima for the blessing of the cornerstone with a truly enthusiastic group of pilgrims. I asked each one at the end if they had been satisfied. Not only was there not one serious complaint from the entire group, but all said it was far beyond what they ever could have hoped for at the price that was paid.

But the greatest success of the trip was what I had hoped most: Those 125 pilgrims were so struck by the wonder and reality of Fatima that many came home to *become our most outstanding apostles to spread the Message of Fatima* in the United States!

We had blessed the cornerstone for the House without having money for the construction of the building, but it went up steadily, month after month, and everyday the necessary money to pay the bills was there. *It was the first major pilgrimage center to be built at Fatima* and is, to this day, one of the most preferred places for pilgrims to stay at that holy place.

Thirty-Two Years Later

Back in the 1950's and early 1960's the value of the dollar

was so high that one could travel in Europe inexpensively.

We continued to have these great "Ave Maria Tours." But then the currencies of the world began to level off and it became as expensive to travel in Europe as in America, sometimes even more expensive.

Little by little the "big" pilgrimages to most of the great shrines went beyond the capacity of most pocketbooks. Only a visit to a few selected shrines could be afforded by the average person.

Then in the late 1970's we began to use a special aircraft for the World Peace Flights. It was suggested that we should obtain *our own plane* for the peace flights and use it "in between" for low-cost pilgrimages.

This made possible a one-week trip to Fatima for about \$500 . . . using the special plane and using the Blue Army House at Fatima "at cost."

Many took advantage of this. But only a few felt attracted *to go only to Fatima*. If they were crossing the ocean, why could they not also go to Lourdes? Why couldn't they go to Rome to see the Holy Father?

So we began to schedule the plane for Fatima, Lourdes and Rome. The flights were filled. Over 15,000 went in a single year.

This was still a far cry from the great Ave Maria Tours of the past . . . but at least we were getting people to the three *most important* destinations.

Then again something very unexpected happened (almost like that automobile accident back in 1954).

Terrorists exploded a bomb in the Leonardo da Vinci airport in Rome. Other terrorist incidents took place at other important airports, aimed directly at Americans due to U.S. support of the state of Israel. (Most of the terrorists were Arabs trained in Syria or Libya, according to the reports.) Suddenly many of our flights in 1986 had to be cancelled. We even considered closing the office. And here it is important to explain another great concern:

With "our plane" we had been able to take people inexpensively to Fatima, Lourdes and Rome. These were indeed three very important destinations, as mentioned above. But we had always regretted that in going to the airports nearest to Fatima, Lourdes and Rome we could not get our people to other great shrines like Loreto, the

Shrine of the Holy House of Nazareth, now enshrined on the Adriatic Coast of Italy. And what about Pontevedra and Santiago in Spain . . . LaSalette and Rue du Bac in France?

It used to be that we could afford to travel a whole month in Europe to visit these places. Now a month in Europe, at a cost of \$60 to \$100 a day, was too long for most people to afford.

Now on the heels of the terrorism at some major airports, we asked a question which seemed inspired:

Since we had our own aircraft, *could we not find airports completely out of the path of terrorism, and yet sufficiently central* to visit not only Fatima, Lourdes and Rome *but also most of the other great shrines?*

More than 30 years of "Ave Maria Tour" experience (including the recent operation of our own aircraft) made it possible for us to come up with *the idea of using airports which will probably revolutionize pilgrimages far into the future*. It will now be possible *to visit almost all those shrines we visited in 1954*, and at "approximately the same price as paid in 1954."

It may seem presumptuous of me to believe that this pilgrimage idea was actually an inspiration from Our Lady. Yet that is indeed what I think. Shortly before, as mentioned in the previous chapter, I had been wondering how to *best* allocate the remaining good years of my life (since they would necessarily be few).

I had reviewed all of the major projects of the moment . . . a new major motion picture film we had just produced in Hollywood, completion of our building programs in the United States and Fatima, development of the International Secretariat in Switzerland, problems of the Apostolate in various countries, manuscripts to be published, and so on and on. In the review was the terrorist problem with the pilgrimage program.

I asked myself which of these projects could probably be accomplished by others if I were to become incapacitated and which ones might most need my own experience. And I had decided that the *pilgrimage* project was one of the latter.

When *the idea of the new airports* came to me I at once prepared a folder describing the new concept. Five hundred

copies were sent out in *a research mailing* to determine just how many people would respond and which shrines most of them would choose out of the some twenty-two options which this concept made possible.

Even before most of the answers arrived *I was on my way to the key airports* in Portugal, Italy, and France to verify the practicality of the concept, to see if I could find the personnel to make it work, and to strike a bargain with airports, bus companies, and hotels so that this could not only open up the possibility of visiting *all of the major shrines* to persons of modest means but *could also be the greatest pilgrimage value in history*.

At this same time a trust agreement was being prepared so that these pilgrimages would be operated long into the future as a *completely apostolic, non-profit* benefit not only to members of the World Apostolate of Fatima (The Blue Army), but to all those who, like St. John Chrysostom, recognize that "a pilgrimage is a religious instinct."



Blue Army House at Fatima.



The thrill of seeing (and often touching) the Pope.

Chapter 3

Why Go?

A well-conducted pilgrimage is such a fulfilling experience that there is probably nothing upon which one could spend "extra " or "vacation" money to greater benefit, and perhaps even greater satisfaction and joy.

Naturally, one's first obligation is one's family.

But I would think that even more important than money *in the bank* for the family is the pilgrimage experience *in the "person"* (regardless of age, and sometimes even more for youth than for adults.)

St. John Chrysostom, as previously quoted, said wisely (and as a Doctor and Father of the Church) that "*a pilgrimage is a religious instinct.*"

Almost all of the canonized saints in history have made pilgrimages. Sometimes pilgrimages were the turning points in their lives.

For example, St. Francis de Sales had graduated as a lawyer from the University of Bologna. Before returning to his home near Geneva he went with a servant to what was then the greatest Marian shrine in the world: the Holy House of Nazareth in Loreto, Italy.

When the young lawyer entered the Holy House he was so overwhelmed with the spiritual atmosphere that he fell upon his knees. His servant reported that he knelt there almost half an hour before he finally rose, and on leaving the Holy House, confided to the servant that he had decided to become a priest.

Many pilgrimages have been made as a result of vows. We read in the log book of Christopher Columbus of 1492-93, for example, in which Columbus recalls the dramatic episode of the terrible storm which overtook his ships as they were returning from their discovery of the New World. He had to throw overboard two barrels which

contained very valuable notes written during the journey, and when it seemed that all was lost, he and the crew vowed to make a pilgrimage to three Marian Shrines of Our Lady if Our Lady would protect them. (Two of these shrines were Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain and the Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto in Italy.)

But most pilgrimages are made precisely because someone feels the attraction to go to a place "close to Heaven" . . . to a place where one can feel the presence of God in a special way.

The first words of Our Lady at Fatima to the children were quite simply: "*I am from Heaven.*" And the millions who go to that Shrine actually *experience* the special nearness to the Queen of Heaven who chose that spot as a "place of contact" with the modern world . . . a world threatened by atomic destruction.

On a recent trip, I met a man who had been on our trips to Fatima seventeen times! When I expressed my surprise, he said that *each time* he felt *something even more extraordinary* than all the previous times . . . something that kept drawing him back.

Perhaps Pope John Paul II expressed this best in his very first words at Fatima on May 13, 1982 when he had come to thank Our Lady for having spared his life from the assassin's bullet which had struck him down on that same day a year before.

The Pope said that in coming to Fatima, he felt that he was coming to "*Our Lady's Home.*" He mentioned that at the foot of the Cross, St. John took Our Lady *to his own home*, and that shrines of Our Lady in the world are the special places where She waits for Her children . . . where they are "*at home with Her.*"

Later when the Pope had returned to Rome, he said that he could never forget the farewell chant of the "Ave" at Fatima . . . that place where he had felt so close to Our Lady "at Her home."

But the Holy Father used almost the same expression in going to the Holy House of Loreto in Italy, because this same expression can be applied to any of the great shrines of Our Lady where it truly seems She is waiting for Her children, waiting to manifest Her maternal presence and to shower Her graces upon them.

The Patron of Pilgrims

The greatest example of an ideal pilgrim is St. Benedict Joseph Labre, who tried six times to enter the Trappists and six times came out, usually because his health was not adequate for the strict Trappist life.

He did not get an answer in a specific way. He felt a certain peace from having gone to the shrine. He then decided that he would go to other shrines until he found the answer.

He spent the rest of his life on pilgrimage! He went several times to Einsiedeln in Switzerland, to Santiago in Spain, eleven times to Loreto in Italy! He spent the last six years of his life in Rome. But once each year he crossed the mountains to the Holy House of Loreto.

For centuries St. Benedict Joseph Labre *was the only layman, (except kings and martyrs) to be canonized*. Until very recently a Swiss hermit, Nicholas von Flue, was canonized.

One could ask why St. Benedict Joseph, for a thousand years, was the only layman ever canonized because he had made pilgrimages. What was his *message* to the world? He had never written a book. He had never preached a sermon. Usually he never *even told anyone his name* as he wandered from shrine to shrine!

So of what use had his life been? And how could anyone imitate him since we knew nothing about him other than the fact that he visited shrines?

There seems only one possible answer: In him *God wanted to show the sanctifying power of shrines*. God wanted to show that what convents and spiritual retreats are for persons in religious life, a pilgrimage can be for the average lay person.

That is why I am writing this book. That is why after half a century of labor in the apostolate, now in my seventies, I feel that *it is most important* to make it possible for as many as possible to visit the great, traditional Shrines to touch the roots of faith and be able to bathe in the flow of miracles and grace from those sacred places.

“The Saint is Dead”

Certainly St. Benedict Joseph would have gone unnoticed

except that God wanted to have him exalted as I have just said above.

The saint had just visited one of the 125 Marian Shrines in Rome . . . one perhaps little known. He had attended three Masses there. Knowing the end was near, and not wishing to cause a commotion by collapsing in church, he left and collapsed on the steps outside. He was carried across the street to a butcher shop, where he died.

Suddenly all the bells of Rome began to ring and little children ran into the streets crying: "The saint is dead! The saint is dead!"

Up on the Quirinal, which was the residence of the Pope at that time, they were asking why all the bells were ringing, and what holy person had died?

Was it some famous confessor of the Holy City? Some Bishop or Cardinal? No, it was a man in rags, his body infested with lice (which he suffered as a penance) who had collapsed on the steps of a church and died that morning in a butcher shop across the street.

Ah, but we should not say he was a beggar, because St. Benedict Joseph Labre did not beg. If someone gave to him, he accepted. But he lived by Divine Providence. And as he had begun his way of life by visiting a little shrine near his home up in the northeastern part of France, so he spent the balance of his life going to ever greater shrines.



The Pope Praying in the Holy House at Loreto.

Chapter 4

Where?

Any shrine is "important." The most important shrine for anyone will be whatever shrine becomes a personal place *of special contact* with heaven, a place of good, general confession, a place which makes one *know* what it means to be a member of the "pilgrim Church" on earth.

In 1521 a soldier was wounded during the siege of Pampelona in Spain. During convalescence at the hospital he read some spiritual books which impelled him, as soon as he was better, to go to the famous Spanish shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat. There Our Lady confirmed his great conversion. And he laid his knight's armor and his weapons at Her feet.

He was St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits.

But now that he had given up his vocation as a soldier, what did God want of him?

Like St. Benedict Joseph Labre, St. Ignatius *began to go to the great shrines* to those places of special contact with heaven, to *find out what God wanted of him*.

In his own autobiography, St. Ignatius calls himself "the pilgrim." And indeed this he was, as he went around Europe from shrine to shrine and finally even to the holy places of Palestine and to the Holy House of Loreto, then the greatest Marian Shrine in the world.

He finally knew actually what he wanted to do. He wanted to become a priest and to serve the Church, and in a special way to serve the Holy Father through a vow of obedience.

He was ordained in Venice (where he had gone from Loreto) and said his first Mass in Rome on Christmas Day, 1538 in the greatest church of Our Lady in the world: St. Mary Major. He gave to the Church the "Company of Jesus," one of the greatest forces for education and renewal

in the annals of Christian history.

Loreto is still one of the most important shrines of the world, if not still even *the most* important. But it is perhaps less visited today than the more recent shrines of Fatima and Lourdes.

Beyond doubt, the Holy Land is unique. For centuries the three major places of pilgrimage have been the Holy Land, Rome, and Santiago in Spain, the tomb of St. James.

Would it be wrong to ask: "*Which is most important?*"

In the case of St. Benedict Joseph Labre, we find that the saint journeyed all over Europe, but finally settled in Rome. Because there you have 125 Marian shrines in one city . . . 125 images of Our Lady which have been papally crowned. In addition, you have the tombs of Peter and Paul, you have the Catacombs, you have the great shrine of St. Mary Major with the miraculous picture painted by St. Luke and the relic of the crib or manger of Bethlehem. You have the Holy Stairs, perhaps the greatest of all the relics of the Holy Land after the true Cross, and so on and on.

I had the privilege of living in Rome for about five years. During that time I acquired a "little library" about the major sanctuaries and monuments of Rome. One could easily understand why the canonized pilgrim (St. Benedict Joseph) spent the last six years of his life there—except to spend Easter in that "holiest place on earth."

But if St. Benedict Joseph Labre were a pilgrim today, might he not be at Lourdes or Fatima? And what would be his attitude towards "unapproved" places such as Garabandal and Medjugorje?

We will try to answer that last question later. For the moment, let us consider which shrines seem "most important" at the present time as gauged by the number of pilgrims visiting them.

We would have to put Rome at the top of the list if Rome were truly in itself "a sanctuary" or shrine. But Rome is a great city which contains *many* shrines. And *not one* of those shrines in itself attracts more pilgrims *than Fatima or Lourdes*.

But many would consider Rome the number one place of pilgrimage, even more than the Holy Land, with one very large "caveat":

In this city there is so much good. But as in all cities there is also evil. And in order to have the great religious experience which Rome offers, a person must go there in a true spirit of pilgrimage and prayer and with a great deal of preparation.

Blessed Anna Maria Taigi used Rome as a catechetical school for her children. Every Friday she did all seven of the most important basilicas on foot! Just to visit the holy places of Rome in the footsteps of Blessed Anna Maria Taigi could be a “supernatural explosion” for any devout soul, particularly for young women and mothers, of whom Blessed Anna Maria is the official patroness.

A special school was founded in Rome for young women (which is no longer in existence) under her auspices. The whole idea of the school was to use a bus and to travel at least twice a week to the holy places of Rome to experience the roots of The Faith and the flowing miracles of Rome’s many holy places: Tombs of apostles, relics of saints, repeated opportunities of seeing the Holy Father face to face, living successor of St. Peter. — It was called the Romana School for young women who had finished high school and were considering their vocation in life as preparation for college.

Rome, as we said above, requires special preparation.

The commercial guides in Rome spend most of their time describing art works . . . of which there are many!

For this reason the Ave Maria Tour offers a little brochure on the four major basilicas, explaining the spiritual message of each in just a few words. Despite the art works, in each there is a *special grace* to be sought and received!

Most pilgrims to Rome experience the frustration of being unable to see *all* the most important holy places. But those which we do see are tremendously impressive.

When we ask pilgrims after they have been to several of the major sanctuaries which one impressed them the most, they do not often mention Rome. *They almost always mention their audience with the Holy Father* and the thrill of having seen the Vicar of Christ and having received his personal blessing.

Lourdes

Outside of Rome, the number one pilgrimage attraction is Lourdes . . . a town with over 25,000 hotel beds which are usually pretty well filled.

Many express some surprise (and even disappointment) at the tremendous number of religious stores which line the streets of Lourdes. But they soon get over this first impression when they enter the sanctuary, where all is peace and quiet and there is not the slightest taint of commercialism.

But all those stores, together with all the hotels and restaurants, are *for the great convenience of the pilgrims* and because *there are so many, from all the corners of the world*. And those pilgrims are there because when they enter the sanctuary, *they can touch the rock upon which Our Lady stood*.

They can do as Bernadette did at Our Lady's request. They can eat a piece of grass and they can drink the water which flows from the spring which Our Lady opened in the cave of Her apparition.

Even more . . . just a short distance from the Grotto, they can enter a bath to which this same miraculous water has been diverted.

And how beautifully, how reverently this ablution is conducted!

Volunteers serve in the baths with great devotion. The Rosary is constantly recited as one pilgrim after the other is conducted into the waters with wonderful modesty and faith.

And almost all of those who take the baths of Lourdes experience a "miracle."

The water is cold. The towel used when one enters the bath is soaking wet, and there is water everywhere. Yet most pilgrims attest when they emerge from the bath that instead of feeling cold, they feel warm. And by the time they have replaced their clothing, they are completely dry . . . even though they have never been offered a towel with which to dry themselves.

In over a hundred years there has never been an incidence of illness or infection as a result of taking these baths, even though thousands bathe in the same water on any given day.

There is a *joy* one experiences at Lourdes even if one has only a modest devotion to the Blessed Virgin. There is a feeling She is a loving mother, given to us at the foot of the Cross, who wants us *to know* that She is our caring, *loving mother*, responsive to every one of our needs, however small or great.

And through this experience there comes to every sincere pilgrim a new understanding of the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist.

During the procession of the Blessed Sacrament the greatest miracles occur. Perhaps nowhere in the world is there a greater public manifestation of adoration and faith in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament than during the procession of the Eucharist and the Blessing with the Eucharist every afternoon in the great square of Lourdes.

At Lourdes *one experiences faith*.

This faith, this experience of "Church," is one of the great pilgrimage fruits. More than once I have known personally of pilgrims who have gone to Lourdes in the hope of a great favor, sometimes of a cure, and after being there a couple of days have been so moved by the faith of the people, and the need of the sick, that they have forgotten themselves and have begun to serve the sick with both love and joy...considering their own needs and illnesses as inconsequential, and themselves very blessed, in comparison with so many others who come often on the verge of death or severely crippled. And they felt themselves so privileged to be a part of dispensing that joy and consolation which seems to flow from the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mother of the Eucharist, upon Her children in this special place of "contact."

Fatima

Fatima is very different from Lourdes. Many of our pilgrims who have been to both Lourdes and Fatima say that Fatima has meant more to them. But I myself have preferred the feeling of joy and intimacy with Mary experienced at Lourdes rather than the feeling of great responsibility which I usually feel at Fatima.

But each of us is different. Each of us sees through different eyes. Each of us proceeds in a different way. And

perhaps this is why God has made contact with us in so many different places, in so many different modes, even though so often through the same great instrument of mercy and love: The most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mother of all men (a title She earned at the foot of the Cross).

At Fatima we do not have a rock to touch as at Lourdes, but we see the statue of Our Lady standing at the very spot, at the very height of the little tree upon which the three children saw Her as She said: "I am from Heaven."

At Fatima we must be filled with awe if we know what happened here: That over this very place occurred the only miracle in history at a predicted time and place *"so everyone may believe."*

And I am here to believe!

Who of us is not struck by the fact that at this very spot where we kneel, Our Lady revealed hell to the three children and spoke of the great loss of souls *"because there is no one to pray and to make sacrifices for them?"*

Here at Fatima, Fr. Gobbi received his vocation to found the Marian Movement of Priests. Here at Fatima, Fr. Fox felt his call to work for youth. Here at Fatima many of us have been inspired to ask as did the children: "What do you want of me?"

