



**Annual Franciscan Federation Conference
Keynote Address – Joanne Schatzlein OSF
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Introduction to Pilgrimage: Being Pilgrims and Strangers

OPENING REMARKS

In his book entitled *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, Phil Cousineau says:

“The art of pilgrimage is the craft of taking time seriously, elegantly. What every traveler confronts sooner or later is that the way we spend each day of our travel...is the way we spend our lives. Inspired by our journey, perhaps we can learn the “True Life” we were searching for is here, where our travels and our home life overlap.”

In another book on the spiritual practice of pilgrimage, Edward C. Sellner says:

“We are pilgrims on the earth and strangers; we have come from afar and we are going far. The journey of our life goes from the loving breast of our Mother on earth to the arms of our Father in heaven. Everything on earth changes; we have no abiding city here; it is the experience of everybody.”

These quotes speak to the heart of what you and I are about during these days. You and I are pilgrims and strangers, taking some serious and elegant time in search of a deeper understanding of our Life in God ... a journey right here, and right now.

In this journey, we are bonded with many others who have gone before us:

- **Our biblical ancestors** ...those who followed Abraham to a new homeland; the ones who drove Moses crazy with their complaints and their demands for signs...who embraced the One True God only to revert back to pagan ways...yet this group of Israelites became God's Chosen...heirs of the Kingdom yet to come. Acts 13: 13-25 **“For forty years God put up with them in the desert”** After another four hundred fifty years God gave them land as an inheritance. And 5,000 years later God still is with us. Our God doesn't give up on us (Jim Gannon at Cardinal Stritch University April 17, 2008)
- We join with the groups of **pilgrims climbing up to Mount Zion and singing: Let us go rejoicing, to the house of our God.** Mt. Zion (where God dwelled) represented all



they longed for...security, abundant food, peace. Who wouldn't rejoice at the thought of such great gifts.

- **We journey with Christ, Jesus of the Gospels**, who has been described as the “**pilgrim par excellence;**” and “**the model of a pilgrim passing through this world.**” This is the Pilgrim Francis would follow, learning from the stories of the Gospel how to meet the challenges of each day.
- We are companions with all those **thousands of Medieval Pilgrims**, traveling to shrines and pilgrimage centers **in search of forgiveness, healing and transformation.** We will be learning more from them throughout these next days.
- **AND FINALLY** we are bonded with **all those whom we have/or are journeying with to holy places of all sorts:**
 - Perhaps Assisi - but maybe other Franciscan places like retreat centers or Motherhouses...**who are companions for us there?**
 - Maybe Rome and St. Peter's – but maybe our companions are members of our own parish churches
 - The Holy Land – or perhaps hospitals, infirmaries and care centers
 - Santiago de Compostella (the tomb of St. James) – or perhaps our own places of burial of family members, fellow brothers and Sisters or friends. **Who is there that walks with us today?**

DEFINITIONS

Pilgrims are distinguished from tourists, nomads and itinerants. While nomads and itinerants move from place to place, what motivates these moves is weather, changes in seasons or places to work. While itinerancy certainly characterized Francis, for our purposes today we will explore the dimensions of being a pilgrim, and look especially at what it means to be “Pilgrims and Strangers,” characteristics especially important to both Francis and Clare.

Pilgrim comes from the Latin word *peregrinus* Per meaning through, and ager meaning field and land. Thus a pilgrim is one who travels.

Doris Donnelley has gifted us with five key identifying characteristics which distinguish pilgrims from tourists. It is important to outline them here, because while they may describe pilgrims, I believe they are elements to embrace in our journey through life:

- A pilgrim perceives an **internal dimension** on the journey. For pilgrims, what motivates the journey is a hope for something to happen within. As my sister Mary said before making her pilgrimage this past January, “I am praying for change in some of my



attitudes and ways of looking at my life.” While the externals excite us and create their own energy, it is what happens within that is key.

