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A pilgrimage is a journey, usually in the company of others, to a holy place. It is an ancient Christian devotion and one that can bring numerous benefits to the way we live and share the Gospel.

A pilgrimage has three vital parts:

- The **journey** is the one least emphasized in these days of cars and aeroplanes, yet it is still important and often pilgrims journey slowly or on foot. By journeying away from home we leave behind the things that give us comfort, safety, and security. This process of 'letting go' enables us to be more open and receptive to God.
- The **destination** is some acknowledged holy place where we can find God's peace and presence, a place that God has touched and made holy.
- The most important part is **going home**, because the purpose of pilgrimage is to live the Christian life more fully once we return to our daily lives.

### **Pilgrimage and my journey of faith**

It is all too easy for faith to become a matter of routine or for us to become complacent about God and his love for us. A pilgrimage can be an occasion of **conversion** when we decide for Christ afresh and are renewed in our relationship with him, as we set apart time for God and share in worship with others. Historically pilgrimage has been associated with penance. Whilst we may not emphasize this aspect of it so much today, time spent away in a holy place is an opportunity

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to experience God's **forgiveness** and make a new start. A pilgrimage can be an ideal time for using the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) or of Anointing. Unlike on an individual retreat where we go away alone to a quiet place, pilgrims have **fun**, finding Christ in other people, as well as in worship, and enjoying their company.

### **Where should I go on pilgrimage?**

There are many wonderful pilgrimage places. Amongst the most famous are: **The Holy Land**. To be where Christ was born, to look out over the Sea of Galilee, to walk the Stations of the Cross in Jerusalem, to pray on Calvary, to venerate Christ's tomb — these are life-changing experiences for any Christian.

**Rome**. The heart of the Church and the site of the martyrdom of many early Christians, Rome is the second greatest



place of pilgrimage. The city's churches are heart-stoppingly beautiful, and to be with Christians from all over the world is a powerful, converting experience.

Other sites of pilgrimage in Europe are: **Lourdes** with its particular emphasis on the ministry of healing.

**Santiago di Compostela** in north-west Spain and a pilgrim site since the relics of St James were brought here in the ninth century.

In Britain, the most well-known places of pilgrimage are:

**Canterbury**, the spiritual home of Anglicans and a place of pilgrimage since Thomas Becket was martyred here in the twelfth century.

**St Albans** where the first English martyr, Alban, was killed in Roman times. The cathedral church, St Albans Abbey, is one of the loveliest in England.

**Iona** off the west coast of Scotland and a place of deep holiness since St Columba founded his monastery here in 653.

**Holy Island**, or Lindisfarne, in Northumberland from which St Cuthbert and others of the great northern saints brought the Christian faith to so much of Britain.

**Walsingham**, a beautiful Norfolk village and a destination for pilgrims since 1061 when the Lady Richeldis saw in a vision the home in Nazareth where Mary received the angel's visit.

In addition to these well-known destinations, there are numerous places of pilgrimage – and probably some near anyone reading this – where the holiness and presence of God may be known and felt by those open to receive them.

## Preparing a pilgrimage

Because pilgrimage is a communal experience people often go as part of a **group**.

Parishes may plan residential or day pilgrimages and that is an excellent way to start. A number of companies offer pilgrimages to more distant destinations. A group pilgrimage should have a spiritual leader or chaplain and provide regular opportunities for prayer and worship. Before you set out, find time to pray and consider if there is a **pilgrimage intention** you particularly want to pray about whilst you are away.

Pilgrimage is a spiritual discipline, so **pack light** and plan to dress simply. Remember to take with you something that will help you to pray, for example a rosary, bible, or prayer book.

**Expect** the pilgrimage to change you, and look forward to opening yourself to the love of God.

To know Thee is  
the **end**  
and the  
**beginning** ...  
Thou **art** the  
journey **and**  
the journey's end.

Boethius (c.480-c.524)

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# Pilgrimage

## Christian Prayer