And individually, to each one, *Our Lady seems to speak.*

This is what our pilgrims tell us again and again.

Moreover, the actual place of the apparition in the Cova, in front of the great Basilica, is not the only place of special "contact" when we come to Fatima. About a mile away we have the village of the children and the sites where the angels came to them, and where Our Lady appeared when they were released from prison on August 15, 1917.

It is particularly impressive to kneel at the place where the archangel appeared with the Blessed Sacrament and gave them the prayer of adoration and reparation to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

To me personally, most impressive is Valinhos where Our Lady appeared to the children after their release from prison. The Sanctuary of Fatima has bought the ground and preserved it without any buildings, exactly as it was except for one monument built a short distance back from the actual place of the apparition.

What a holy, tranquil spot. What a marvelous place of "contact!"

Loreto

After Rome, Fatima, and Lourdes, perhaps the next greatest place of pilgrimage in Europe today is Loreto.

It is not as frequented now as it was before Fatima and Lourdes. But there are many who after being to Fatima, Lourdes and Rome would be ready to say that Loreto was the greatest place of "contact."

Padre Pio once said that Loreto, where we visit the original Holy House of Nazareth, is such a holy place that although he longed to go there, he felt that he would not be able to enter a place so holy.

St. Charles Borromeo, the great Cardinal-reformer of the clergy, felt the same way. Three times he made pilgrimages from Milan to Loreto. Once he left the carriage a long distance from Loreto and walked the last miles on foot. And when he arrived in the Basilica, he felt unworthy to enter the Holy House. He spent the entire night in prayer, and then went around the Holy House on his knees before entering.

A Pope once inscribed over a door of the Basilica which enshrines the Holy House: "*Tremble all ye who enter here. This is the holiest place on earth.*"

Here, transported from Nazareth, is the original little house in which the angel appeared to Mary. Here Jesus lived with Mary and Joseph, and after thirty years of "hidden life" in this special house went forth to spend only three years teaching the world His message before performing the great act of Redemption on the cross and confirming His message with the miracle of resurrection.

St. Benedict Joseph Labre came eleven times to Loreto.

All of those visits lasted from ten days to a month. During the last years of his life, he took from twenty to thirty days to get there from Rome, and from twenty to thirty days to return!

Those who know the life of the saint marvel at those difficult journeys, in the worst possible weather, across the mountains from Rome to Loreto and back again.

He used to spend most of the day in the Holy House. When the doors of the Basilica were closed at night, he

would often sleep leaning against them.

But the last three years, when he was so fragile, he was sheltered in a basement room of a house on the square through the kindness of the Sori family, whose descendants are there to this day.

St. Benedict Joseph Labre is the official patron of our Ave Maria Tours. May all who are privileged to make a pilgrimage to Loreto be imbued with some of his spirit and his faith.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, although I rejoiced that our special plane made it possible for thousands to get to Fatima, Lourdes and Rome, I always regretted that due to the scheduling of the plane, there was never time for most of these same pilgrims to get to Loreto. I am sure that St. Benedict Joseph Labre helped with the inspiration to take our plane to Ancona, the airport of Loreto, rather than to Rome . . . so that our pilgrims would have a choice. Those who have been to Rome will be able to spend four days in Loreto, or visit many of the other holy places in Italy, such as Padre Pio, Assisi, Tolentino, Collavaleza. But now *all*, including the pilgrimages to Rome, will get to Loreto.

Other Shrines

Other major shrines, in the sequence of the “great Ave Maria Pilgrimage” launched in 1987, are the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and the Shrine of the “Good Jesus” in northern Portugal and the convent of the Apparitions of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Pontevedra, Spain.

The latter is in the custody of The Blue Army. This is one of the unique sanctuaries of the world. At least a few pilgrims *can actually sleep* under the very roof where the great revelation of the Five First Saturdays and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary took place.

Adjoining the convent of the Apparitions in Pontevedra is a building converted by The Blue Army of Spain into a pilgrimage house. All rooms have private facilities and are *directly connected with the convent* in such a way that a pilgrim can go to that very room in which Our Lady put Her arm around Lucia and revealed Her Immaculate Heart in the presence of the Infant Jesus!

It was in the garden of this convent that Jesus said: "*What is being done to establish devotion to the Immaculate Heart of My Mother in the world?*"

From this holy place, through the "contact" made by pilgrims, the devotion of the Five Saturdays and of the Immaculate Heart is gradually spreading with new force and vigor throughout the world.

Just an hour away from Pontevedra is *one of the greatest shrines in all Christendom*: The tomb of St. James, brother of St. John the Apostle.

In the Middle Ages so many pilgrims came from all over Europe to this shrine that roads created pilgrimage routes—which to this day have developed into some of the major roads of Europe.

After we leave Portugal and Spain the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage goes to Italy, a land of shrines! Of course, for those who have not been to Rome, this is the first choice.

Another choice is the shrine of Our Lady of Graces, over the tomb of Padre Pio. Many thought that the number of hotels built during the time of Padre Pio would stand empty after his death, but even more have had to be built in the years that followed! Many miracles are reported here. Only a short drive away is the cave of St. Michael, the cave associated with the two great feasts of the Archangel.

To the north of Loreto, also near the Adriatic Sea, is Padua, with its great shrine to St. Anthony whose tomb is visited there annually by tens of thousands of pilgrims. Nearby is Venice, with the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Health, and the tomb of St. Mark the Evangelist.

In France, the great shrines after Lourdes are La Salette, high in the French Alps, the Rue du Bac in Paris, where Our Lady appeared in 1830 as Queen of the World. Here she revealed the Miraculous Medal. Most Marian writers claim these apparitions started the "Marian Age."

Also of great importance in France is the Shrine of Our Lady of Fourvieres in Lyon. Ars is the center of devotion for the parish priests of the world. Of great importance is Paray-le-Monial, known as the "City of the Eucharist" and "City of the Sacred Heart." It was here Our Lord revealed His Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Between Paray-le-Monial and Paris is the town of

Nevers, where many flock to visit the beautiful and incorrupt body of St. Bernadette, to whom Our Lady appeared at Lourdes.

North of Paris, easily available in a one-day excursion, is Lisieux, with the great Shrine of St. Therese . . . the most magnificent building in the world built in honor of a single human being. This is true if we exclude St. Peter's in Rome, being built not only in honor of St. Peter, but also as the world center of the Church.

In Ireland, the great shrine is that of Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland. In England we have Aylesford, associated with the gift of the Brown Scapular to St. Simon Stock. And while Aylesford has become the most popular Marian Shrine in England due to its proximity to London, also of great importance is the national Marian Shrine of Walsingham, which grew around a replica of the Holy House of Loreto even before the original Holy House was transferred from Nazareth to Italy.

In Switzerland, we have the shrine of Einsiedeln which was visited five times by St. Benedict Joseph Labre and was very dear to the saint. We have the shrine of Our Lady of Bourguillon, a unique shrine of Our lady of the Scapular at Fribourg, associated with the great doctor of the Church, St. Peter Canisius.

This saint used to make a pilgrimage every day from the old city of Fribourg, on foot across the valley and up the hill to the shrine of Our Lady of the Scapular, to pray that the Faith would be kept in Switzerland.

While the Reformation raged around, and nearby Geneva was declared the Protestant "Rome," Fribourg remained an island of faith. It became a center of Christian education from which the Faith gradually spread back through Switzerland and gave missionaries to the entire world! While it is true that all of the saints made pilgrimages for special favors, there is no greater example than that of this holy doctor of the Church who also made four pilgrimages all the way from Germany and Switzerland down to the Holy House of Loreto on the Adriatic coast.

And St. Peter Canisius became a great defender of the tradition of the Holy House. He is depicted in one of the chapels in a large painting holding the replica of the Holy House because he was its glorious defender.

Is it any wonder that we consider it an obligation *to do all in our power* to make it possible for many to come to these places of special “contact” with Heaven itself? We know that those who make this “contact” become our greatest apostles. Like St. Benedict Joseph Labre, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Ignatius, St. Peter Canisius, and so many others . . . from these simple “contacts” many will go forth to change the world.

Pope John Paul II said that Fatima was “more urgent than ever.” Is it not true that our pilgrimages . . . our actual visit to these special places . . . is even more urgent now than in times past?



The Holy Father venerates statue at place of apparitions in Fatima.



The Basilica of Fatima

Chapter 5

Let's Go to Portugal

We are able to visit all the Shrines mentioned in the last chapter from three principal "hubs": Porto (Portugal), Ancona (Italy) and Lyon (France).

Ancona and Lyon open up most of the important shrines of Italy, Yougoslavia, France, Switzerland . . . and *most* of the places most people aspire to visit outside the Holy Land. So there was no difficulty in choosing these two "hubs."

But it was not so easy to decide on Porto as the hub city in Iberia (Portugal and Spain), thus offering a choice of Fatima in Portugal or Pontevedra-Santiago in Spain.

After all, the reason we began the Ave Maria Tours almost half a century ago was to get people to *Fatima*. And why should we tempt them to go to Spain instead?

I had just spent an entire month in Europe talking to key personnel, studying airports, hotels, ground transportation, everything the great "Ave Maria Pilgrimage" would require. Only the choice of Porto remained in question as I boarded the coach at Domus Pacis in Fatima to join a group bound for a flight home on the Queen of the World plane.

I had not met this particular group before. After four days in Lourdes, they had just completed another four days in Fatima. I asked a priest sitting next to me on the coach how he had enjoyed the trip.

To my surprise he answered: "I enjoyed it all, *but I regretted there was not enough time for us to go to Santiago.*"

I looked at him in surprise and then told him that I was returning to America with one great, unanswered question: — whether the Queen of the World plane for the great "Ave Maria Pilgrimage" beginning in 1987 should in the future continue to land in Lisbon, offering only Fatima,

or whether it should land in Porto and offer a choice of Fatima or Pontevedra-Santiago?

"My concern, Father," I explained, "*is that Fatima is so important that I want everyone to go there.*"

"You should have no fear" he answered. "I am sure that anyone who has not been to Fatima would unhesitatingly choose Fatima rather than Pontevedra and Santiago because they know it is so important and they have heard so much about it. But if you stop in Porto, then you make it possible for many of us who have been to Fatima also to get to Pontevedra and Santiago."

All my doubts vanished and Porto was chosen as our hub city for Iberia.

Little known to most Americans, Porto is a busy, interesting, proud city (second largest in Portugal) with an ancient history and ancient traditions. Unlike Lisbon, it was never destroyed by an earthquake and it has 18 enormous churches built of granite which, some 300 years ago, were completely covered in brilliant tile.

For those who know Barcelona and Madrid, there is a similarity between the relationship of Porto and Lisbon: the busy, proud city of industry versus the city of politics and government.

But one must not expect Portugal and Spain to be anything alike because they are not! Four hundred years ago the Portuguese poet, Camoens sang: "Here in this small land of Portugal there will not be wanting men to do and to dare for Christendom . . . if Spain is the head of Europe, Portugal is the crown on the head!"

One of the most immediate differences between the two countries is that of language. Portuguese, with 16 different nasal sounds, is a difficult language, completely different from Spanish.

Father McNaspy in his book *A GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN EUROPE* says: "Name almost any trait that you reckon typically Spanish, and you will find it as untypically Portuguese."

Spain was discovered by tourism in the late '50s, and there has been a crescendo of tourism into Spain ever since, so that even now it is *the number one tourist goal of all Western Europe*.

Portugal lagged behind but little by little began to come

to the fore as the “undiscovered jewel.”

From our gateway city we can go north into the most beautiful part of Spain or go south into the heart of Portugal.

Fatima “An Experience”

Two Popes of our time have been pilgrims to Fatima, where through a Papal Legate in 1946, Pope Pius XII crowned Our Lady as “*Queen of the World.*”

Pope John XXIII said that Fatima is the hope of the world. John Paul II said in 1982: “It is more relevant now than ever.”

As noted before, Ave Maria Pilgrimages were founded 32 years ago specifically to make it possible for as many people as possible to *experience* Fatima.

One problem, of course, is the Atlantic Ocean . . . and another, back in the early 1950s was the fact that there were no hotels in Fatima.

So together with Msgr. Colgan, I planned to build a large pilgrimage house there directly opposite one of the gates of the sanctuary. Today it offers comfortable and convenient accommodations with American standards and literally thousands of Americans have enjoyed its hospitality.

And today there are many more hotels in Fatima, including the largest one in all of Portugal. Crowds are coming in ever greater numbers throughout the year, especially, of course, on the 13 of the month from May through October, when they arrive *by the hundreds of thousands.*

Focal point of the pilgrimage is the “little chapel” (Capelinha) now under a splendid canopy, in a great hollow of ground known as the “Cova da Iria.” There Our Lady appeared on May 13, 1917 to three shepherd children aged 7, 9 and 10 years.

Certainly Fatima seems the climax of a long series of apparitions which began in Paris in 1830 at the very time that Karl Marx was preparing an atheistic thesis which would polarize the world.

The apparitions took place at the very peak of the first world war. Our Lady spoke to the children of that war and of “more terrible wars” which would follow if men did not stop offending God. She foretold that militant

atheism would spread from an atheist Russia "throughout the entire world" if men did not turn to God. But She promised that if Her requests were heard: "Russia will be converted . . . and an era of peace will be granted to mankind."

We consider three days the absolute minimum for *experiencing* Fatima! There may be two reasons for this:

- 1) The concept of Fatima is so staggering that it is difficult to assimilate in a short time;
- 2) There is not just one place to visit, but at the very least four.

Much to Absorb

At Lourdes you can walk up and touch the rock on which Our Lady stood and you can meditate on the few words spoken to St. Bernadette. You can pray the rosary by the grotto as Bernadette did and imagine that the statue in the niche is Our Lady Herself as She appeared to Bernadette, and as She followed along the Rosary with Bernadette, bead by bead! In a short time you can "experience" that wonderful, loving presence of Our Lady at Lourdes . . . a Mother of pity and compassion who has cured there many and consoled even more.

But at Fatima you are faced not with a rock but with a series of events and of prophecies which stagger the mind. And no matter how many times you may be there you will always be filled with a sense of wonder to think that over this place, thousands saw a miracle at a predicted time, "so that everyone may believe." It was seen over an area of 32 miles and caused everyone in the area to think it was the end of the world!

At Lourdes you can feel consolation and nearness to a loving Mother.

But at Fatima, at the very place where She spoke so lovingly to the children, She also opened the ground and showed them a vision of hell! She showed them a myriad number of souls falling into that abyss and lamented: "So many souls are lost because there is no one to pray and make sacrifice for them."

Perhaps *it is the importance of Fatima* and of the Fatima Message which sets this Shrine apart . . . especially to our atomic age. Yet what is it that draws the pilgrims back again and again to Fatima? Why is it that so many of them

(indeed most) when asked which they preferred, Lourdes or Fatima, almost invariably replied that Fatima had the greatest impact upon them.

Earlier I mentioned meeting a man from the United States who in just a couple of years had been back to Fatima 17 times!

Also when we had our first priests' retreat in Fatima, I was concerned because several of the priests had asked: "What are we going to do at Fatima for a whole week?" When the retreat ended, I asked the first priest I met: "Father, how was the retreat?"

"I have been a priest for 46 years," he answered, "and this has been the greatest experience of my life."

It is not so much what we do here, but what *Our Lady is doing here*. It is something one cannot put into words.

Although the little chapel of the apparition at the very place where Our Lady appeared is the main focal point of devotion in Fatima, perhaps at least architecturally, the focal point is the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, with the great marble statue carved by the Dominican priest, Father Thomas McGlynn, in the niche above the entrance . . . a statue carved after long meetings with Sr. Lucia herself.

And in this basilica, in the sanctuary, is the original international Pilgrim Virgin statue, through which many miracles were performed in various trips around the world.

In the side chapels on the right and left of the basilica are the tombs of Francisco and Jacinta, two of the three little children to whom Our Lady appeared.

The first apparitions were not here at the Cova, however. The first apparitions took place some distance behind their village about a mile from the Cova. And a visit there is a sacred "must" on any pilgrimage to Fatima.

Six apparitions of angels prepared the children for the great message they were to give to the world. Three of the apparitions were silent, and three conveyed messages concerning the special calling of God for these children, including a special message on the Blessed Sacrament . . . during which an archangel adored the Eucharist. The Angel of Portugal then gave the children Holy Communion and taught them a magnificent prayer of reparation to the Most Holy Trinity, in petition to the Hearts of Jesus

and Mary for the conversion of sinners.

A short distance from where this Eucharistic apparition took place, at Valinhos, Our Lady appeared to the children on August 15, 1917 after the children had been detained in the Ourem prison for two days and threatened with death if they did not deny Our Lady.

To me, this is the most sacred place, or the most meaningful place in all of Fatima. We must rejoice that the sanctuary at Fatima was able to obtain and preserve the land about it, permitting nothing to be built there. It is kept as it was in 1917 except for a small shrine with a statue of Our Lady which is built a short distance back from the actual place where She appeared.

Mingling in with these places where the apparitions occurred is the Way of the Cross which begins at the great circle half way between the Cova and the village of the children and winds through the hills, climaxing in a Calvary half-way between the Eucharistic apparition of the angel and the August 15 apparition of Our Lady.

Other attractions at Fatima are audio-visual programs to be seen in the sanctuary; a marvelous display of original, historic photographs; and behind the Chapel of the Apparitions there is the Chapel of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where the pilgrim experiences, in a special way, the Eucharistic presence, Mary's plea to "stop offending Her (Divine) Son . . so much already offended by sinful man."

And Fatima itself is beautiful, on a mountain over 3,000 feet above sea level. A short walk to hills in the area offers some remarkable views, a relaxing experience for any pilgrim to enjoy.

Beyond the village is the parish church where the children were baptized. It contains a picture of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel which one of the children said resembles the final vision of Our Lady when She appeared holding the scapular at the climax of the Miracle of the Sun.

Next to the parish church is the cemetery where Francisco and Jacinta were once buried near the tombs of their parents just inside the cemetery gate.

A short distance behind the church, one can look across the hills to the Shrine of Ortiga . . . which is within walking distance of the parish church and was *the center of devotion*

to Our Lady in this region before the apparitions at Fatima.

Indeed in the early days when I first came to Fatima, the local people were still going with great devotion to the Shrine of Our Lady of Ortiga even as they went to the Cova. The church was built in the 16th century to commemorate an apparition of Our Lady to a little shepherdess. There had been a similar apparition of Our Lady several hundred years before on the other side of Fatima, down at the foot of the mountain, in the Village of Reguengo do Fetal. So the mountain of Fatima could truly be called "Mary's Mountain"; and it is little wonder that these people have such great devotion to Her and that the little children had been taught to say the Angelus and to pray the Rosary . . . in that remote mountain village which suddenly exploded upon the world scene when Our Lady appeared there at the height of World War I and performed a miracle, witnessed by over 100,000 people "*so that everyone may believe.*"

Yes, there is much to see, much to experience at Fatima . . . far too much to be absorbed in a brief visit. Even though I have personally been there more than fifty times, there is always some new impression, some new realization or deeper appreciation never before experienced.

Truly Fatima is today, and will long remain, one of those intimate, most lively places of "contact" with heaven in our troubled world.