- Pilgrims **invest** themselves while tourists avoid personal commitment. As Doris suggests, “To be a pilgrim is to assume a new and risky identity, surrendering all that clutters one’s life so that God takes center stage.”
- A Pilgrim hopes to be **“affected” by the pilgrimage**. It is amazing to watch this happen. All of a person’s senses are awakened in new ways on pilgrimage. We tend to be a visual people, but sounds now become more important, not to mention taste (great Italian food and wine), smells of cooking and fresh bakery, and touch...we encourage pilgrims to touch walls and stones...drawing us back in time. Franciscans thrive on “affective spirituality.”
- Both the **journey and the arrival are important** to a pilgrim. Pilgrimage began when you started thinking through registering for the program, and it continued in packing, in negotiating travel which is getting more challenging each day, and continued right up to your arrival at the hotel. Doris suggests that all that preparation is part of the pilgrimage, and just as important as being here and participating in a program. And more...on pilgrimage we suggest pilgrims must then **“GO HOME”** in order for the internal dimension of the journey to unfold...for the pilgrimage to begin in new ways.
- Lastly, Doris suggests that **community is formed** for the pilgrim, while the tourist is content to experience things on their own. **“Pilgrims build community, a curiously non-hierarchical community where there is no distinction of class.”** When we welcome our pilgrims we suggest that they are on this journey at this time and with this particular group for a reason. In the beginning that thought is lost in jetlag, but as the journey unfolds, the connections being made and the experiences shared by the group help them understand that they are part of something much bigger than just their own decisions.

FRANCIS AND CLARE - “PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS

In exploring the meaning of **“Pilgrims and Strangers”** in the lives of Francis and Clare, Keith Warner’s article in the Volume 10 of *Spirit and Life* is fundamental in its scope. The article is entitled **“Pilgrims and Strangers: The Evangelical Spirituality of Itinerancy of the Early Franciscan Friars.”**

Keith outlines how Francis’ choice of the term “Pilgrims and Strangers” is specific to his wanting to **“Follow in the Footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (It is worth reading Keith’s descriptive of what it means to follow in the footprints)** This is what distinguishes him from those living the *Vita Apostolica* and the *Eremitical* ways of life. These lifestyles invite its followers to live poorly **“On the Road”** and to a combined life of preaching and withdrawal for prayer, but find their motivation from the life of the Apostles. Francis’ eyes were **“Fixed on Christ”** and everything else about his way of life followed from that.



While Francis and Jesus could both be considered Itinerant, i.e being freed to preach “In Via,” itinerancy as a descriptive for Francis is incomplete. It is Francis himself who invites his brothers, and Clare her sisters, to go through the world as “Pilgrims and Strangers.” There is intent, focus and purpose in Francis’ choice of identity: the focus is on Christ.

This is echoed in our TOR Rule, Chapter 22: **“The truly poor in spirit following the example of the Lord, live in this world as pilgrims and strangers.”**

Francis as Pilgrim and Stranger:

The Rule of 1223 – VI:1-2: Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. As pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms with confidence, and they should not be ashamed because, for our sakes, our Lord made Himself poor in this world.

The Rule of 1221 – IX:5

He (Christ) was poor and a stranger and lived on alms – He, the Blessed Virgin, and His disciples.

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Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. As pilgrims and strangers, let them always be guests there.

In the The Saint is a section called *Fragments* from a manuscript of the Worcester Cathedral in England containing passing comments by Thomas of Celano and Hugh of Digne which may have been part of the early rule or form of life that the brothers were living. These fragments offer an understanding of what the Gospel life meant to Francis and his early followers:

When the brothers go through the world, let them take nothing for the journey, neither knapsack nor purse, nor bread, nor money, nor walking stick.#33 p. 89.

Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says: having food and clothing, we are content with these.#73 on p. 91.

Conclusion: For Francis, it is important to be pilgrims and strangers as Jesus was. This means owning nothing that would keep you from going about the world proclaiming the Gospel as Francis felt so called to do. Freedom from permanent housing, excess baggage, and what we believe as necessities of life can hold us back, keep us comfortable, and silence the call of the Spirit to move on.



