
What is a pilgrimage?

We Have Come to Worship Him

What is a Pilgrimage?

Encyclopedia of Catholicism: A religiously motivated journey to a specific location to visit a holy person or to commemorate a special event that occurred there. The journey to and from this special place, along with the stay, comprise the pilgrimage. Three requisites constitute an authentic pilgrimage: 1) the belief that God responds to prayer 2) the conviction that God is present at holy sites, and 3) the desire to make a sacred journey to a holy site. People undertake pilgrimages to seek guidance for direction in life, to thank you God for favors received, to petition God for spiritual and physical favors, or to atone for sins.[1]

The Church has a long history of pilgrimages going back to the 4th century with visits to the special places in our Lord's life in the Holy Land. Over time, other locations were visited too. The most famous pilgrimage destinations were Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela in Spain, though many countries now boast special pilgrimage locations such as Knock in Ireland or St. Anne de BeauprÉ in Canada.

There are other senses of pilgrimage in the Church as well. We sometimes talk about the pilgrim Church on earth which emphasizes the fact that we are all on a journey through our lives home to God.

The Church also has a long mystical tradition of speaking about spiritual pilgrimages where the pilgrim's journey is an inward one of ascent or descent within the pilgrim's heart rather than an external voyage; one need only consider the mystical writings of Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross to see this.[2]

For WYD Cologne we want to emphasize the spiritual aspect of this trip to Germany. It is more than a cool trip to Europe with the chance to see the Pope! A fruitful pilgrimage is one that is rooted in prayer and a mature approach to exploring the action of God in our lives and the lives of others.

People undertake a pilgrimage to WYD for many different reasons and at different stages in their faith lives: for some, it's a chance to celebrate their faith with others from around the world; for others it's a chance to stir up their faith, to get re-enthused about the truth and beauty of the truth the Church teaches. There isn't only one good reason to go ñ just listen to the experiences of past pilgrims!

What this means is that there isn't a spiritual test to qualify for Cologne. But we do want to encourage our young people to approach this trip as a true pilgrimage: as a chance to prayerfully encounter Christ and to deepen and enrich their faith lives with others who share the same values and aspirations.

The theme of this WYD is 'We Have Come to Worship Him' and we will be using this theme to prepare ourselves for this pilgrimage experience.
Who is a Pilgrim:

Anyone who takes on the spiritual challenge of attending WYD Cologne is a pilgrim! Being a pilgrim is about prayerfully entering into the preparations for WYD, participating in the events of WYD and then spending time afterwards reflecting on this experience.

It is our hope that the WYD pilgrimage experience is not limited to those powerful days in Germany but that it starts in the coming months and continues long after we return home.

Although a pilgrimage has a definite lift-off and touch down time frame, the preparations for this experience and the prayerful reflection on its personal significance are important parts of this process.

The better we prepare ourselves for this pilgrimage, the more fulfilling we hope our pilgrims will find the experience. An important component of this whole journey is the faith enrichment that emerges for our pilgrims that will hopefully affect their entire lives.

WYD Cologne as a pilgrimage experience should hopefully help pilgrims to see how much they are already an integral part of the Church ñ the pilgrimage to Cologne ideally would allow pilgrims to return home with a renewed enthusiasm to get more involved in their home parishes.

Who is a Spiritual Pilgrim:

Unfortunately, not everyone can attend WYD 2005 in Cologne ñ either due to age, financial considerations or other factors. It is our intention to offer to people who cannot go to Germany, a chance to be closely connected to the pilgrimage experience.

Spiritual pilgrims may not be able to go to Cologne, but they will be offered the chance to participate in the pre-pilgrimage events and the post-pilgrimage reflections. In addition, we hope to be able to organize a number of events here in Ottawa during the pilgrimage to Germany where spiritual pilgrims will be able to join their thoughts and prayers in solidarity with the pilgrims in Germany. We are looking at a number of ways of being connected with the archdiocese and the spiritual pilgrims throughout the WYD 2005 experience including spiritual pilgrim buddies and prayer and vigil activities as well.

One of the core tenets of a pilgrimage is the efficacy of prayer ñ we hope to include as many spiritual pilgrims as possible in our WYD experience.

A spiritual pilgrimage is just as valid a way to honestly participate in the WYD experience as those who are able to travel to Germany.

[1]Richard P. McBrien ed, The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism (Pilgrimage) (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995) 1000-1001.

[2] Encyclopedia of Catholicism, 1001.