Coimbra

Most of our previous pilgrimages to Fatima used to offer a side trip to Coimbra where Lucia became a member of the Carmelite Community, with Mass in the Carmelite Convent . . . knowing that very often she attended the Mass from behind the grill.

Coimbra is *now* included on every trip to Fatima on the great Ave Maria pilgrimage.

In his *Guide to Christian Europe* Father McNaspy said of Coimbra: "It must on no account be missed."

Coimbra boasts one of the world's oldest universities, founded over 200 years before the discovery of America. St. Anthony of Padua was graduated from here and was a priest in Coimbra when he decided to join the Franciscans

has remained incorrupt since the 13th century.

But when we landed in Lisbon, it was impossible for most of our pilgrims to get to Pontevedra and Santiago (of which we shall speak in a moment) and therefore we changed our airport to Porto.

However, those who are staying in Fatima for three nights, especially if they have been there before, may wish to take a one-day excursion to *Santarem and Lisbon*. This will be particularly easy when the new super highway is finished (most of which is already completed between Santarem and Lisbon). The new road will pass directly by the great sanctuary of Fatima.

The Castle Banquet

Some say that "pilgrims" should not be going to banquets or taking a night tour of Paris.

But one of the real highlights of the Ave Maria Pilgrimage is the Medieval Banquet at the "Fatima Castle" in Ourem. And you haven't really *seen* Paris if you have not seen its fountains and monuments illuminated at night (among the most glorious of which are Montmartre and Notre Dame).

We will speak later of what makes the difference between a tourist and a pilgrim. But if anyone thinks that tourists "have more fun" than pilgrims, they are wrong. The opposite is true!

But as I said . . . that's for another chapter. So now, about that Banquet . . .

As mentioned before, it was only after 1960 that hotels began to develop in Fatima and most of the so-called *pilgrimages to Fatima* (advertised as such) spent *no more than one or two hours in Fatima*. And whenever pilgrims inquired about staying at Fatima they were simply told that they had to stay in Lisbon but a day excursion to Fatima was the answer.

This "answer" amounted to free time in Fatima for *one or two hours*, during which time most of the pilgrims were occupied in getting lunch!

The result was that thousands upon thousands of pilgrims from all over the world were coming to Fatima, saying a prayer in the Cova, and then after a "quick look around" (usually without even any assistance from a guide),

spending the balance of the day driving back to Lisbon. (The round trip then averaged six hours!).

Organized groups with a Spiritual Director usually had a Mass at the Cova so at least they would have a homily. But the explanation they received about Fatima would usually depend on the knowledge of the spiritual director who accompanied them, and sometimes this was very slim.

To fill the need of giving these one-day pilgrims the Message of Fatima during their lunch hour, we conceived the Medieval Castle program at the Castle of Ourem . . . because *the whole history of Fatima centers around that castle*. Indeed the local inhabitants now say: "This is the place of the gateway to heaven, because it was always from the direction of the Castle that Our Lady came in a ball of light to appear to the children, and She always disappeared in that direction, seeming to enter heaven over the very area of the castle . . . which has stood here for over 2000 years as the center of government for this entire area."

Fatima itself gets its name from a Moorish princess who lived in the Ourem Castle.

The Moors had ruled in Portugal for over 300 years and the Castle of Fatima was the center of their defenses for the entire nation.

A Count from the north (from the area of the city of Porto, hence the name "Portugal") conquered most of the lesser castles from the Moors and then waited and prepared for seven years before making an assault on that principal castle, which even from Roman times had been called *the impregnable*. It is on a solitary mountain, with a source of fresh water at the top, commanding view of the surrounding countryside. On a clear day even the distant boundary of Spain is visible from its towers.

It was a "miracle in the sun" which gave the Portuguese troops their courage. The sun seemed to take the form of a cross before the final assault on the "Fatima" castle.

What is most amazing is that Portugal's first king sent an offer to the Moors in the castle inviting them to come out and battle in the very area which now lies between the castle and Fatima. *He agreed that whoever won the battle would rule the entire country.*

The Moors accepted the challenge. . . and *lost the battle without a single drop of blood being shed on either side!*

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Fatima itself gets its name from a Moorish princess who lived in the Ourem Castle.

The Moors had ruled in Portugal for over 300 years and the Castle of Fatima was the center of their defenses for the entire nation.

A Count from the north (from the area of the city of Porto, hence the name "Portugal") conquered most of the lesser castles from the Moors and then waited and prepared for seven years before making an assault on that principal castle, which even from Roman times had been called *the impregnable*. It is on a solitary mountain, with a source of fresh water at the top, commanding view of the surrounding countryside. On a clear day even the distant boundary of Spain is visible from its towers.

It was a "miracle in the sun" which gave the Portuguese troops their courage. The sun seemed to take the form of a cross before the final assault on the "Fatima" castle.

What is most amazing is that Portugal's first king sent an offer to the Moors in the castle inviting them to come out and battle in the very area which now lies between the castle and Fatima. *He agreed that whoever won the battle would rule the entire country.*

The Moors accepted the challenge. . . and *lost the battle without a single drop of blood being shed on either side!*

This is a part of the extraordinary story told during the dramatic presentation which takes place during the Medieval Castle banquet.

Seven major “spirits” of the past are called back into the presence of the diners in the castle’s great banquet hall . . . recalling all the glorious history which led up to the miracle at Fatima, climaxed by the Miracle of the Sun (predicted by Our Lady so that “all may believe” that if Her requests are heard Russia will be converted and “an era of peace will be granted to mankind”).

The most picturesque approach to the castle is directly from the Parish Church at Fatima, past the Shrine of Ortiga. All along the route there are most impressive views of the castle across the very fields where the contest with the Moors took place in the 12th century.

As our pilgrims arrive at the foot of the tower, a knight descends on a white horse with the programs and menu. The pilgrims then board special small coaches to go up through the narrow gates of the castle wall.

This Castle Banquet is *included* in *all* the Ave Maria pilgrimages to Fatima and will be long remembered.

Chapter 6

Let's Go To Spain

For those who have already visited Fatima previously, there is a second option available from Porto: Via Balasar and Braga through the Minho Valley (most beautiful scenery in Portugal) to the Spanish frontier at Tuy.

Balasar

Only 17 miles from Porto is Balasar, close to the famous beach of Povoia de Varzim.

Until recently few people had heard of Balasar, a tiny village in the wine region. But here was born an extraordinary soul now known throughout the world by her Christian name, "Alexandrina."

The cause for her beatification has already been concluded on the diocesan level and probably by the time some are still reading this book she will already have been raised to the altar. And fortunately the home in which she lived, paralyzed and bed-ridden as a victim soul, is completely intact, with the very pictures around the bed which were her constant companions. The parish church has become her shrine.

Alexandrina is so important to our time and to each of us individually that over a century before she was born a miracle in front of her parish church prepared for her coming . . . a miracle which can be seen to this day.

It was first described in a letter written by the pastor to the Archbishop of Braga who gave permission for a chapel over the spot. The pastor wrote:

"I write to advise you of an inexplicable occurrence in this parish of St. Eulalia of Balasar. On the last Feast of Corpus Christi while people were coming to Mass, they noticed a cross laid out on the ground and that dew had fallen around, but not on the cross. I myself went to brush

away the dust and loose earth that formed the cross, but the design reappeared in the same place. I then ordered a considerable quantity of water to be poured over it, but after it drained away the cross reappeared once more and has remained since.”

Over a hundred years later the miracle of the cross was explained in colloquies between Our Lord and Alexandrina. *Jesus told her that the cross had been a sign for her who was to be His victim soul for the world.*

Imagine! A miracle over a hundred years in advance of this extraordinary woman to whom Jesus later said: *“Thousands have been saved by your terrible sufferings.”*

The story of Alexandrina is one of the most marvelous, most beautiful, most extraordinary in the annals of sanctity.

In March of 1918, less than a year after the apparitions of Fatima, a fateful event transformed her life.

She was with her sister and another girl sewing in an upper room when three men broke in with the intention of molesting them. When the door gave way, Alexandrina leaped from a window 13 feet above the ground. She heard the screams of her sister and the other girl and, although injured to an extent which she could not have imagined, she picked up a stick and climbed valiantly up to defend her sister and friend. When the men saw her broken body and her impassioned resistance, they fled.

But Alexandrina became a helpless cripple in constant excruciating pain. At first she had hoped that she might go to Fatima on a pilgrimage to be healed, as many were. But then she learned of the heroic sacrifice of little Jacinta of Fatima and of the words of Our Lady: *“Continue to pray and to make sacrifices. . . so many souls are lost because there is no one to pray and make sacrifice for them.”*

From that moment, Alexandrina patiently offered her suffering for the conversion of sinners. And she began to receive messages from Our Lord almost identical to the messages given to Lucia, the sole survivor of the three children of Fatima, about the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The Archbishop of Braga sent her communication to Rome stating that in his opinion Alexandrina was an extraordinary soul. He reported that *she was living solely*

on the Blessed Sacrament, receiving no other food.

When Rome asked for confirmation, the Archbishop asked Alexandrina if she would be willing to go to a hospital for constant surveillance.

After forty days it was determined beyond any doubt that the only food which passed her lips was that of the Blessed Sacrament. She lived only on the Eucharist without losing weight, from Good Friday of 1942 until she died on October 13, 1955, the actual anniversary day of the the final vision of Fatima and the "Miracle of the Sun".

I wish I could use all the pages of this book to speak only of Alexandrina! I was privileged to visit the house where she suffered and to speak to Deolinda, the loving sister who wrote down Alexandrina's colloquies with Our Lord, one of the most touching of which reveals an extraordinary promise made by Jesus:

"If anyone should invoke your name while you are in heaven, they will never do so in vain. I will appoint you a protectress of mankind. You will be so powerful with the All-Powerful. After your death I will make your name widely known; I shall see to it Myself. Many sinners will come to your tomb and be converted."

And there, less than half an hour from our hub city of Porto is that tomb of which Our Lord Himself said: "Many sinners will come to your tomb and be converted."

Even the inscription on her tomb reads: "Sinners: if the ashes of my body can be useful to save you, approach. If necessary, pass on the ashes, trample on them until they disappear; but never sin again. Sinners: there is so much that I would like to tell you. This vast cemetery could not contain all that I would like to say. Do not offend our dear Lord anymore. Convert yourselves. Do not lose Jesus for all eternity, He is so good! Enough of sin! Love Him! Love Him!"

Francis Johnston, in his beautiful little book *Alexandrina* (published by Tan Books and Publishers and available from The Blue Army National Center in Washington, N.J. 07882) summarizes the great apostolate of Alexandrina who in the last years of her life received as many as 6,000 people in a single day, and to each one she had the same message. . . the Message of Fatima: "Make reparation to Our Lord in the adorable Eucharist! Penance! Penance!

Penance! Pray the Rosary devoutly every day. practice the First Saturday devotion. Consecrate yourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary through the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.”

In a sense, Alexandrina is like an “extension of Fatima, especially of little Jacinta whom our Lady promised to take ‘soon’ to heaven . . . but who seemed to live on in Alexandrina to whom Jesus said: “If anyone should invoke your name when you are in heaven, they will never do so in vain. I appoint you a protectress of mankind.”

Tuy

From Balasar we shall continue to Braga, where we visit the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception of Portugal on Mt. Sameiro and the Shrine of the “Good Jesus” on Mt. Espinho.

We will describe these interesting, mountain-top shrines in a future chapter, but now we continue through the beautiful Minho Valley until we cross the Minho River into what is probably the most beautiful part of Spain.

Most of the houses are of granite. And some of the stones used in the buildings, and even in the fences to support grapevines are of such massive size that we cannot help but wonder how, in times before modern machinery, they were put in place.

Our first glimpse of Spain, as we cross the bridge, is the castle of the old town of Tuy.

Lucia was once stationed in the provincial house of the Dorothean Sisters in this little town. One day she was crossing this same bridge and met two eager pilgrims who had heard that Lucia was in Tuy and were on their way there in the hopes of seeing her.

When they met the two Dorothean Sisters on the bridge (one of whom was Lucia), the visitors asked: “We hear that Sister Lucia is in the convent in Tuy, can you tell us if that is true?”

Lucy had just crossed the demarcation line on the bridge between Portugal and Spain and looking at her Sister-companion, with a little smile, she turned to the visitors and said: “Oh, I believe she is back in Portugal now.”

Disappointed the visitors retraced their steps . . . and

spread the word . . . and Lucia was spared many inquisitive visitors!

We stop in Tuy to visit the provincial house and the chapel. Even though all of the furnishings of the sanctuary of the vision have been removed to Pontevedra, this is known as the "last vision of Fatima."

It was in the attic of this convent that Lucia wrote most of her memoirs.

Then, a little more than an hour to the north, we come to the granite city of Pontevedra and to the Convent of the Apparitions . . . that special place in which Lucia received the visit of Our Lady with the Child Jesus . . . the visit in which Our Lady revealed Her Immaculate Heart and made the promise of the five First Saturdays.

In the main chapel of the Pontevedra convent are now reserved *all the major momentoes of both the apparitions in Tuy and those of Pontevedra itself.*

Few Americans have discovered this beautiful northwestern part of Spain with these interesting old cities . . . but since the middle ages the Europeans have been visiting here because of its pilgrimage route to the tomb of St. James. Often in the summertime it is difficult to find a hotel room anywhere along this beautiful coast, particularly popular as a vacation center for both the French and English.

Then between Tuy and Pontevedra is the port city of Vigo, where cruise ships dock and a ferry operates between England and Spain.

Pontevedra

Pontevedra was a Roman city and probably got its name from the Latin, "Old Bridge." And just down from the convent of the apparitions is one of the oldest bridges crossing the river which flows from Pontevedra into the great sound and on down to the port of Vigo.

The center of the city, where the convent is located, has narrow winding streets. Its granite houses are frequently marked with Coats of Arms of the knights who served in the defense of Galicia in ages past. The convent itself was formerly the residence of the Duke of Rias Bajas, another name for lower Galicia. Just across a narrow street in front of the convent is the former residence of the Baron,





At left, the Convent of the Apparitions at Pontevedra. Above: Room at which First Saturday vision took place. Below: Garden where the Child Jesus appeared in Pontevedra.



now a government-run hotel (so popular that rooms have to be reserved well in advance.) And virtually around the corner from the convent is the magnificent basilica of St. Mary Major all in granite and with magnificent towers which dominate the old section of the city.

Despite a few modern houses, here in this center of granite antiquity, one feels plunged back into the middle ages.

We do not tire of saying that Our Lady seems to appear in only the most beautiful places and even here where She appeared in the center of an old city, the area itself is a delight to experience.

Certainly there are many possible focal points of a visit to Pontevedra. Yet two have a particular interest for the Ave Maria pilgrim:

The Pilgrim Virgin

Pontevedra is on the main *Camino de Santiago* . . . or road of St. James . . . leading from the South. All the Portuguese pilgrims to the tomb of St. James passed this way. And in the 16th century an extraordinary miracle resulted in a shrine to Our Lady in Pontevedra which caused Michener to say in his book *Iberia*: “ Pontevedra boasts the only Marian Shrine on all the roads of St. James throughout Europe.”

This is the story:

While a group of pilgrims from Portugal were passing through Pontevedra, a mother who had been walking with them (dressed as a pilgrim and carrying a child) was suddenly transformed in their presence. A great light shone from her. She raised the child to bless the pilgrims who were now only a day's walk from the shrine of the apostle.

Amazed, the crowd fell to its knees. After the blessing the Lady seemed to be absorbed in the great light that surrounded her and the Child and then both disappeared.

At the importunity of the pilgrims, and aided with the offerings they generously gave, a church was built on this very spot *in the middle of the road!* Now all the traffic in Pontevedra diverts around this unique church which houses a statue of Our Lady clothed in the garment of the pilgrims to Santiago, and holding the Divine Child.

Was Our Lady thus marking Pontevedra, perhaps long in advance, as the place where She would reveal Her

Immaculate Heart to the world as She had promised in Fatima in 1917 . . . and which She Herself would propagate throughout the world through the Fatima "Pilgrim Virgin"?

Only a few blocks away from where this miracle occurred is the convent in which the apparition of the five First Saturdays took place in the former residence of the Duke of Southern Galicia on December 10, 1925.

Lucia, the sole survivor of the three children of Fatima, was alone in her tiny room. Ten years before Our Lady had told her that She was going to come soon and take the other two children to heaven, but that she, Lucia, was to remain on earth because God wished to use her "to establish in the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart." And Our Lady had promised in the apparitions at Fatima to come back and to ask for the devotion of the five First Saturdays.

Now on this December 10, 1925, that tiny room was filled with light and Our Lady stood beside Lucia and placed Her arm around her shoulder. The Child Jesus appeared at the side of Our Lady elevated on a small cloud so Lucia could look directly into the eyes of Our Lady and the Divine Child Who then begged her to have "pity on the Heart of your Mother pierced with the thorns of ungrateful men." And Our Lady then spoke, with Her arm on Lucia's shoulder, and made the promise of Her special assistance at the hour of death to all those who would make the devotion of the five First Saturdays.

This must be considered one of the most intimate apparitions with a public message in history. The only comparable vision was that to St. Catherine Laboure in Paris, where the saint rested her hands on Our Lady's lap during the first apparition when Our Lady appeared seated in a chair in the Chapel of the Rue du Bac in Paris.

Now at Pontevedra one wall has been removed from that small room of the apparition so that from the adjoining room a group of about forty can attend Mass at the very spot where Our Lady and the Divine Child appeared.

Down in the garden, next to the convent, there occurred a miracle very similar to the one which resulted in the building of the Pilgrim Virgin church in the center of the town.

While Lucia was working in the garden, a child stood

at the gate. He seemed lonely and did not speak. Lucia asked him why he did not go around the corner to St. Mary Major and ask Our Lady for the Child Jesus to play with him.

Suddenly the child was transformed. It was Jesus Himself and he asked her: "*What is being done to establish devotion to the Immaculate Heart of My Mother in the world?*"

There is now an altar at this place with a statue of the Holy Infant and our groups not only can attend Mass *in the main chapel* of the convent (which has the furnishings from the Chapel of the final vision of Fatima in Tuy) and not only *in the actual Chapel of the Apparitions* of the Immaculate Heart upstairs, but *also here where the Child Jesus appeared*, transformed, solicitous about having the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of His Mother spread throughout the world.

Cardinal Cerejeria, Patriarch of Lisbon, has predicted that the convent of Pontevedra will become for devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary what the Chapel of Paray-le-Monial has become for devotion to the Sacred Heart.

It is almost like three enormously important shrines in one single spot!

And some of our pilgrims may even have the privilege of sleeping under the actual roof in which the apparitions took place!

Santiago

Less than an hour away to the north, is a shrine which in the middle ages was *one of the three major places of pilgrimage for all the Christian world*. (Rome and the Holy Land being the other two.)

Books have been written about Santiago and about the "roads of pilgrimage" . . . which had developed into major highways not only in the middle ages, but highways still used even to this present day!

Perhaps the simplest and most direct way to explain the importance of those pilgrimages is to mention the "tower of St. James" in Paris.

When one visits Paris and sees the magnificent 13th century cathedral in honor of Our Lady one is rather surprised to see a tall Gothic tower over on the right bank, on the

other side of the river from Notre Dame, which was built at the same time as Notre Dame and looks as though it was intended to be the bell tower of the cathedral. And one would ask: "Why is the bell tower so far away from the cathedral itself?"