Clare as Pilgrim and Stranger:

The Rule of Clare – VIII:1-5

Let the sisters not appropriate anything, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all; instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them confidently send for alms. Nor should they be ashamed, since the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us. This is that summit of the highest poverty which has established you, my dearest sisters, heiresses and queens of the kingdom of heaven; it has made you poor in the things [of this world] but exalted you in virtue. Let this be your portion which leads into the land of the living.

Second Letter of Clare to Agnes of Prague

[A]lways be mindful of your resolution like another Rachel always seeing your beginning. What you hold, may you [always] hold, What you do, may you [always] do and never abandon. But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet, so that even your steps stir up no dust, may you go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly, on the path of prudent happiness, not believing anything, not agreeing with anything that would dissuade you from this resolution or that would place a stumbling block for you on the way...

Conclusion: For Clare, who may have made a journey with her mother, but basically was never on the road, these quotes reveal the depth of her understanding of what it means to imitate Christ who was Pilgrim and Stranger. Being pilgrims and strangers ourselves lifts us to the highest level of poverty and establishes us as heiresses and queens in the kingdom of heaven. Virtue is exalted when we are pilgrims. Once we agree to this journey, we must move forward swiftly, securely, and joyfully on the path of prudent happiness.

Fr. Joe Doino, of blessed memory, a teacher, colleague and mentor of mine, gave a presentation on pilgrimage to our pilgrimage staff back in 1992. He believed that Francis had memorized the first two chapters of I Peter, in which the apostle describes how **“We are called to be holy as God is holy...how we are to go about the world as pilgrims and strangers as God’s chosen people, proclaiming the marvelous deeds of God who has called us out of darkness into a marvelous light.”** These ideas find their way into Francis’ Later Rule, Chapter 6. He sees himself as a pilgrim and stranger, commissioned to proclaim the Good News. Joe suggests that **POVERTY, JOY, REVERENCE** and **SERVICE** are all fundamental to being pilgrim.

He went on to describe how Clare’s Rule echoes these same themes: To quote him: **“Enclosure at San Damiano created a spirit-filled insecurity so they are also considered ‘pilgrims and strangers’.** *** Joe goes on to say, **“Trace the notion of Clare’s sense of pilgrimage in her consciousness...how poverty allows this. How space becomes sacred space... how limits become unlimited.”** Clare tore down boundaries that would confine...allowing one to walk unrestricted into God.



CHARACTERISTICS OF A COUNTER-CULTURAL PILGRIM

A pilgrim in the Middle Ages was immediately identifiable by what they wore:

- Some type of tunic called a *sclavein* marked with a cross
- A staff which was a rough **wooden stick** with a metal toe on one end
- A *scrip* which was a soft pouch usually made of leather, strapped to the pilgrim's waist containing mess cans and money. Because the pouch was small, one had to rely on the goodness of others for alms to sustain you on the journey.
- Later a **broad brimmed hat** was worn

Pilgrims also had badges that identified where they were traveling to:

- Pilgrims to **Santiago de Compostella had cockle shells**. Later the **scallop shell** became the identifying characteristic of all pilgrims.
- Pilgrims to **Jerusalem carried palm branches**
- **Crosses** marked the pilgrims traveling to **Rome**

Inner Characteristics:

While these externals marked the pilgrim, there are **some inner characteristics** I believe identify us as life long, in fact **counter-cultural pilgrims today:**

Simplicity - which stands in the face of our consumer society. We exhort, cajole, encourage but rarely convince people how little they need on pilgrimage. AND they often come with shopping lists for others, postcards they HAVE to send, multiple additional sights they want to see. But simplicity is key. As one author describes it in a different context,

"I always tell people to simplify their museum experience. Find one painter, or just a few paintings, and pay attention to those. If a work of art excites you, memorize it with your eyes and your imagination right there in the museum and you will have it for ever." (Phil Cousineau)

Journeying in Relationship - which counters the individualism and independence so prevalent today. On pilgrimage one must be willing to make decisions with a consciousness of a group beyond oneself. A pilgrimage inherently introduces others into the journey. **Paolo Cuelho** recounts this repeatedly in his book *The Pilgrimage*. And there is a reason that both Francis and Clare stress the importance of being with others on the journey to God. It is an invitation not only to **"Preach by Example"** but even more, through our relationships in community to **"Grow in Virtue."**



Minoritas - which invites us to let others lead us. As pilgrims we must let God be in charge, or as we tell our pilgrims, we the staff are your mothers during this time together. You have to let go of your status, your positions of authority, and let yourselves be led. How difficult this is for some.