But that enormous 13th century tower was built because of the pilgrimages to Santiago! At that time there were open fields around the tower. And when pilgrims would come from many miles around Paris to make a pilgrimage to Santiago, they would wait in houses throughout the area, or on the city-island itself, until there were enough pilgrims registered so that they could form a group to travel together down the whole length of France, and many miles into the Westernmost parts of Spain, on the "great Santiago pilgrimage."

Then the tower bell would ring. They would all assemble at the foot of the tower and set out on that incredible pilgrimage which would take weeks to complete!

There are similar towers at major cities elsewhere in Europe and one wonders today at the greatness of faith and the importance of pilgrimages to which these towers give testimony.

The tomb of St. James had been lost for several hundred years, having been hidden during the time of the Moors. It was discovered through the miracle of an apparition of a star over the field where the tomb had been secreted, and the joy of Christendom at the discovery of the tomb was such that the Pope granted special indulgences to those who would visit the apostle. A whole city grew up over and around the tomb . . . a marvelous medieval city intact to this day.

It must be remembered that St. James was the brother to St. John, and that this apostle went literally to what was then thought to be the "end of the world" to preach the Gospel (only a few miles from where the saint is buried is "Fina Terra" or "land's end.")

Our Lady appeared to him during his time in Spain and told him that he would return to Jerusalem and be the first apostle to give his life for Christ. This prophecy, of course, came true and disciples who had followed St. James to Jerusalem brought his body back to Spain after he was beheaded by Herod.

The cathedral which had been built over the spot where the tomb was found is a gem of 12th century architecture; the best time to see it is on the Feast of the Assumption, or the actual Feast of St. James, July 25. And when this Feast day falls on a Sunday, it is a “Holy Year” in Santiago . . . during which one can gain the same indulgences in going to Santiago as one obtains in going to Rome during a Holy Year! (But of course without waiting the usual 25 years for Rome!)

Balasar, Braga, Tuy, Pontevedra and Santiago, all set in areas of magnificent scenery, are now available to all on a four-day excursion from Porto on the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage.



Pilgrims at Santiago Cathedral

Chapter 7

Let's Go To Italy

We first learned about the airport in Ancona several years ago when we used it for a Queen of the World flight retracing the "flight" of the Holy House of Loreto to the Holy Land. With us on that flight was Cardinal Sabattini, then the Rector of the Basilica of Loreto, and now the Rector of St. Peter's in Rome.

Ancona is a principal port on the Adriatic and it was heavily bombed during the war. Its airport was built for military use, but has now been opened, with every modern facility, as a public airport. The day before I arrived there in June of 1986 to negotiate with the authorities for the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage, the supersonic concorde had just landed for the first time.

Some pilgrims will want to spend all four days at Loreto. Many others will want to visit their "Spiritual Father" Padre Pio. Still others will want to go to Padua, Venice and Assisi. Some will choose to go to Yugoslavia which is available overnight by ferry from Ancona . . . the path used by most of the thousands of pilgrims of Italy who have gone to Medjugorje.

But most pilgrims, especially if they have not previously been to Rome, will set out on arrival at the Ancona airport for Assisi, overnight, and then on to Rome for two glorious days.

Assisi—Rome

The pilgrims for Rome will board their own coach to leave at once for Assisi, to spend the night in the city of St. Francis.

(A visit to the walled town of Assisi is also included in the optional trip to Venice and Florence.)

In addition to being the most lovely town in Umbria

(in itself one of the most beautiful parts of Italy) Assisi is undoubtedly *the most beloved shrine in all of Italy outside of Rome*.

Fr. McNaspy, in his *Guide to Christian Europe* says: "The sheer charm of the hill town of Assisi, with its fabulous views, as well as what man has done to add to humanity through nature, all contrive to make Assisi worthy of its gracious saints" (St. Francis, St. Rufino, and St. Clare).

In a sense it could be said that Assisi has everything . . . because it has one of the greatest Marian shrines in the world, the tombs of two of the most popular saints in the world, one of the oldest churches in honor of Our Lady in the world, and it is all in a perfectly preserved medieval setting of almost breathtaking beauty.

St. Francis and St. Clare are buried at the extreme ends of the walled town. Within four years after the death of St. Francis, an enormous monastery with a three-level church was constructed over his tomb. And as one walks from the tomb of St. Francis through the old town to go to the tomb of St. Clare, one passes the *original Roman temple* of Minerva which was turned into a church in honor of Our Lady!

Beneath the pavement of the square, in front of the temple (now Our Lady's church) one can walk on the original Roman pavements of 2000 years ago! And a short distance beyond is the church built at the place of the house of St. Francis, where his father had a textile shop.

A short distance to the left is the cathedral of Assisi dedicated to St. Rufino, one of the earliest bishops of Assisi who was put to death during the Roman persecutions. And just down to the right we see the church in which is venerated the original crucifix which spoke to St. Francis saying: "Francis, mend my Church."

In the same chapel of the crucifix we see the tunic of St. Francis, the hair of St. Clare which Francis himself sheared when she entered the cloister. And in the crypt is the incorrupt body of St. Clare herself from which a fragrance occasionally comes forth, filling the whole crypt with a scent of flowers.

The Portiuncula

Down in the valley below the walled city of Assisi there

risers an enormous dome, the great Marian Shrine of "Our Lady of the Angels." Under that dome is a little church which St. Francis "mended", believing that this is what Our Lord meant when He spoke to him from the crucifix saying: "Francis, mend my Church."

What Our Lord really meant, of course, was the introduction of the spirit of poverty and penance into the entire Church (which Francis was to bring through the Franciscan Order) but at first, taking Our Lord literally, Francis abandoned all and went down in the valley to mend the church that had been abandoned.

When the Saint had finished the work, Our Lady appeared to him there. She was surrounded by angels and told him to ask whatever he wished. And in his great charity, Francis immediately thought of others. He prayed that *those who would come here would have their petitions granted.*

So many favors resulted that the Pope declared a Plenary Indulgence to all who would come to this spot and pray for the Pope's intention! That is the famous "Portiuncula Indulgence".

It is the great desire of most Franciscans to visit this holy spot, the birthplace and center of their Order.

Francis himself so much respected this holy place that when he knew he was dying, he asked to be transported down from the city of Assisi and placed in the hut next to the little Portiuncula Chapel. It is there that he died. So under the same roof you have the Portiuncula Chapel and, only a few feet away, the actual spot of the death of St. Francis.

During the past seven hundred years, how many saints have prayed at this holy place!

For this reason not only do we include Assisi in the two most popular "options" from Loreto airport but even those who wished to stay in Loreto for four days may easily make the three hour trip from Loreto to Assisi, returning via Tolentino . . . where they can visit the basilica of the great St. Nicholas.

St. Nicholas saw the translation of the Holy House in a vision and it said that St. Francis of Assisi himself, when passing by the hill of Loreto before the miracle of the Holy House, prophesied: "*O blessed hill* which will one day

possess the house of the Holy Family.”

Rome

For the pilgrims who have not yet been to Italy (and for those who never seem to tire of it) “The Eternal City,” Rome, will certainly be the primary attraction.

A book would be required to describe Rome, but there are two major highlights of any visit to the Eternal City:

1.) If we are in Rome on a Wednesday, Sunday, or First Saturday, the highlight of the visit, of course, is the audience with the Holy Father, to pray the Rosary with him on the First Saturday, or to recite the Angelus with him on a Sunday. On these occasions we receive his personal blessing.

2.) Every visit to Rome includes the four major basilicas:

Our Lady's Basilica

St. Mary Major is the oldest of the great basilicas of Rome and perhaps the oldest “great church” of the entire world.

As you enter here, feel the devotion of the Church from its earliest days for Holy Mary, Mother of God!

It was built in the year 432, the year after Our Lady was proclaimed “Mother of God” by the Council of Ephesus, and owes its origin to the “miracle of the snow,” commemorated by a special feast each year on August 5. And this glorious monument to the Mother of God has been enriched by one Pope after the other down through the centuries. One could spend *several weeks* to get to know the rich treasures of this one basilica!

As we enter it today, it is difficult to realize that it is ten-and-a-half centuries old! The gold on the ceiling is the original (and the first) gold brought by Columbus from the New World. He gave it to Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, and they in turn gave it to the Pope, who in turn used it to enrich the ceiling of this great church in honor of “Santa Maria,” the same name inscribed by Columbus on his flagship, and the name invoked by the crew when they sighted the new land.

Under the high altar is a relic of the manger of Bethlehem. In the Blessed Sacrament Chapel is the tomb of St. Pius V, the Pope who instituted the Feast of the Rosary after the Battle of Lepanto.

The greatest treasure of all in this fabulous monument to the Mother of God is the painting by St. Luke in the most ornate chapel of the basilica—one of the most miraculous and revered images of Our Lady in the Western Church. It is known by the people of Rome as “the Health of the Roman People.” Its story is linked to the Castle of the Holy Angel, near St. Peter’s.

Be sure your guide in Rome tells you this wonderful story of the ending of the plague in Rome and the apparition of the angel sheathing a sword as this image of Our Lady was carried across a bridge of the Tiber.

St. John Lateran

Inscribed at the entrance of St. John Lateran are words proclaiming it to be the “*Mother of All the Churches of the World.*” This was the very first place of official public worship by Christians. When Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, proclaimed the freedom of Christian worship he gave this property to Pope Silverius.

In gold reliquaries over the main altar are the heads of SS. Peter and Paul. Over the tabernacle to the left of the transept is a relic of the table of the Last Supper.

It is to this church the Pope comes on Holy Thursday to celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy which began with the Last Supper of Our Lord.

Monumental statues of the Twelve Apostles line both sides of the nave.

Across the street is the “Scala Santa,” the twenty-eight steps down which Our Lord walked after He was sentenced to death by Pilate. At the top of the steps is the chapel that was originally here at St. John Lateran. It is called the “Holy of Holies.”

Feel here, the earliest origins of the Church from the times of the Apostles.

St. Paul’s

St. Mary Major’s is the oldest of the basilicas in Rome because it is still the original building. The other major basilicas have been rebuilt, some several times.

To many St. Paul’s is one of the most impressive of all the basilicas. And it has a most amazing history.

Being a Roman citizen, Paul could not be put to death

inside the walls of Rome. He was therefore beheaded next to the Temple of Diana and buried in the nearest cemetery, which was here on the Via Ostia.

In the Blessed Sacrament Chapel is the original crucifix which spoke to St. Bridget and to Blessed Anna Maria Taigi. To the latter, Our Lord said that He would have to destroy the basilica because of sins committed within it. And this humble housewife begged Our Lord not to destroy the basilica until the Pope, who was then ill and had a great devotion to St. Paul, would have died.

The basilica burned to the ground on the day of the Pope's death.

Its reconstruction was one of the greatest acts of devotion to St. Paul in all history, and also one of the great acts of united, worldwide Christian faith of the last century. Many religious groups contributed. The four magnificent alabaster columns, inside the main entrance, were given by the King of Egypt.

All the "windows" of this magnificent church are of translucent marble.

To many this is one of the most impressive of all the basilicas because its special "atmosphere" is impossible to put into words.

Feel here the great power and influence of St. Paul in the Church and in the world.

St. Peter's

The "biggest" is the greatest of all the churches in the world, not only in size but in its history and richness of relics.

Within the four columns around the altar over Peter's tomb are Veronica's Veil, a relic of the True Cross, the tip of the lance which pierced the Heart of Christ on the Cross, and major relics of St. Andrew, brother of St. Peter.

But it is particularly because of Peter, upon whom Christ founded His Church, that this basilica is here over the actual tomb of the Prince of the Apostles.

It is almost impossible to grasp the size of this vast church because everything within it is on such a colossal scale.

The dome is as high as a forty-story building (and even that is difficult to imagine).

Books have been written about this vast church, but

as you enter, notice the great alabaster window, depicting the Holy Spirit, at the back of the church, 700 feet from the entrance!

This image of the Holy Spirit seems to dominate the whole basilica shining above an enormous bronze chair, borne up by statues of four early Fathers of the Church, two of the West and two of the East—representing the promise of Our Lord that the Holy Spirit would remain with the Church for all time.

From beneath that great bronze chair the Pope speaks on solemn occasions. These pronouncements are known as “*ex cathedra*” or “from the chair.”

As you go down from the entrance, you will note brass inscriptions in the middle of the floor showing where the front door of other various churches of the world would be if those churches were placed back to back with St. Peter’s. You will be amazed to find St. Patrick’s Cathedral almost half-way down the aisle!

At about that point, do not miss on your right side the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament where Pope John Paul II instituted Perpetual Adoration.

Concluding your visit to St. Peter’s, time allowing, you will visit the tombs of the Popes beneath it.

Feel here, “the Church” built upon the Rock of Peter.

The Experience of Rome

In addition to the four basilicas, there is the *experience of Rome itself*. . . something which cannot be described

In the center of Rome are the ruins of the Roman forum, former heart of one of the greatest empires in history. Now it is dominated by the Cross.

At the entrance to the forum is the Mammertine prison where Peter and Paul spent their last night before execution. Above is the Capitoline hill where the government of Rome has been maintained continuously since 400 years before Christ!

Most Ave Maria Tours try to include Mass in the catacombs and to allow sufficient free time for visits to such places as the Holy Stairs (next to St. John Lateran) and the original picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help just a short block down from St. Mary Major’s.

Those who like art will want to visit the Vatican museum

and the Sistine Chapel. Those who like beautiful parks and views will want to go to the Pincio or take a walk up the "famous Spanish steps."

And it is a tradition among travelers in Rome to toss a coin in the beautiful Trevi Fountain to "guarantee" that you will return.

Venice and Florence

Now we turn to another "option" from Loreto: The option of Venice, Padua, Florence, and Assisi.

Venice is one of the most romantic and beautiful places in the world. One night I got up at two o'clock in the morning, went down to the canal, and hired a gondola so that I could go in the quiet of the night to visit some of the places I loved most.

The gondolier was completely silent for almost a half hour as we had gone down the grand canal and were just turning into the canal towards the bridge of Sighs. The gondolier broke the long silence: "*It is, sir, the most beautiful city in the world.*"

I thought for a moment and replied:

"Not the most beautiful, but the most unique."

"No, sir," he replied, "*It is the most beautiful.*"

And then I began to think: Even if all the canals were filled in and made streets, *Venice would indeed be the most beautiful city in the world.* Where else are there so many magnificent palaces? So many fine churches? So many lovely squares? And where else, with the possible exception of Florence, is there so much art by great masters *in the original places* for which the artist intended them?

But *Venice is also a religious experience.* In the magnificent cathedral of Venice, we have the tomb of St. Mark the Evangelist.

And just opposite the main square (with the Palace of the Doges) are two areas famed for their holy history: the one a former monastery, and the other the basilica of "Our Lady of Health," one of the official Marian Shrines of Italy.

On the Venice-Florence-Assisi trip we also visit the tomb of St. Anthony in Padua.

Chapter 8

Let's Go To France

From our hub city of Lyon, *we can easily reach almost all the shrines of France*, beginning with the greatest of all: Lourdes.

Direct from the airport a super highway takes us to Toulouse, the *city of St. Dominic* and the city in which the Rosary was first used to overcome a major heresy.

Toulouse suffered no destruction in the recent great wars. As a result there are at least three churches still standing in which St. Dominic undoubtedly preached and offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Oddly enough, Toulouse has not just one cathedral but two, and also a very, very old sanctuary in honor of Our Lady built on the spot where St. Sernin, the Bishop-martyr of Toulouse was buried.

One would have thought that the terrible persecution of AD 250, when the holy bishop was killed by being drawn behind a wild bull, would have ended Christianity in Toulouse. But the miracle wrought through the intercession of the saint, and the heroism of his death, sparked a deeper Christianity. His tomb became the center of such numerous pilgrimages that a short distance away the cathedral of St. Sernin was built and his body moved there.

During the great pilgrimages to Santiago, Spain, it was normal for pilgrims to pass through Toulouse in order to venerate the body of St. Sernin. Indeed, the ancient *Guide of the Pilgrims of St. James* recommended a visit to the tomb of St. Sernin and added: "An immense basilica was constructed there by the faithful in his honor." The Cathedral was begun in 1080, over 100 years before St. Dominic.

But the other Cathedral of St. Stephen was standing at its present location even when this basilica of St. Sernin

was built. Although rebuilt in the 13th century, parts of the original, very old cathedral still remain. *And tourism has not discovered Toulouse.*

I personally walked for hours through the old sections of the city where most of the impressive mansions date from the 15th century (when production of pastel brought new wealth to the city). And flowing through Toulouse is the amazing canal which joins the Atlantic Ocean with the Mediterranean Sea.

There is something I found in Toulouse which I never found in any other city, but would have liked to have found in all: A beautiful folder giving the time of all the Masses throughout the city! And available in all the hotel lobbies.

By contrast, in Lyon I had found it difficult to find out from the hotel desk what time Mass would be in even the nearest church! . . . and indeed if one wants the time of *daily* Mass in any city . . . one has similar difficulty at *any hotel*. (I comment on this in the hope that sometime in the future, dioceses in all cities where there is a flow of tourists will think of the great number who come to hotels and want to go to Mass, and especially need to know the hour of later Masses if they are arriving in the afternoon or evening.)

Toulouse is only two and a half hours from Lourdes, so after Mass at one of the principal churches, we drive through the beautiful lower reaches of the Pyrenees (magnificent scenery) to arrive in Lourdes by noon of the second day. After checking in at the hotel we have an orientation tour of the sanctuary. After dinner we join in the glorious candlelight procession.

We have the entire next day in Lourdes for all the devotions: the baths, the Eucharistic procession and blessing, and private devotions at the grotto. Again we spend the night in Lourdes, again participating if we wish in the candlelight procession. The fourth day we leave for Avignon, the "city of the Popes," with its famous papal palace of the 14th century.

It was here in 1324 that Pope John XXII promulgated the great Sabbatine Privilege of the Brown Scapular which Pope Pius XII described as "the greatest of all our privileges from the Mother of God."

Our Lady appeared to the Pope while he was still a Cardinal

and told him that those who wore Her Scapular, who had also observed chastity according to their state in life, and say the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin (which is now usually commuted to the Rosary), would be “free from purgatory” by the First Saturday after death.

Next to the palace of the Pope we admire the beautiful church of Our Lady with a colossal statue of the Madonna at its peak overlooking the swift-flowing river with its famous “pont d’Avignon.”

LaSalette

LaSalette is a mile high village in the French Alps. If one continues beyond over the next few mountains, one could arrive in Italy or Switzerland.

Here in 1846, Our Lady appeared to two shepherds and said that because of the sins committed in the world She could no longer hold back the arm of Her Divine Son.

She wore a crown of roses (perhaps indicating that She is Queen of the Rosary). But at the same time She wore symbols of the Passion.

She appeared to the children seated upon a stone with Her head in Her hands, weeping.

Perhaps we can best understand this apparition in the whole sequence of the visions of Our Lady beginning in Paris in 1830.

In Her first appearance to St. Catherine Laboure, Our Lady also *wept as She foretold the sufferings that were going to come into the world*. And this apparition took place *at the very time that Karl Marx* was laying the groundwork of his manifesto, completed a few years later in Paris.

Then, only 16 years after the vision in Paris, with the Marx manifesto complete, the Queen of Heaven appears high on the mountain, almost at a point where Switzerland, France and Italy join, and wept over the world saying that *because of its sins* Our Divine Lord, Who is Mercy Itself, *would be forced to punish mankind*.

At the spot where Our Lady appeared at LaSalette, a spring flows. Just behind the statue at the place of the apparitions rises an impressive basilica adjoining a large modern pilgrimage facility.

There is something very different, very impressive about

LaSalette. Often the top of the mountain is enshrouded in a cloud, and even late in the Spring and early in the Fall it is often white with snow.

I personally have visited LaSalette at least a dozen times, having gone for the first time in 1946. Then I found my own way, taking a train to Grenoble from where I hitched a ride after an early morning Mass with a tired group of pilgrims in a coach coming from Paris. And I *have never failed to be impressed with LaSalette*. I can only say that what one experiences at LaSalette is different from that at any other Shrine.

This LaSalette pilgrimage is the “easiest” of the options from Lyon because LaSalette is just a little more than three hours away.

This allows us all of the first afternoon to enjoy Lyon, to take a side trip to Ars, to visit the Roman arena and the Shrine of Our Lady of Fourvieres. Then we start the next day for LaSalette via Grenoble, through ever increasingly spectacular scenery.

The second day we have a free morning at LaSalette to enjoy the various walks around the mountain with their breathtaking views. After Mass and lunch we return to Lyon via the beautiful and ancient town of *Annecy* where we visit the Shrine of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. Continue on to Lyon for dinner and overnight.

The Great French Pilgrimage

The major itinerary in France on the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage is to Paris, via Ars, Paray, and Nevers, returning through Vezelay.

Ars is the shrine of St. John Vianney, patron of all the parish priests of the world. Most priests desire to visit this extraordinary shrine where one sees how St. John Vianney lived, and where they can celebrate Mass next to his tomb in the little parish which he transformed by his holiness and pastoral concern.

But if it is a place of special pilgrimage for priests, it is also a very special place of pilgrimage for all of us. We seem to *meet* St. John Vianney . . . *as though he were still there receiving all who come*, still performing his marvelous miracles.

From Ars the coach proceeds Northwest to Paray-le-

Monial where Jesus appeared out of the Monstrance to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. Here He revealed His Sacred Heart flaming with love for men.

The body of the saint is to be seen in the chapel.

A short distance down the street is the tomb of Blessed Claude, the Jesuit who was appointed by Our Lord to receive the revelations from St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and to make them known to the world.

Paray is a beautiful little town, with an old abbey, situated by a flowing river and green countryside. It has become a world center not only of devotion to the Sacred Heart but also to the Eucharist and is indeed called "*the City of the Eucharist.*"

St. Margaret Mary had special revelations concerning the intimacy of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary: That uniting our hearts to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the surest and quickest way to enter into the Sacred Heart of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament.

I have always had joy in taking pilgrims to various shrines, but never greater joy than to Paray. And a few years ago, when the Church placed the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus next to the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I chartered a plane so that we could have Mass at Paray on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, and be in Pontevedra the very next day for the Mass of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

On the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage we have dinner and spend the night in Paray. After Mass the following morning in the Chapel where the Sacred Heart appeared we continue in the direction of Paris, stopping in *Nevers*, where we see the incorrupt body of St. Bernadette (to whom Our Lady appeared at Lourdes) and the chair in which the saint died, saying: "Pray for me, poor sinner, poor sinner . . ."

Paris

Who of us has not heard of the "city of light." It is considered by many to be the most beautiful capital-city in the world. (Note: Venice is not a capital.) On our very first night in Paris, we take a sightseeing tour of the illuminations of Paris . . . broad avenues, marvelous squares, many fountains, magnificent buildings, all beautifully illuminated.

The first day in Paris we have Mass in the Chapel of the Apparitions on the Rue du Bac at the very place where, according to most Marian writers, "*the Marian age began*" with the apparitions of Our Lady to St. Catherine Laboure.

It seems extraordinary that while most Shrines to Our Lady are in remote areas (usually in the mountains) this very important apparition took place in the heart of the very great city where the modern revolution against God began and from where it developed, spread to Russia, and then gradually throughout the world.

In this one chapel there were three apparitions of our Lady! First She appeared seated in a chair placed in the sanctuary in front of the main altar for the priest who was to give a conference the following day (the apparition took place at night).

Next She appeared off to the right, at the very place where today we see the incorrupt body of St. Catherine. In this vision Our Lady held a globe in Her hands which She said *represents the world and each person in particular* . . . held close to Her Immaculate Heart as She lifts Her eyes in prayer to God.

The most famous of the visions took place over the main altar. Rays of light streamed from Our Lady's hands and She promised to grant special graces *to those who "came to the foot of this altar."* The rays of light seemed to be coming from gems on Our Lady's fingers. But some of the gems were dark . . . not giving off rays. St. Catherine asked why. Our Lady answered: "*These are the graces for which no one asks.*" Then suddenly the vision was transformed and St. Catherine saw *the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary side by side*, surmounted by an M and a Cross. To the right of this Chapel is *the incorrupt heart* of St. Vincent de Paul, the great apostle of charity. And to the left is the body of St. Louise Marillac who, together with St. Vincent, founded the Sisters of Charity. Underneath the altar where the incorrupt heart of St. Vincent is venerated, one sees the original chair in which Our Lady sat when She spoke to St. Catherine. It is impressive to think that Our Lady sat there, tears starting in Her eyes, as She began to speak to the little saint who knelt beside the chair, resting Her hands in Her Heavenly Mother's lap.

Just to the left of the chair one can actually look into the incorrupt eyes of St. Catherine. . . her body intact after more than a hundred years!

Paris Sightseeing

And later, of course, we shall visit the 12th century cathedral of Our Lady at the heart of Paris, and then climb up the distant hill "of the martyrs" (Montmartre) where the basilica of the Sacred Heart lifts its dome above the entire city.

This basilica was built as a direct result of the apparition to St. Margaret Mary. From its porch you can look out over the entire city, remarking the domes of the major churches and the lofty symbol of Paris, the Eiffel Tower.

General sightseeing of Paris will include the Champs Elysees, the Arch of Triumph, the Concorde, the Assembly, the French Academy, the Louvre. There will be free time the second afternoon for those who wish to go up the Eiffel Tower or visit any of the museums, or perhaps take the scenic ride on the river Seine (which we also recommend especially at night).

On the third day, we have a leisurely departure from Paris and drive to Vezelay, a "surprised joy" of this itinerary with Mass at the Basilica of St. Mary Magdalene who came to France with some of the first Christians. We then arrive back in Lyon for dinner and overnight.

For those who wish to go to Lisieux, a special side trip can be arranged on the last day, returning to Lyon on one of the fastest trains in the world from Paris to Lyon in just two hours!

For those who are not interested in taking the four-day excursion to Paris, there is an express train which will take you *from Lyon to Paris in just two hours!* It is said to be the fastest train in the world traveling at times over 200 miles an hour. I was amazed in 1986 when I took this trip . . . because the train had very little vibration and was so quiet. The only similar train ride in the world is that between Osaka and Tokyo in Japan.

From Lyon we can go not only to Paris but to Switzerland, or to LaSalette, Ars, Paray, Nevers, Avignon, Toulouse, and so on.

We chose this city precisely because from here one can

easily take a four-day excursion to Lourdes, a two-day trip to LaSalette, a scenic and historic tour of Switzerland, and a one-day tour to Ars, Paray (city of the Sacred Heart), Nevers (incorrupt body of St. Bernadette) and Paris ...all within easy traveling distance of ancient, historic Lyon.

Switzerland

It is only a three hour drive from Lyon to Geneva so the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage can offer a four-day tour of Switzerland, a country with magnificent roads and with the greatest varieties of scenery in the entire world.

Geneva is a lakeside city of worldwide renown. The main attraction is a general view of the city itself on Lake LeMan, with its symbolic geyser-like fountain towering out of the lake.

From Geneva we travel via Lausanne to Fribourg, an old city considered by many to be the most beautiful of Switzerland. Here we have the Shrine of Our Lady of Bourguillon which in the middle ages was the center of pilgrimages from all Europe, and outside of Aylesford, England, undoubtedly the most important shrine associated with the Scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

In the middle ages a leper colony existed on this spot. One of the lepers carved the statue of Our Lady which became a center of devotion for the lepers, many of whom were cured.

The fame of this statue spread.

Then Our Lady, clothed as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and holding the small Brown Scapular appeared to a Cistercian Abbot in the city and told him She wished the miraculous *statue of the former leper colony to be clothed in the same manner*. Thus the shrine became known as that of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

Marble plaques covering the walls attest to miracles performed here even in very recent times.

We have already spoken about St. Peter Canisius, who used to climb daily on foot from the old city, across the valley, up the mountain to this shrine to pray to Our Lady to preserve the faith in Switzerland. And nearby is a replica of the Holy House of Nazareth, also overlooking Fribourg.

Usually snow-capped peaks are visible in the distance.

We have Mass at the shrine, and then tour the old city with a reception at the International Secretariate of The Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima on the Place de Notre Dame.

In the afternoon we leave Fribourg for Lucerne, located on the magnificent Lake of the same name.

From Lucerne we take a ship across the lake to Mt. Pilatus, and then a cable to the top of this famous mountain said to have been the place where Pontius Pilate spent his last years in exile.

Just outside of Lucerne we will visit the tomb and the hermitage place of St. Nicholas Von Flue, patron saint of Switzerland (recently canonized). Devotion to Our Lady of the Scapular of Mt. Carmel in Swiss life is evident from the monumental painting over the tomb of St. Nicholas depicting Our Lady giving the Scapular to St. Simon Stock.

On our third day following the visit to St. Nicholas and to Mt. Pilatus, we arrive at the major Marian shrine of Switzerland: Einsiedeln. It is internationally famous and St. Benedict Joseph Labre came here five times despite its remote location.

On the last day we have a scenic drive over half the length of Switzerland, stopping en route at Interlaken, famous site of the Olympic games, driving down the valley between towering mountains which reach over a mile into the heavens.

While Switzerland is known particularly because of its neutrality, its banking, and its beauty, it is also dear to the World Apostolate of Fatima because it was here that the International Secretariate was established for communications with the Apostolate in some 110 countries around the world.

(The official International Center of the Apostolate is, of course, at *Domus Pacis* in Fatima. It was primarily for reasons of language and communication that the working Secretariate was established in Fribourg.)

Switzerland is today the center of many, many world organizations, including International Catholic Missions (also centered in Fribourg).

Come Home

Some old countries of Europe advertise for Americans

to "Come Home": "Come home to Italy!"; "Come home to Greece!", etc.

Few advertise "Come home to Switzerland" because so few Swiss have ever left their country and the roots of many are not in Switzerland as much as in Rome, Assisi, Santiago, and even Lyon (the Roman capital of Gaul 2000 years ago).

But somehow Americans *do* feel they have "come home" when they enter Switzerland, especially the French, Germans, and Italians . . . whose countries border Switzerland, and all of whose languages are spoken here.

Father McNaspy says: "One reason Americans like Switzerland is that they can have all the comforts of home while enjoying just enough of the exotic. There is more to be seen than Alps and cuckoo clocks." He says that not only is Einsiedeln important to Switzerland but "*one of the main pilgrimage spots in Europe.*"

And it is *old*!

St. Meinrad arrived here in the 9th century with the same statue revered in Einsiedeln to this day. And in the middle ages Einsiedeln was a great spiritual and cultural support to the Christian world. Its Benedictine monastery is one of the few to have existed continuously from Carolingian times to the present day. And it is this mixture of the very old and the modern which gives Switzerland a special character.

Difficult Choice

Most of those who take the great Ave Maria pilgrimage for the first time will find it difficult to choose which option to take from each of the hub cities. There can be little choice for those who have never been to Fatima, Rome or Lourdes. These would be obvious first choices. And there is no problem for those who have already been to Fatima; they will probably want to choose Pontevedra and Santiago.

But in Italy, would you want to go to Venice, Florence and Assisi? Or to Rome? Or to Lanciano, St. Michael and Padre Pio?

And the choice becomes even more difficult in France: Lourdes? LaSalette? Ars, Paray, Paris? *Switzerland?*

There is an easy solution:

Choose the one which interests you most then plan to come back another time!



Einsiedeln.



Basilica of Loreto.

Chapter 9

The Gateways: Porto, Loreto, Lyon

Porto

Although I have never heard anyone else say so, to me Porto seems a great deal like Istanbul (Turkey). . . formerly known as Constantinople. . . perhaps because of the busy river, the port, the great bridge, the unusual old houses rising up on the banks of the Douro River.

There are many beautiful old churches in Porto with special relics and special memories, and there are three nearby places of pilgrimage: Balasar, Bom Jesus and Sameiro. . . all of which are included in the pilgrimage to Spain, but which can also be visited as one-day excursions from Porto.

So there will certainly be some pilgrims. . . especially those who have already been to Fatima and Santiago. . . who will want to spend four days in Porto, which is not far from the medieval castle of Guimaraes, where Portugal's first king was born.

The spectacular bridge which ties together the suburb of Asia to Porto rises some 200 feet above the river and until recently was the largest "single" arch bridge in all Europe. And over in Gaia there are over 80 cellars of Port Wine production and you will see the typical wine boats, with their colorful sails, on the river Douro, especially if you take the river cruise.

Public buses are available to several beautiful beaches, the most famous of which is Povia de Varzim, the best beach in northern Portugal.

Even in a few days one cannot see it all. . . or begin to absorb all the history of Porto in whose cathedral John I and Phillipa of Lancaster were married, tying together the English and Portuguese thrones in a friendship which

has endured to the present day.

Also just a short distance outside the city is the Peneda Geres National Park with an ancient shrine in honor of St. Benedict.

So for those who may choose to spend a few days in Porto, undoubtedly one of those days would be at the beach, and perhaps another day at the Peneda Geres Park. But most certainly other excursions would include Balasar, Braga, and the shrine of the "Good Jesus" and the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on Mount Sameiro.

Braga and Its Shrines

From Porto, a single day excursion could include Povoas de Varzim, Balasar, and also Braga. But it would be better to devote an entire day for the trip to Braga, the primatial See of Portugal and to the two nearby shrines on the high mountain overlooking the Braga Valley.

Braga was the center of Christianity in Portugal in the earliest centuries. To this day the Archbishop of Braga bears the title "Primate of Portugal." The old town is one of the most picturesque of the country. But what attracts most visitors to this area is the truly unbelievable shrine of the "Good Jesus" (Bom Jesus) on Mount Espinho.

A short distance from Braga, an enormous staircase leads up to the shrine, or you can go up in a cable car which is operated solely by water power.

All over the mountain are fountains and chapels with *life-sized figures* depicting the main episodes in the life of Our Lord. At the top is a beautiful old church with the entire scene of Calvary in lifelike statuary over the main altar.

Nearby is Portugal's shrine to the Immaculate Conception. Built before the apparitions of Fatima, it was the main Marian pilgrimage shrine for all Portugal.

In 1646, over two hundred years before the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the King of Portugal consecrated the nation to the Immaculate Conception. He ordered that on *every fortress and city* of the realm there be imbedded a stone plaque commemorating THIS consecration so that all the nations, and every

individual town and city, would know that it belongs the Immaculate.

At the entrance to this national shrine on Mt. Sameiro which commands a breathtaking view looking toward Braga, are statues of four doctors of the church who upheld the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Nearby is a lovely hospice (like the Blue Army's *Domus Pacis* in Fatima) where many of our Ave Maria Pilgrimages from Fatima have stayed. It is inexpensive and you might like to spend the night on this holy mountain.

Conclusion

If you have been to Fatima and also to Santiago and Pontevedra, as we said before, there is much to see and to do in and around the hub city of Porto . . . and this is one of the reasons why many will want to take the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage more than once!

There are 24 choices, and Fatima will always be the principal choice for those who have not been there. But now there are other choices for those who have already been to Fatima. And it is our hope that by operating the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage on a non-profit basis, we will enable many to go more than once and thus avail themselves, in the spirit of St. Benedict Joseph Labre, of many of those fabulous 24 pilgrimage choices.

Loreto

There is a marvelous new airport only twenty minutes from Loreto and this has become the gateway of the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage to Italy.

All who take the pilgrimage will have at least one night in Loreto, with Mass under the great dome to the Holy House of Nazareth!

Is it surprising that the Holy House of Nazareth is called a Marian Shrine, when it could be called a Shrine of the Holy Spirit? Or even the "Shrine of the Holy Family," or perhaps even the "Shrine of St. Joseph" . . . since it was this house where he lived with Jesus and Mary, and died in Their arms?

But from the very beginning it has always been known as the "Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto" perhaps because

of the little black statue which came with the Holy House from Palestine. . . a statue of Our Lady holding the Infant Jesus which smiled miraculously when it was crowned by Pope John XXIII when he came to Loreto two weeks before the Second Vatican Council in order to entrust the Council to the prayers of Our Lady.

Many books have been written about the Holy House. We have documentation of over one hundred saints who have made pilgrimages there!

But perhaps nothing underlines the great importance of Loreto more than that visit of Pope John XXIII . . . the first Pope to leave the Vatican in a hundred years and who did so *specifically to come to this shrine in order to pray here for the success of Vatican II!*

When the Pope first announced the Council in the company of a few Cardinals at St. John Lateran back in 1961, the Pope told the Cardinals that he felt that "It was not without inspiration of the Holy Spirit" that he felt impelled to call this Council, and that *"I am going to go to the Shrine at Loreto to pray to Our Lady for its success."*

Because of all the work of preparing for the Council the Pope was delayed and was not able to fulfill his desire to go to Loreto until just two weeks before the Council was about to open. And you can imagine the excitement throughout Italy when the Pope, who had remained a "prisoner of the Vatican" since the unification of Italy a hundred years before, crossed the Apennines to go to the Holy House of Nazareth on the shores of the Adriatic Sea.

The miracle of the smile of the statue was recorded in photographs. Afterwards the Capuchin Fathers who work in the Shrine moved the statue into different lights and photographed it over and over to see whether light could have caused a change in the expression. It was only after long photographic experiments that they were convinced a miracle had taken place.

With the Pope at that time was Archbishop Loris Capovilla, Pope John's secretary. After the Pope's death Archbishop Capovilla asked to be appointed to Loreto where he succeeded Cardinal Sabbatini as the Pontifical Legate at the Holy House. On his death, Pope John XXIII willed his Papal ring to the little Madonna of Loreto.

As we said earlier, St. Benedict Joseph Labre made eleven

trips on foot to Loreto, some from Switzerland, Germany and France, and at least five from Rome, *journeying up to one month each way! . . . and then remaining from ten days to a month at the Holy House.*

And you will be privileged to be here conveniently, for four days if you like!

As you stand on the square by the statue of Pope John XXIII and look out to the sea, on the right you have one of the lovely beaches of the Adriatic at Porto Recanati. . . only a 50-cent bus ride away and the bus leaves right from the square by the hotel.

The Basilica of Loreto was built before the United States had become a nation. But there was *one single unfinished chapel. . . and in our own day the privilege was given to the United States* to finish that chapel in honor of Our Lady of the Assumption following the proclamation of the dogma in 1950.

This is now called the “American Chapel” and on the left are shown the dignitaries present at the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption with Cardinal Tisserant in the foreground. . . the same Cardinal who became the first “Cardinal Protector” of our Apostolate.

At the back of the chapel is a magnificent fresco of the Assumption, with a golden crown placed there in 1972 when Bishops all around the world simultaneously crowned images of Our Lady of Fatima as “Queen of the World.”

On the right side there are four persons carrying the statue of Our Lady of Loreto, and I am privileged (and “immortalized”) to be one of the four figures. And all around are symbols of the triumph of flight, including the early planes, and the recent U.S. flights to the moon.

Yes, and if they build a Marian Shrine up there. . . we’ll see about including it on one of the future trips!



The Blue Army House at Fatima as seen from the tower of the Basilica.

Chapter 10

Ireland—England

A “great” small country on the Ave Maria Pilgrimage is Ireland . . . “the isle of saints.”

On landing at Knock airport, our first sight is the Shrine of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland, whose development has been due to the farsightedness and genius of Monsignor Horan, pastor of the Church where Our Lady appeared with St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist in the late nineteenth century. Msgr. Horan died in 1986.

This is often called the “silent vision” because no words were spoken. The message was in the figures themselves emphasizing the importance of *the parish*, the *Holy Family*, the role of *St. Joseph*, the mediation of *Our Lady*, and the apostolic and evangelical mission of the Church represented by *St. John* the Evangelist, clothed as a bishop and reading the Gospel. Center to it all was the image of a Lamb bearing a banner and a cross . . . a triumphant Lamb on an altar, symbolizing the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who dwells in our midst *in the Blessed Sacrament*.

It is also an “apocalyptic” vision and may have echoes in Medjugorje where Our Lady is said to have appeared with Her hands in the *orantes* position, as at Knock.

The vision took place at the back wall of the church . . . as though it had come from the tabernacle right through the wall to appear to the parishioners.

This vision bears testimony to all the faith of Ireland through the centuries, a deep faith rooted in devotion of the Irish to Our Lady, to the Holy Mass, to the Eucharist, to St. Joseph . . . and certainly to the evangelizing spirit which has carried the Gospel from Ireland to the four corners of the world.

Near the parish church now stands a glorious new basilica, the Shrine of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland.

It was a joy to the Irish when His Holiness, Pope John Paul II visited the Shrine. And it has a facility unequalled by any other Shrine in the world: *its own major airport* . . . with a runway large enough to take even a 707.

To millions of Americans Ireland can truly say, "Come home for a visit."

But they would not be coming home to a nation filled with old monuments and great buildings . . . but to a green, lake-studded land with devout Catholic ancestors who struggled to live and maintain their faith.

We have two main reasons for scheduling Ireland in the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage. The first, of course, is the very fact of the Knock Shrine and that the airport is next to the Shrine. It is by far the most convenient major Marian Shrine in the world if you arrive by air.

But the second reason is that so many of our people have wanted to visit Ireland. And since our plane will be landing there every four days, we may be able to arrange a certain number of seats for those people who would like to stay in Ireland, or take a quick trip across the Irish Sea to England. And on several of our trips, we hope to offer two full days in Ireland.

Irish Delights

One of the great delights of Ireland is the people . . . full of smiles and song. During more than 30 years of operating the Ave Maria Tours, one country where we did not feel it necessary to have our own guides was Ireland. And often whenever we ended a trip in Ireland, many people would say: "You have saved the best to the last."

A short distance down from Knock, we have the city of Galway, on famous Galway Bay. Just below is the beautiful river Shannon, and then the Lakes of Killarney.

Ireland is so small that even on a normal tourist bus you can cross it in four hours to Dublin . . . the capital of Ireland which holds a fourth of the nation's population. From here a ferry crosses the Irish Sea to England, with a train connection via Oxford to London.

England

There are two major shrines to be visited in England: Aylesford and Walsingham.

In the early 12th century, the land at Aylesford belonged to Lord Richard de Grey. We have a copy of a charter issued in 1238 by Henry III, "King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy, etc." authorizing a market at Aylesford and protecting the lands of Lord de Grey in his "domain of Elford."

Not long after this Lord de Grey was on the crusade to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. He brought back to England a small group of Carmelites who had been living since the earliest Christian times on Mt. Carmel but whose lives were now threatened because of unsettled conditions in the Holy Land.

At this time Our Lady appeared to a diocesan priest named Simon of Stock instructing him to join this new community. Probably the rest of the story you know.

In 1251, when St. Simon Stock was very advanced in years, Our Lady appeared to him and gave him the Brown Scapular as a sign of salvation and a sign of Her special protection over those who would consecrate themselves to Her as had those Holy Monks on Mt. Carmel for so many centuries.

So many wonders were performed through this sign of consecration to Mary that within a generation the Scapular was being worn throughout the Church from Pope to peasant. Together with the Rosary, it became the most richly privileged and indulgenced devotion to Our Lady in the Catholic Church.

After being confiscated by Henry VIII, this ancient Carmelite Monastery (lands originally granted by Lord Grey) returned to the possession of the Carmelites in 1948 and the major relic of St. Simon Stock was brought here from Bordeaux (where the Saint died in 1261).

Aylesford is located about an hour and a half south of London in the County of Kent, known as the "Garden" of England.

Walsingham

North of London one can visit the magnificent university town of Cambridge, with chapel and buildings that date back over five hundred years. From there continue to *Walsingham*, the national Marian Shrine of England.

Here in Walsingham both Anglicans and Roman

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Here in Walsingham both Anglicans and Roman

Catholics together honor the place where a Shrine was built back in the 9th century as a result of an apparition of Our Lady to a widow.

In this apparition, Our Lady showed the pious woman the Holy House in Nazareth and told her to build a replica on this spot.

Various miracles confirmed the authenticity of the apparition. In a short time all England recognized this as a place of special devotion to Our Lady. Even Henry VIII was one of those kings who came barefoot the last mile to honor Our Lady at Walsingham.

But later this same monarch destroyed the Shrine and turned the monastery over to private hands, all but wiping out the memory of Walsingham for centuries.

Henry VIII did the same, of course, at Aylesford where the Church of the Annunciation was destroyed and the monastery was turned over to private hands. I hesitate to write the following . . . because it may seem self-serving. However, as I am nearing the end of my life, and since Aylesford has become a major place of Marian pilgrimage in England, perhaps the reader would find it interesting:

There was no Carmelite community in England, as such, when I went there in 1946 with the intention of visiting Aylesford. I had written a book about the Scapular of Mt. Carmel some years before and I was actively engaged with the Carmelites of the United States in promoting the Scapular devotion. So the Prior General wrote to a Carmelite priest stationed in England to accompany me.

The great estate with its walls and gatehouse looked very formidable. I did not know how I would be received.

To my surprise the Lord Sheriff of Kent had just recently died and the only one now living in that vast mansion (formerly the Carmelite Monastery) was his widow.

She had no children. A nephew whom she did not particularly like was living in the gatehouse.

When I explained that I had written a book about the Carmelites, she received me with an unexpected degree of kindness. She took me from room to room and even showed me some of the precious vestments which had been preserved through all the centuries as treasures which came with the house when Henry VIII drove out the friars and gave the property to become eventually the home and court

of the Lord Sheriff of Kent.

Next to the main house was a row of what formerly had been the cells of the monks. Although the stone and brickwork was intact, the roof had crumbled. When I asked if I might take a little of the old wood as a "relic" the gentle lady was visibly moved. Indeed she seemed to be so touched by my respect for the place that I suddenly blurted out:

"Why don't you give this back to the Carmelites? You would be rendering a service to all of England. Indeed the history of this former monastery is important not only to England, but to all the world."

She received my words with silent attention.

Within two years the Carmelites had the monastery back and a priest with whom I had been working most closely in the United States was then elected Prior General of the Carmelites. At my request he placed great emphasis on reclaiming Aylesford and in obtaining the major relic of St. Simon Stock from the Cathedral in Bordeaux to bring it back to England.

The importance of the Scapular was greatly underlined in the apparitions of Fatima where Our Lady appeared at the climax of the Miracle of the Sun, clothed as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and holding the Scapular out from the sky.

Lucia said: "It is because She wants everyone to wear it. . . it is a sign of consecration to Her Immaculate Heart."

And consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was an extremely important element. . . if not perhaps *even the most* important element. . . in the Fatima Message.

Two visions preceded that of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel while some hundred thousand people saw the sun whirling in the sky:

1.) St. Joseph with the Child Jesus appeared beside Our Lady:

2.) Our Lady appeared as "Our Lady of Sorrows."

Most Marian writers interpret all three visions as representing the Mysteries of the Rosary: Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious.

It is obvious, of course, that the Holy Family represents the Joyful Mysteries; and that Our Lady of Sorrows represents the Sorrowful Mysteries. But why should Our Lady appear as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, holding down

the Scapular, as a representation of the *Glorious Mysteries*?

Perhaps the answer is that the Scapular is a sign of the triumph of Our Lady. . . it is the sign She gave with the assurance that all who die clothed in it would be saved. And the final triumph of the Heart of Mary is the triumph of bringing all of Her children to heaven. And it has never been known in the 700 years that the Church has enjoyed this great sacramental that a single, solitary person clothed in it, has died inpenitently.

It is a great consolation to me when I pray the Rosary to realize that the Scapular is the symbol of Mary's special protection and special "presence." It is a consolation to reach out and touch it over my own heart knowing that it is the sign of Mary's love, uniting my heart to Hers! It is my personal sign of Her triumph in *me*.

And the closer we can come to the reality of this great gift, the more we shall benefit and it is for this reason that the Ave Maria Pilgrimage stresses Bourgillon in Switzerland, and Aylesford in England, in addition to Fatima.



Basilica at Knock

Chapter 11

Apparitions Now

A problem for many is whether or not they should make pilgrimages to places where apparitions are reported to be taking place *at the present time* since apparitions are very rarely declared truly “supernatural” until some time has passed and the Church has had adequate time to evaluate the circumstances thoroughly.

But even as I am writing this book in 1986, literally millions are going to places where current apparitions are reported. And sometimes they wonder whether they are “doing the right thing.” Millions more who would like to go stay away because they believe that one should await the final approval of the Church.

There is nothing wrong whatever in going to places of alleged apparitions as long as there is no specific ecclesiastical prohibition.

However, if we follow the spirit of the Church, we will be very, very cautious. We know of some “apparitions” which have been just plain “fakes.” And if we should go in all good faith and think that we are seeing something authentic, we might end up doing harm by spreading falsehood.

The reason the Church is so very careful is because of her responsibility to souls and to the integrity of the truth entrusted to her.

What if, for example, the Bishop of Garabandal were to say that those apparitions were “supernatural” before the actual proof predicted by the children ever took place? And what if that “miracle” never took place? What would happen to the reputation of the Catholic Church?

It is with 2,000 years of experience and with the authority from Jesus Himself to judge in such matters, that

the Church moves with caution. We should move in the same spirit.

However, this does not mean that we should *not* go to *any* places of current apparitions.

As a leader of the Blue Army, I have made it a point, personally, not to go to places of current apparitions without some definite sign of approval on the part of the local bishop. For that reason, even though I have always been “open” to the apparitions of Garabandal, I have personally never been there. And although many have spoken of convincing evidence of authenticity of the apparitions at Medjugorje, again, I have personally never been there.

While I might be free as an individual to visit these places, since I am an official of the World Apostolate of Fatima I am bound by its policy not to promote unapproved apparitions.

For those who are free to visit places like Garabandal and Medjugorje, perhaps the following observations might be helpful.

In 1917, three months in advance, Our Lady announced that She was going to perform a miracle at Fatima: “*So that everyone may believe.*”

A dear friend of mine, Dona Maria de Freitas, was a young woman in Lisbon at that time. Some of her friends, and thousands of others were flocking to Fatima that October to see the miracle. But Maria did not go!

“I wanted to go,” she said, “but I felt it would not be right because the apparitions reported at Fatima had not been approved by the Church.”

Forty-two years later, she helped me gather material for my book *Meet the Witnesses*, a book about the “miracle of Fatima” based on the testimony of dozens upon dozens of living witnesses. She dedicated most of her life to the promotion of the Message of Fatima and was the first International Secretary of our Apostolate and the foreign language secretary to the Bishop of Fatima. I know how much she *regretted* that *she had never seen the miracle of the sun* . . . although she lived at the time only a few hours away.

“If only I had realized” she said, “that there is a difference between something being approved by the

Church and being 'under investigation.' My common sense should have told me that there is no way the Church could approve apparitions before they are complete or before having absolutely certain proof of their authenticity."

There *are* some current apparitions towards which ecclesiastical authority show signs of "openness." These places in particular might be proper for individuals to visit, although for the reasons given above I myself have been very cautious in this regard. I did actually visit a "current apparition" under the following circumstances.

I was in Madrid for a meeting with Capt. Carlos Etayo concerning the building of a replica of the Columbian fleet planned to sail to America in 1992 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the first voyage of Columbus. Present at the luncheon was Father Baussmann, President of The Blue Army of Spain, and another priest . . . a prominent Jesuit known all over Spain as a great preacher and retreat master.

The meeting had been set up long in advance. It was a Friday afternoon and my wife did not attend the luncheon because the conversation would be in Spanish and she would prefer to take a trip to El Escorial and the Valley of the Fallen, places which I had visited but which she had never seen.

In the course of the luncheon, there was mention of apparitions reported to be taking place at El Escorial. I asked the priests about the attitude of the Archdiocese. "The Archbishop is open on the matter," was the answer. And they gave instances of wonders reported at the place of the apparitions in which a middle-aged woman, mother of seven children, was receiving messages from Our Lady. The basic messages seemed to be that Our Lady's requests at Fatima had not been heard and that it was more urgent than ever that the world respond.

I had known virtually nothing about these events and I was surprised when Fr. Baussmann said:

"The apparitions take place on each First Saturday, and tomorrow is the First Saturday."

He suggested that I might take advantage of being in Madrid at this time to go and see for myself. However, I had no intention of going. I was following my policy of many years of simply waiting until there would be some definite signs of Church approval.

That evening when I rejoined my wife, I did not find her as enthusiastic as I expected her to be from the glorious trip she had planned.

It turned out that although that trip from Madrid to El Escorial operated every day, on this particular day it did not operate because she was the only passenger who showed up! So she had taken a rather dull city tour to fill the time.

“Fine,” I said. “I will take you tomorrow . . . and if you don’t mind, I will stay at El Escorial and the driver can take you on to the Valley of the Fallen, and then pick me up again at El Escorial.”

And so it happened that the next day I was there among a large crowd at the time of the apparition . . . and for the first time in my life I realized what it must have been like for those crowds who came to Fatima in 1917 to see the three children kneeling in front of a little tree.

However, this was a personal matter, and I have not spoken of it until now, after the Archdiocese has permitted a statue to be placed at the spot and has officially permitted devotions there.

Now concerning Garabandal:

Personally I always tended to believe in the apparitions of Garabandal because it seemed improbable that Our Lady performed the great miracle in Fatima and then went back into heaven, folded Her arms and said: “Well now I have given proof; if they don’t accept it, it’s just too bad.”

Even as all of the apparitions from 1830 onward seemed to come to a climax at Fatima, Fatima was obviously the opening of *a new era* . . . an era *unprecedented* in Christian history in which Our Lady had obtained from God permission to perform a *miracle at a predicted time and place* “*so that everyone may believe.*”

Because it was so unprecedented, it was many years before most of the world even knew about the Fatima miracle. It *first* became known in the United States in 1942, 25 years after the apparitions, when Pope Pius XII responded by consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

So the apparent apparitions at Garabandal, *with the prophecy of another miracle*, seemed to be a logical sequence to Fatima. I was particularly excited at this

because Our Lady was reported to be appearing as Our Lady of the Scapular of Mt. Carmel. She had appeared at Fatima as Our Lady of the Rosary . . . but at the closing of Her apparitions at the climax of the miracle, She appeared as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, holding the Scapular out to the world.

And I had other reasons to believe in Garabandal.

Father Pio seemed to me a living saint and one day I asked him what we should believe about those four girls in Spain who were seeing apparitions of Our Lady? I asked if I should lead a pilgrimage to Garabandal? His answer was affirmative . . . but he seemed to lead me to understand that I should lead the pilgrimage *only for the miracle*.

I now had an even stronger reason to believe.

Some said that Garabandal was “condemned”; others that the Church was still open to it. So during the Council I asked the Bishop of Fatima (Bishop John Venancio) if he would ask the Bishop of Santander (the Diocese of Garabandal) what His Excellency *really* thought about the events of Garabandal (not only as one bishop to another, but as the Bishop of Fatima to the Bishop of an alleged new apparition). And the Bishop of Santander answered briefly and to the point: “*We will wait, Excellency, for the miracle.*”

This is obviously the prudent attitude of the Church.

The children of Garabandal predicted a miracle which is still to take place on eight days notice. So there is no way the Church could approve “as supernatural” events for which the promised proof had not yet taken place.

We have a different situation at Kibeho in Rwanda, Africa. There the situation is very similar to that of Fatima in 1917. The Bishop of the diocese in Rwanda has permitted the publication of a book about the apparitions and when we wrote for permission to conduct a pilgrimage there, the Bishop said that we were free to come and hoped that many graces would result.

In the case of the apparitions in Nicaragua, the Bishop has already expressed his belief in the apparitions and has purchased the land at the place of the apparitions to reserve them for future pilgrimage use, pending approval on a level higher than his own.

Cardinal Ratzinger, Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Holy Office) says: "One of the signs of our times is that the announcement of Marian apparitions are multiplying all over the world. For example, reports are arriving from Africa and from other continents at the section of the congregation that is competent to deal with such reports."

Cardinal Ratzinger is in charge of the most important Vatican Curial Office, charged with the preservation and promotion of Catholic orthodoxy. Referring to recent apparitions the Cardinal spoke in great detail about Fatima and the importance of the Fatima Message: "A stern warning from Heaven has been launched from that place 'Fatima' directed against the prevailing frivolity, a summons to the seriousness of life, of history, to the perils that threaten humanity."

Then the Cardinal went on to say that none of these private revelations adds anything "to what a Christian must know from revelation (the Scriptures) but that the Marian apparitions approved by the Church in their known context reconfirm the urgency of penance, conversion, forgiveness, fasting." The Cardinal mentioned that already millions of pilgrims have gone to Medjugorje in Yugoslavia and of the controversy between the local Bishop there and the Franciscans. And responding to the question as to whether the Congregation, ("the highest court in this matter") would make a judgement, he replied:

"In this area, more than ever, patience is the fundamental policy of our congregation. No apparition is indispensable to the Faith; revelation terminated with Jesus Christ. He Himself is the revelation. *But we certainly cannot prevent God from speaking to our time through simple persons and also through extraordinary signs that point to the insufficiency of the cultures stamped by rationalism and positivism that dominate us.* The apparitions which the Church has officially approved—especially Lourdes and Fatima—have their precise place in the development of the life of the Church in the last century." (The above quotations from *The Ratzinger Report* published by Ignatius Press, pp. 110-111.)

El Escorial

I have met many who have gone to places of current

apparitions. I have not yet met *one* who returned unsatisfied or who did not seem to have obtained some special grace.

I have had only one experience; that of El Escorial and I will tell you of my reaction for whatever value it may have:

What I experienced at El Escorial could not be remotely compared with my experience of touching the rock upon which Our Lady stood at Lourdes, or my kneeling before the place of the apparition at Fatima. I would like to repeat: “not even *remotely*.”

When I touch the rock at Lourdes *I know* that Our Lady stood on that rock, said the Rosary with St. Bernadette, spoke to her, and from that rock opened the miraculous spring and invited Her children from all over the world to come here.

When I kneel in front of the place of the apparitions at Fatima, as Popes and millions of pilgrims have done before me, I *know* that Our Lady stood there and spoke to the children. I can feel Her speaking *to me*, as millions of others have also felt! I know! *I have no doubt!*

However, at El Escorial I was impressed with the crowd, with the novelty, perhaps even with the excitement. But I did not really *know*. The Church had not yet spoken. There was a doubt. And where there is doubt, faith is never fully active.

Even if I had seen a phenomenon in the sky at El Escorial as some have done, it would have made no difference. The doubt would be there. Was this woman really seeing Our Lady? Were the words *she spoke* being transmitted by *Our Lady* to the world? Maybe. And that would be wonderful. And it will be interesting to wait and see.

Meanwhile, what she said *seemed* all too true. But did it add anything to the message given in the approved apparitions? It did not even seem to me that the crowd there was more deeply moved than I. Wonder? Curiosity? Mixed faith? Whatever it was, *I had the feeling that it must have been like that for the crowds who saw the children at Fatima* kneeling in front of a little tree speaking to an unseen person . . . mixtures of questioning and faith . . . and perhaps hope . . . until the miracle happened.

On the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage there is private opportunity for anyone to go to Medjugorje, which can

be reached by a ferry which leaves just a few miles from Loreto.

There is the private opportunity to go from Porto to Garabandal. It is in the northwestern part of Spain, not too far from Santiago.

If and when these places are formally approved, the hub cities of the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage will not have to be changed in order to include either Garabandal or Medjugorje as additional options to the basic Ave Maria Pilgrimage.

Conclusion

Based on my personal experience, I would say that any pilgrim is more advised to go to the places that are *certain* rather than to the places still under study. . . except, of course, in the event that at one of these places to which the Church remains “open” a miracle may be predicted or some special event is expected to take place to which we are all “invited” by heaven.

Prudence, common sense, and our own good spiritual instinct will guide us well. We are aware that *our times are extraordinary. The world trembles on the brink of atomic destruction* and Our Lady, *an anxious Mother*, seems to be calling us from so many different places in a desperate effort to remind us of the evil of sin and to call us to the necessary reparation to turn back the tide of evil.

And if Our Mother is calling, would we not be open to Her call?

As we set out on any great Ave Maria Pilgrimage there will certainly be before us those words of the Cardinal Prefect (Ratzinger) of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

“One of the signs of our times is that the announcement of Marian apparitions are multiplying all over the world.”

Footnote: The communication from the Bishop of Santander to the Bishop of Fatima remained a secret with me for more than 20 years. However, after the death of both bishops, a priest in France published an article in which he testified that in a private meeting Bishop Venancio encouraged him to “promote” the message of Garabandal so that at the time of the announced miracle there might be many who would be present. And I feel that to make known *why* Bishop Venancio believed in Garabandal is now a service to his memory. Ever since his meeting with the Bishop of Santander during the Council, Bishop Venancio believed in the visions of Garabandal and on his last trip to America, he made a private detour in order to meet Conchita, the principal one of the four children to whom Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was said to have appeared. However, neither to me, nor as far as I know to anyone else except the priest mentioned above, did Bishop Venancio ever express his personal belief in the apparitions at Garabandal so that he would in no way alter the path of prudence which the Bishop of Santander himself, with support of the Holy See, had taken.



Pope blesses crowd at Loreto.



**U.S. National Blue Army Shrine of
the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Washington, N.J.**

Chapter 12

Shrines Near Home

Almost all Ave Maria pilgrimages are planned around Fatima. For this reason almost all have been tours to Europe.

However, there is a very, very important shrine here at the center of the Americas: The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City and while most Marian writers say that the “Marian Age” began with the apparition of Our Lady in Paris in 1830, could it not be more truly said that they began with the apparition of Our Lady in Mexico City in 1531?

In that apparition Our Lady said that She was appearing for “all in these lands.” And Mexico City at that time was the *center of all the Americas*, and their highest point of culture.

As a result of Her appearance, and as a result of the miracle She performed, there was virtually a new “Pentecost” in the New World . . . with literally *millions* of conversions in just a few years. An explosion of faith resulted in many other shrines such as “Our Lady of Light” in Leon; the miraculous statue of Our Lady at San Juan de los Lagos; a miraculous image of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel; and many, many others.

Several times I have personally led pilgrimages to Mexico for an Ave Maria *American* Pilgrimage. But for some reason there were just not enough people interested—(despite volumes of publicity)—to maintain the personnel needed. Perhaps it is because *individuals* can get to Mexico City easily on their own, or with one or two others with whom they choose to arrange their own trip.

However, those who do go to Mexico City should try to go on a real *pilgrimage* which requires guidance from someone *who truly believes* in the miracle of Guadalupe.

There are several marvelous things to be seen in addition to the miraculous portrait of Our Lady itself. The great new shrine, in itself is worth a trip to Mexico City. There is also the hill of Tepeyac, where the apparitions occurred, and the shrine some miles away where Our Lady appeared to the uncle of Juan Diego, curing him of his illness, and where there is also an important sanctuary.

And if a pilgrimage is well conducted, it will include the Pyramids and an explanation of the Indian culture, a visit to the "square of three cultures" with the original church to which Juan Diego was traveling on the very day that Our Lady first appeared to him.

Today in the United States we have a wonderful organization called the "Queen of the Americas Guild" which is planning to build a pilgrimage facility in Mexico City. Americans will then have their own center there, with knowledgeable people to explain the importance of the apparition and of the beautiful message of love and consolation which Our Lady brought to "all in these lands," words which we love to remember today: "*Fear nothing! I, who am your Mother, am I not here.*"

The Queen of the Americas Guild has a priest stationed at the Shrine in Mexico City, a member of the Shrine staff, and there is an English-speaking audio-visual to be seen in a facility on the periphery of the Shrine.

And it would be wasteful to go all the way to Mexico City and see *only* the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the miraculous image of Our Lady. There is also a "circle tour" around Mexico City which is so interesting that I myself consider, from the point of view of variety of scenery and even shrines, second only to a trip around the world for its diversity. One passes from real tropics, through subtropics to temperate climate in just a few days. And one sees cathedral after cathedral, church after church, often 300 to 400 years old!

There are also some interesting shrines in South America, which have been visited on the Ave Maria pilgrimages at one time or another, but none of them are as important as the Shrine in Mexico City, which can truly be called the *major Marian Shrine of the Americas*. Indeed, the Holy Father has proclaimed Our Lady of Guadalupe the Empress and Patroness of *all* the Americas.

Fatima Travel has its own representative in Mexico City, who is a devout Catholic and who is an expert on all the shrines. Year after year he conducts the great Ave Maria Circle Tour in Mexico. For this reason, Fatima Travel has published a special booklet about the Mexican pilgrimage and offers it, using commercial airlines, several times a year.

U.S. Shrines

But we also have many shrines "close to home" . . . such as the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Portland, Oregon; Our Lady of Peace just south of San Francisco; Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois; Our Lady of Fatima in Youngstown, New York; the Shrine of the Jesuit Martyrs in Auriesville, New York; the Shrine of Our Lady in St. Augustine, where Mass was first said in what is now the continental United States; and in addition to many other local shrines there is the official National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D. C. . . to which diocesan pilgrimages are organized annually from all over the nation.

Near New York City, in Washington, New Jersey, is the *Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* at the National Center of the World Apostolate of Fatima (The Blue Army).

I would like to speak about this in some detail because it is our hope that most of those who take the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage will also visit our own shrine in Washington, N.J. where pilgrimage facilities are under constant development.

It is beneficial for those going on the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage to Europe to come *first* to Washington, N.J. and spend at least one night at the Shrine, then proceed by coach the next day to the airport for the trip to Europe. This takes away the anxiety of "getting to the airport on time." It gives one a chance to be completely rested from the strain of packing and getting away from home, and it is a spiritual preparation for the great pilgrimage.

Our Shrine of the Immaculate Heart has rightly been called the "American Fatima" because it was here in 1948 that the original International Pilgrim Virgin, which the Bishop of Fatima had blessed to go to Russia, was first enshrined. It was from here in Washington, N.J. that it

left for Russia to arrive there in January 1950. It is now enshrined in a chapel serving embassy personnel of Moscow.

And on this mountain was born the "World Apostolate of Fatima" which was proclaimed by Our Lady's Bishop, the Bishop of Fatima himself, as the official Apostolate for spreading the Fatima Message to the entire world.

In 1985 the rector of the Sanctuary of Fatima blessed an exact replica of the Chapel of the Apparitions of Fatima on the grounds of Washington, N.J. Parts of the original chapel of the apparitions of Fatima have been given by the sanctuary to the U. S. Shrine so that the Capelinha is not only a replica, but *has actual parts of the original Capelinha* from the spot where Our Lady appeared to the children in 1917 and over which took place the Miracle of the Sun.

The Holy House

It was never intended by the founders of the Blue Army (The World Apostolate of Fatima) that the offices of the Apostolate in Washington, N.J. should ever become a "National Shrine." But when a group of Felician Sisters came to the Blue Army Center to help with their labor and especially their prayers, a replica of the Holy House of Nazareth was built to serve as a chapel for the Sisters.

We knew that when the doors of the original Holy House were changed (because of the millions of pilgrims going there) that a few stones were left over and were preserved in the treasury of the Holy House. We were able (in 1970) to obtain two pieces of these stones which we crushed and imbedded in the mortar of the fieldstone used to build a replica of the Holy House in Washington, N.J.

When finished it was so much like the original Holy House of Nazareth that Father Modestus Papi, who was then the director of the Universal Congregation of the Holy House, said on more than one occasion (when he flew on the same day from Loreto to New York, arriving in Washington, N.J. still in daylight because of the 6-hour time change):

"I was in my Mother's house at Loreto this morning, and I am back in my Mother's house here tonight."

I speak at length about this in my book *Dear Bishop*

and of the miracle of angelic voices which took place over the Holy House in Washington, N.J. . . . a miracle extremely well substantiated.

Visitors had been coming to the Blue Army National Center to get material, or to have questions answered. But many more began to come in order to pray in the replica of the Holy House. Often crowds were so large that Mass had to be held out of doors.

Sister Mary Miranda, the Felician Sister who had that "special vocation" to come to Washington, N.J. with some other Sisters, that they might be a "heart of prayer" at the Blue Army's National Center, began to speak of building a major shrine on the grounds. (Indeed, she had predicted from the time she first came that one day a great Shrine would be built there.)

Now rising on this mountain, above the very valley down which George Washington marched in 1776 with the battered remnants of the Continental Army after his first defeat in New York, a massive bronze statue of Our Lady showing Her Immaculate Heart seems to touch the sky.

Precious Relics

Here we have the largest piece of the original tree upon which Our Lady appeared in Fatima! It is quite small. . . but still the single largest piece in existence. It stands in a reliquary in the Holy House and the official seal of the Bishop of Fatima bears testimony to its authenticity.

Also in the "Holy House" is a life-size representation of the "final vision" of Fatima: the Holy Trinity; Our Lord on the Cross with blood flowing from Head and Heart to the Eucharist; and with Our Lady standing at the foot of the Cross, Her Immaculate Heart surrounded by thorns.

Directly beneath the sculptured figures (which are a masterpiece of carving), is a *part of the original altar over which the vision occurred.*

As mentioned elsewhere in this book, the furnishings of the sanctuary of the final vision of Fatima were obtained by the Blue Army (which is the custodian of the Chapel of the Apparitions in Pontevedra). The center part of the altar of the vision is at Pontevedra, *but the two side parts* were refashioned into the altar which now stands in the Holy House in Washington, N.J.

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During the vision Lucia saw the words “*Grace and Mercy* flowing down over the altar like water” . . . and it is extremely impressive for a pilgrim to attend Mass here before the very altar thus mentioned in Lucia’s Memoirs.

But there is something perhaps even more precious, or certainly just as precious as the altar. That is *the Baldachino* which stood on the altar to hold the crucifix . . . and which was also used for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. And this Baldachino *was literally at the very center of that great vision* that filled the chapel with light and during which Our Lady said that “Now is the time for the Holy Father to consecrate Russia to My Immaculate Heart.”

This Baldachino is kept in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of the major shrine, up on the hill, and is used for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during the All-Night Vigils on every First Friday-First Saturday. It is in its original condition with original paint and gold leaf exactly as it was at the time of the vision.

Also in the same Blessed Sacrament Chapel, on the right side, is a beautiful statue of St. Joseph which also came from the Convent of the Apparitions in Pontevedra.

On the left is the Pilgrim Virgin statue which the Bishop of Fatima accompanied on a pilgrimage to Odessa, Russia . . . one of those “unusual world pilgrimages” which were a prelude to obtaining the special plane for the world peace flights.

The Shrine is situated in the center of some 150 acres in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The scenery, even to veteran travelers, repeatedly causes exclamations of wonder.

On the grounds there is an outdoor Way of the Cross, and a Rosary Garden. The Joyful Mysteries begin at the Holy House, and continue in a series of life-size figures throughout the other four Mysteries. The Sorrowful Mysteries are more somber, with bronze figures. The Glorious Mysteries are masterfully carved in white marble.

Just above the main building of the World Apostolate of Fatima, where thousands of letters are answered every week, is a beautiful statue of Padre Pio, spiritual father of the Blue Army. Elsewhere on the grounds are Shrines to St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Anne and others.

National Guardian

In a reflection pond in front of the main Shrine stands a great white marble statue of the *National Guardian Angel of the United States*.

Special ceremonies are held on July 4, the birthday of the United States, centering around the Mass of the Guardian Angel and recalling the words of God to Moses that He would send His angel before the nation of Israel to prepare the way.

Why is this Shrine to Our National Guardian Angel located here at the "American Fatima"?

It is because Portugal was previously the only nation in the world which honored its National Guardian Angel with a special feast. And the Archangel who appeared to the children of Fatima, and gave them Holy Communion, *identified himself as "the Guardian Angel of Portugal, the Angel of Peace."*

The priest in charge of the Apostolate of Portugal's National Guardian Angel came all the way to the United States to urge the Blue Army to establish devotion in the United States to *our own Guardian Angel* and to erect this Shrine at the National Center of our Apostolate in Washington, New Jersey.

As one enters the large, wrought iron entrance gate to the Shrine complex, it seems almost as though the white image of the Guardian Angel begins to "appear" as one begins to climb the hill towards the Shrine.

Repeatedly the original International Pilgrim Virgin has visited this mountain, the same statue which is now finally and permanently enshrined in the Basilica at Fatima, just inside the sanctuary. And as was said above, a similar miraculous statue, which accompanied the Bishop of Fatima to Russia, is now enshrined in our own "American Fatima," as a constant reminder of the great visitation of Our Lady in our own time as the "Queen of Peace" and of Her promise to convert Russia, the great rival of America in the struggle for freedom in the world, and to bring about an "era of peace to mankind." And it was from this mountain that the Pilgrim Virgin went to Moscow in 1950.

As said above, we hope that many who go on the great

Ave Maria Pilgrimage will first spend a night at the “American Fatima.” We rejoice that tens of thousands of others, who may not have the time, health, or financial means of taking the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage to Europe may come to Washington, N.J. and experience the Holy House. This Holy House (aggregated to the original Holy House of Loreto) carries the same privileges and indulgences that are obtained by a visit to Loreto itself. The pilgrims can also pray before the statue of Padre Pio, or before a beautiful copy of the miraculous Icon of Kazan (the original of which is at the Blue Army Center in Fatima). They can make the Way of the Cross in the open (as one would do at Lourdes) or make the Rosary Way and pray in the replica of the Capelinha. They can venerate the largest relic of the tree over which Our Lady appeared in Fatima, and attend Holy Mass in the replica of the Holy House or in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in the main Shrine. Indeed throughout the season (May through October) Masses are said morning and evening with constant opportunity for confession, and for Adoration and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

So when planning your “Great Marian Pilgrimage”, plan to spend some time here at the “American Fatima” . . . or if you are planning a visit to the East, make certain that your plans include a visit to the National Blue Army Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary!



Chapter 13

The Pilgrim

On one of those very rare occasions a few years ago, when the Holy Shroud of Turin was exposed, I took a pilgrimage to see it. And even though we could only enter the cathedral, pass in front of the Shroud, and leave again, it was worth having flown all the way to Italy and up to Turin.

I had often seen photographs of the Shroud, actual size, and even enlargements.

But to look at *the very Shroud* which covered Our Lord...which bore His Image...from which He resurrected!

The wonder is with me still. It has enriched my life forever.

But two things were necessary for me to have had this deep and lasting experience: KNOWLEDGE of what I was seeing, and FAITH. And both were rewarded because I had made the sacrifice to come. . .

That basically is what a pilgrimage is all about.

While I was standing in line waiting to go into the Cathedral someone handed me a "flyer" . . . a give-away-sheet with a message. It had a picture of Padre Pio and a quotation from him to the effect that "A pilgrim should not be like a tourist."

(What interested me even more was that Padre Pio said that one of the practices which *would bring God's blessing on the world* and help turn back the tide of evil was PILGRIMAGES TO OUR LADY'S SHRINES.)

The flyer was being handed out to the pilgrims in Turin because obviously many were curiosity seekers, many were "tourists." And what made myself and those with me *different* from just "tourists?"

We were not wearing sackcloth and ashes. We stayed

at a three-star hotel, ate in good restaurants, traveled in an air-conditioned coach . . . probably just like the tourists.

There may even seem to be a contradiction in saying a pilgrimage should be “heavenly and *earthly*” (the Fatima Travel slogan).

But the pilgrim is a person with body and soul, and *it is not extraordinary mortifications which make a pilgrim.*

It is *attitude*. It is a “seeking FIRST the Kingdom of Heaven: It is our *different reason* for travel . . . our seeking a closer *contact with God.*”

All that is required to be a *good* pilgrim, even in the very spirit of a St. Benedict Joseph Labre or a St. Ignatius Loyola, *is acceptance of whatever God sends in the course of our pilgrimage day.* . . . while we are sincerely seeking Divine contact.

Years of experience show that no matter how well *Fatima Travel* (or *any* agency) may prepare for the physical needs of its travelers there will always be trials and crosses. And these, properly accepted, are usually enough for a “pilgrimage” in the very truest sense.

And oddly enough, the tourist, on the most expensive trip imaginable, is going to have most of the SAME trials. Just consider:

Many of us live in comfortable houses, alone, or with one or two other persons. We are not accustomed to traveling with groups, to deferring to strangers getting on and off coaches, waiting to be served a meal, standing in line for this or for that . . . and eminently standing in line to board the aircraft, to go through customs, and to wait in hotel lobbies until one’s room number is called. This for many is *truly a daily* penance requiring kindness, patience, thoughtfulness of others. And I can testify after more than 30 years of pilgrimages that I have never ceased to be edified by the greatest number of our people in kindness and charity towards each other and patience with delays and unexpected hardship. And “unexpected hardships” there certainly will be! No single pilgrimage goes through with the plane constantly on time...all hotel rooms exactly as requested . . . all meals promptly served . . . and everyone on the pilgrimage a congenial fellow pilgrim. I do not think I can recall a single pilgrimage when there was not *something* to be offered up.

And usually there will be one or two people who rant and rave because things are not going perfectly, while the vast majority somehow have the grace to “accept” . . . which is the essence of the spirit of penance in its truest sense.

Perhaps one of the greatest mixed blessings of a pilgrimage is the fact that rooms are shared by two people, some of whom have never met before they gathered at the airport to leave for Europe!

I say it is a “mixed blessing” because as a result many lifelong friendships are born . . . and by this I mean “friendships” in the truest meaning of the word. Many people go through their entire lives without ever having one, sincere friend. But on a pilgrimage, where supernatural motives have drawn people together, two persons sharing this “experience of a lifetime” can continue sharing the rest of their lives.

But what a hardship it is for many who have never shared a room with a stranger . . . to be sharing the same room day after day for two weeks!

Fortunately there is so much activity on the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage that when it is time to go to bed, everyone goes to bed and sleeps! Wake-up time usually comes all too soon for everyone concerned. But still there is much thoughtfulness required, much concern of one pilgrim for the other.

In the first angelic apparition to the children of Fatima, the little ones were told that they were to “pray and make sacrifices” because the Hearts of Jesus and Mary had a special mission for them.

A short time later when the children were *playing*, the angel again came and asked them what they were doing, telling them to make sacrifices. And when Lucia asked what that meant, the angel answered, “Make of *whatever you do* a sacrifice.”

More than once in her memoirs Lucia explains that the penance required of us “*is the acceptance of what God asks of us each day.*”

And I am not writing this to “instruct” our future pilgrims in their behavior. It seems that *most of our pilgrims already have this awareness.*

That is what distinguishes them as Ave Maria Pilgrims.

How often I have been edified by the spirit of our pilgrims . . . most of whom have never met before, most of whom I myself have never met before. It seems to come from the holiness of the shrines, the “contact” with heaven which “works” without any special instruction. And although there might be a few awkward occurrences at the beginning of the trip (especially the first or second day), what a glorious spirit of friendship and joy soon pervades the whole group!

Again, it might seem contradictory for me to say that *a pilgrim has more fun than any tourist*. But just substitute the word “joy” for “fun.”

Even in the very early days of our Ave Maria Tours I would remark how our groups in Rome would pass other regular tourist groups . . . and I would remark the serious faces of the “tourist” groups as contrasted to the smiles, the joy, the camaraderie among our own pilgrims. And I have remarked this again and again through the years.

Is this a fulfillment of the words of Our Lord: “Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and *all these things will be added unto you?*”

A PILGRIM'S PRAYER

If some things do not happen as they are scheduled, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If I should get tired and inclined to become short tempered, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If my meal in a foreign country may not be to my particular liking, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If any delays should occur and I should become anxious, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If some other pilgrim is making noise so that I cannot hear the guide, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist when I ask that person to be a bit more quiet!

If someone takes a better seat or more choice place, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If I find myself last in a line or waiting, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If the person in front of me buys the last item which I really wanted, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If I should get a chance to help another person, who always seems to be annoying me, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

If someone is always the "last one on the bus" and I am always on time, Lord

May I remember that I am a PILGRIM not a Tourist!

But Lord, especially let me remember that what I find objectionable in another

Is really what You oft times find objectionable in me

And let me remember this and forgive the other

As You are continually forgiving me!

Why They Return

Recently the official newspaper of the diocese of Providence, R.I., dedicated eight whole pages to the Blue Army Pilgrimage.

I would wish one could include every word and every picture of these eight newspaper pages in this book!

Julie Marrinucci, author of the articles, began with a quotation from John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to Lourdes: "*With you all, I have become a pilgrim.*"

She then quoted individual Blue Army pilgrims who gave *their reasons* for going to Lourdes and Fatima. Palma Mosca, of Pawtucket, R.I., had had an extraordinary recovery from serious illness, attributed to prayer, and was visiting Fatima for the third time.

"When you are on these grounds," Palma said, "you are receiving many blessings from Mary, blessings you feel for a long time. . ."

Julie said that she was impressed by the great faith of the pilgrims and the variety of reasons which had drawn them to come to Our Lady's Shrines "each of which has its own charisma."

"To compare the Shrines at Lourdes and Fatima is to say that each is an expression of faith and devotion to Jesus through the Blessed Mother," Julie wrote, "To contrast them, picking one over the other, might be a mistake. It is the visiting pilgrim who receives from each Shrine what he himself brings to it."

Edward McCaffrey, the Pilgrimage Apostle in Rhode Island, seemed to summarize the feeling of all:

"I think that there is some kind of feeling of closeness that this Pilgrimage gives you, to the Blessed Mother and

the Lord. You come back with that closeness.”

We call it in this book “special contact with Heaven”...but perhaps those words of Edward McCaffery express it much better: “A closeness of one pilgrim to the other , but especially ‘to the Blessed Mother and to the Lord’ . . .*you come back for that closeness.*”



One of our outstanding “apostles” carries banner at Fatima.

Chapter 14

The Pilgrimage Apostle

Recently we had an Ave Maria Pilgrimage led by Fr. Kenneth Roberts after which people began calling (or writing) to say: "It was the greatest experience of my life" . . . "It was marvelous" . . . "It was unforgettable."

From all of these enthusiastic responses I had to presume that this pilgrimage was just a little less than going to Heaven and back.

Certainly having a Fr. Kenneth Roberts share his special insights at the various Shrines made a difference. Having studied in Rome he was thrilled to take the pilgrims to *relive* the experiences of Rome with him.

These pilgrims were not just *seeing* Rome (going to all of the right places and having the right explanations). For them it was something more. It was *sharing the wonder* with someone who carried that wonder in his heart.

A good example of what I am trying to say is the experience of Dr. Frank Ceravolo on one of our trips:

Dr. Frank Ceravolo of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is Italian and graduated from Rome University. He was miraculously cured by Padre Pio and goes to Italy every year.

On one occasion he and his family were on my bus on a one-day tour of Rome. It was only one day but Dr. Ceravolo still talks about it and says: "I had never before *seen* Rome."

He meant, of course, no one had ever *shared the wonder*.

Faith and joy and enthusiasm can make any pilgrimage a wonderful religious experience, sometimes as wonderful as one may hope on this earth.

This sharing of mine . . . this sharing of Fr. Roberts . . . this sharing by others who have gone on these pilgrimages before . . . could we not at least try to "imitate this experience" for *all* of our pilgrims?

And that is what our “Ave Maria Pilgrimage APOSTLES” are all about!

We expect them to grasp the WONDER of the Shrines . . . the *spiritual excitement* . . . and to share that wonder with the pilgrims they are privileged to accompany.

Yes, *privileged* . . . because it is indeed a privilege (as well as a great responsibility) to have people trust themselves into our hands to be led to sacred places of special contact with Heaven. And the Apostle who takes that responsibility seriously will be WELL PREPARED and will find joy in sharing the wonder . . .

My special thing is to use the Rosary as preparation for each Shrine. I seem to find in the mysteries of the Rosary a way to get at the heart of the mystery of every Shrine we visit . . . the Rosary *comes to life* in these sacred Marian Shrines! . . . mysteries and Aves mingling together *as though Our Lady Herself* were the “tour guide”!

People have often asked me if I would record the Rosaries . . . but there have never been two alike. It “happens”. And I don’t think it is special to me. A “presence” of Our Lady comes with meaningful recitation of the Rosary. It is just a question of *relating the particular mystery* to the message of the Shrine we are visiting. It requires just a brief thought before each Hail Mary.

Best Substitute

The best substitute to a wonder-filled leader is a reading of THE ACTUAL WORDS.

In the Holy Land, for instance, just to read or hear the New Testament at the very places mentioned is all the sharing and wonder necessary for a most successful pilgrimage.

And when we come to Lourdes, to hear the ACTUAL WORDS Our Lady spoke here . . . to be led to the rock on which She stood . . . is often quite enough.

All the responsibility does not rest with the Pilgrimage Apostle. Much rests with the pilgrim!

That is primarily why I wrote this book.

YOU WILL GET AS MUCH OUT OF YOUR PILGRIMAGE AS YOU PUT INTO IT.

Take a New Testament when you go to the Holy Land. And take a book like this when you go to the Shrines described in these pages. Or have a book like Sharkey’s

The Woman Shall Conquer . . . which contains most of the exact words Our Lady spoke in all Her apparitions.

The better you are prepared . . . the more you KNOW . . . the more your pilgrimage will mean to you.

Pilgrimage Apostles

But a big secret behind the success of the Ave Maria Pilgrimages lies in the Pilgrimage Apostles . . . persons who have themselves been so deeply touched by the Shrine contact with Heaven that they themselves long to go back . . . and they long to SHARE their experience.

Some of these apostles spend days and months promoting the pilgrimage and they give up their own seat so that another may go!

But we discourage such sacrifice. We want our apostles WITH YOU on the trip. We want them to share their love of the Shrines, their excitement and their wonder . . . which seems to grow with every pilgrimage they take.

To have Pilgrimage Apostles on every coach, we give one free seat in every 23 . . . so that there can be a priest and a Pilgrimage Apostle for every group of 46 (which is a coach group).

Not everyone can be a Pilgrimage Apostle. Only those who are active in the Blue Army or in some other Catholic organization such as Legion of Mary (preferably in a position of leadership) are invited to become Ave Maria Pilgrimage Apostles. Then their names are listed in *Soul Magazine* (which has over a million readers) with an address and telephone number so that people living in their immediate area can contact them.

The apostle then *Leads* the group FROM HIS OR HER OWN CITY (which can be *anywhere* in the U.S. or Canada).

Originally we took the Queen of the World Plane to various cities . . . but when domestic air fares (such as on *People's Express*) became so reasonable, it became far cheaper to organize the group from a local city into Newark Airport (the headquarters of *People's Express* and many other low fare carriers). From there we could fly directly to Europe . . . to our own "Gateway Cities," on our own great 707.

And it is almost as effective . . . because the *group* becomes a pilgrimage, with the Pilgrimage Apostle, from

the moment its members meet *at their own local airport!* They then stay together throughout Europe, and return home together.

It is also important that the priest chosen for the pilgrimage is truly desirous not only of being a part of the spiritual experience but of contributing to it.

For some of our pilgrims this is going to be a “once in a lifetime” experience.

Some will never have flown before . . . but they are flying now because they want to go to Lourdes . . . Fatima . . . Rome . . . Padre Pio . . . Loreto . . . Their SPIRITUAL LONGING overcomes all else.

Some are making a great financial sacrifice . . . others might say they could not “afford” . . . but which they feel the need to afford more than a television set or a new car!

And it is not enough that they be provided with transportation, hotels and meals and the opportunity to get to the Shrines. That is not at all enough!

On this pilgrimage THEY ARE GOING TO SEE A MIRACLE, perhaps even experience one. Will it be at Santarem, Balasar, Cascia, Lanciano, Loreto (the Holy House itself, without foundations), emerging dry from the baths at Lourdes? And will we who lead them be indifferent to what they are about to experience?

I have known some groups to go to Balasar and not even have an explanation of the miracle of the cross . . . a miracle before their eyes! But sometimes a group is “abandoned” to “professional” guides who know all about the history and the art . . . and often nothing about miracles!

The Pilgrimage Apostle and the priest in the coach must supplement the guide’s professional services (which are also very necessary). They must at least READ THE ACTUAL WORDS . . . and prepare the way with the Rosary, preferably with constant references to the spiritual wonder about to be experienced.

The title of this book is *Go! Your Mother is Calling!* And the title fits the fact. OUR LADY IS WAITING FOR YOU at Her Shrines. Pope John Paul II said that experience of hundreds of our pilgrims confirms that .

And it will be sad . . . and wasteful . . . if you are not prepared and if you do not have a Pilgrimage Apostle and a priest who help awaken you to the wonder you are about

to experience *every day* on the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage.

Usually the heart of that experience, at EVERY Shrine, is in the Eucharistic Liturgy . . . and in receiving Jesus at some special, sacred place. This gives the priest the special privilege . . . and responsibility . . . of relating the charisma of that place (which you have made such a sacrifice to visit) to *your* presence there.

Among our Pilgrimage Apostles there may not be many like St. Benedict Joseph Labre, or Ignatius Loyola or Francis Xavier, or any of the host of more than a hundred saints who made their way with great difficulty to Shrines like Loreto. But there will be *something* of these Saints in them all . . . something St. John Chrysostom called the following of "a religious instinct" . . . a seeking out of the places of special contact with God on this earth.

And how fortunate are these apostles! They are certain to get so much more out of a pilgrimage than the average person . . . not only by their own preparation, but also through the excitement and enthusiasm which comes through the group itself . . . like the joy at Christmas on seeing the light in the eyes of children.

We would wish that all of our Pilgrimage Apostles, and particularly our pilgrimage spiritual directors, may become as enthusiastic about the Shrines as the many saints to whom we have referred in this book

I dedicate these pages to them . . . to those pilgrim saints and to our own Pilgrim Apostles.



Appendix

Our Own Plane

The “great” Ave Maria Pilgrimages back in the fifties were possible because one transatlantic fare by ship covered a stop first in Lisbon, and then continued to any of *four* European destinations for the same fare!

But then the ships stopped sailing and coaches, hotels and transatlantic transportation became so expensive that such trips virtually ceased *until we acquired our own plane* and began to fly to Fatima, Lourdes and Rome in the early eighties.

And now, thanks to having our own plane, and thanks to finding the right “hub cities,” *the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage is again possible* and sufficiently reasonable for almost everyone.

The story of “our own plane” is so extraordinary that I wrote a little booklet about it called *The Skystar Miracle*.

It all began with the Blue Army’s world peace flights . . . back in the seventies when once a year we would travel with the International Pilgrim Virgin statue, together with the Bishop of Fatima, on trips around the world, around Africa, even to all six continents of the world in one single trip to promote the Message of Fatima and world peace.

Then in 1982 the price of chartering a plane was so high that the world peace flight could not be operated. The lowest price offered by any airline for an around the world charter was a million dollars. *That amounted to \$5,000 for each passenger, only for air fare* with additional expenses for hotel room and food.

At this time an airline captain, a good Blue Army member, suggested that we *buy* a 707 then being sold rather inexpensively due to a new noise-abatement law which would make it impossible for the 707 to fly after 1984.

(The law required a certain decibel level . . . and the 707 engines were a few decibels above.)

At this same time, costs had driven airline expenses so high that the airlines no longer wanted a plane which could carry only 200 passengers. They wanted larger planes which could carry 300 and even 500 passengers . . . and yet could be operated by the same size crew. This would make fares more affordable to many tourists.

So the 707's were being sold for a fractional cost of their original price of \$20 million.

At first the idea seemed to me like a fantasy. I did not even consider it. But then I got a sign which I considered to be from Our Lady. It was associated with the making of an All-Night Vigil and it seemed so clear to me that I felt confident that . . . even though I could not ask the Blue Army to finance it . . . I felt sure that somehow I would acquire the plane.¹

The Queen of the World plane was purchased from Pan American Airways with very favorable payment conditions and after we operated the World Peace Flight of 1982, we continued to use the plane for pilgrimages to Fatima offering initially a complete five-day pilgrimage for less than \$500.

It was our intention to continue to operate this one plane only and eventually pay off, over a period of years, the costs of acquiring this "pilgrimage plane."

And then disaster struck! The airline which was operating our plane went out of business and we could not get another airline to operate it for us. For almost a year this pilgrimage plane sat on the ground while we were chartering another plane to fly our trips to Fatima . . . at, of course,

¹ It is important to stress that while all of our pilgrimages originated in the Blue Army with the primary purpose of having a representative group at the blessing of the cornerstone of the Blue Army house in Fatima back in 1954, we had to have a complete separation between the travel agency and the Apostolate for two reasons:

- 1) There was the question of liability;
- 2) There was the question of travel, which had always been considered to be profit-related.

Although we operated the pilgrimages as though they were non-profit, we did not want to give the impression that we were operating pilgrimages and collecting money for planes, buses, trains, etc. in the Apostolate itself. It has always been our policy to put money in a secondary place in our Fatima Apostolate.

In 1954 Fatima Travel, Inc. was formed with the help of an extraordinarily capable man who spoke many languages and who had been the first director of the Blue Army House in Fatima. However, all this is told in my book *Dear Bishop!*.

constantly increasing fares . . . with the costs of the Queen of the World plane mounting as it sat idly on the tarmac.

What were we to do?

The spiritual results of those trips to Fatima were so great and the increase in our general Apostolate was so great (more than doubled during that time) that I decided I would start an airline to fly this pilgrimage plane!

Had I known of the difficulties involved, I would never, never have begun. But once begun, we kept persevering on and on, and on the very last day of 1984, we received the certificate for operating Skystar International. This was the *very last certificate issued* by CAB before its work was taken over by the expanded Department of Transportation. (After that time it became even more difficult for a new airline to begin.)

Even though the “707” was undoubtedly the safest airplane in the sky . . . even though a similar “707” is used as “Air Force One” to fly the President of the United States, we still could not fly it because of the new 1985 noise abatement law which went into effect!

Almost miraculously, I heard of a group of men in Texas who were developing a muffler for noise abatement which would bring the 707 into compliance with the law. I flew to Texas to speak to them.

They said they would gladly equip the Queen of the World plane with a muffler (at a price three times more than the original cost of the plane!) but they were surprised that I considered operating an airline with only one plane. They wondered how this would be possible.

I replied: “*There is a real need for a pilgrimage airline. Statistics prove that the primary motive for travel, after business and before tourism, is pilgrimage.*” I admitted that this number was greatly swelled by the Pilgrimages to Mecca but nevertheless we already had personal experience of the truth of the words of St. John Chrysostom: “A pilgrimage is a religious instinct.”

And moved by this instinct, there were millions of people who wanted to get to the Holy Land and to holy places where they would feel closer to the Divine Reality.

The Texas group seemed to be impressed by what I said and I excused myself from the meeting at about 11:00 in the morning, since I had not yet attended daily Mass. When

I returned, they told me they were going to supply the muffler, finance it, and also consider other aircraft to make Skystar a real airline!

Today Skystar has six 707s in the air including the Super Q 707, as safe and as modern as any aircraft one could possibly desire!

One of those six planes is our original “Queen of the World” acquired for the 1982 World Peace Flight. A special contract with Skystar International reserves that plane for the primary use of the great Ave Maria Pilgrimages, and the contract assures that the plane will be flown by the airline as close to cost as economically viable for both airline and pilgrims.

Without this special aircraft, the great Ave Maria Pilgrimage would not be possible because there are no direct flights (and probably never will be in our lifetime) from the U.S. to cities like Porto, Ancona and Lyon.



Pilgrims from *Domus Pacis* The Blue Army International Center in Fatima, enter the Fatima Sanctuary in procession.

For further information or for reservations on the Great Ave Maria Pilgrimage write or call:

Fatima Travel, Inc.
360 Belvidere Ave.
Washington, N.J. 07882

Toll free: 800-222-0369
New Jersey: 201-689-4600

If you are interested in being a Pilgrimage Apostle please write and explain why. List your qualifications (background in Catholic activities).

Send to: "Director of Pilgrimage Apostles" at above address.