Focus on Christ and not on self. This journey is not about me, or you as a person. It is also not about Francis or Clare in the journeys to Assisi, nor St. James in Compostella, nor St. Peter in Rome. It is all about “**Eyes Fixed on Christ**”. There is a setting on top of the tabernacle at the Tomb of St. Francis. It has small statues of Francis and Clare on either side of a crucifix, with their eyes fixed on Jesus. I often wonder how many see this first, or are their eyes automatically directed toward the coffin holding Francis’ remains.

Planetary Pilgrims - aware of our existence not just in this earthly realm but awake and conscious of a vast universe that exists beyond us. **Marya Grathwohl and Helen Prejean** certainly awakened us to this awesome reality last year in Minneapolis. This consciousness is what sets us apart from most Medieval pilgrims who did not have the knowledge we do about cosmo-genesis, nor could they ever imagine being called to a

Planetary Conversion The wonder is that Francis understood this intimately....because of his embrace of simplicity, relationships, minoritas and deep understanding of God’s Goodness in Jesus Christ. In his *Canticle of the Creatures*, he takes us through a planetary conversion process. In an article in THE CORD by Frances Biscoglio he views the writing of the Canticle as Francis’ own “Soul’s Journey Into God.” Bonaventure will develop this journey later, when he captures the power of all of Creation to move us into God because every creature is “Imago Dei” ... And through these next days we will accompany Bonaventure through the **Purgative Way** in looking at the *Penitential Pilgrimage*...the **Illuminative Way** in making *Pilgrimages of Healing*...and the **Unitive Way** in experiencing a *Pilgrimage of Transformation*.

[In the reflection booklet you have been invited to make this journey through the labyrinth experience. Thank you to our artist and to the Spirit and Life committee for inspiring us visually and reflectively in preparation for this journey!]

THE FOCUS OF OUR PILGRIMAGE

“Eyes Fixed on Christ”

Ilia Delio, in her article entitled “*Toward a New Theology of Franciscan Contemplation: The Mysticism of the Historical Event*” (The Cord: 46.3, 1996), she sets the focus of our inner journey to God in this way:

“Only in union with Christ can one attain the goal of mystical union with God, a union visibly expressed by the spirit of compassionate love, that love which moves the entire created world to its destiny in Christ.” (p. 139)

This is Bonaventurian and central to the theology of Teilhard de Chardin. Without this focus, we are not on pilgrimage.



Mystical Encounter

Many authors have helped describe this often indescribable experience. Victor Turner invites us into “liminality,” that space where we allow ourselves to be dislocated...so that God can do new things with us.

Ewert Cousins describes the Mysticism of the Historical Event where he speaks of mystical union through “participation in the historical event itself.” It is the mysticism of walking in the very footsteps of Jesus in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It is the experience of a pilgrim witnessing the re-enactment of Francis’ disownment of his family’s inheritance before the Bishop of Assisi. We are moved to new understandings not of what happened just to Francis, but what these experiences evoke in us.

Joe Doyno calls pilgrimage “**Extroverted Mysticism**” and mysticism “**Introverted Pilgrimage**”

Spirituality of Place

Finally, Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs focus on the **Spirituality of Place**, believing that while we read our stories about Francis and Clare and their encounter with God, and listen to explanations and lectures breaking open this experience, and look at the incredible artistic renditions of the story in frescoes, tavolas, weavings and paintings, it is in the very places themselves that graces await the pilgrim, ready to inspire and evoke a spiritual response. This is what makes a pilgrimage experience unforgettable. This is what impacts a person for a lifetime.

AN EXAMPLE

My experience at Kuhlshelm

In closing, the words of TS Eliot inspire as we image ourselves at the Tombs of Francis and Clare

TS Eliot from “Four Quartets”

*... You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire....*

These dead would tell us...Fix Your Gaze on Christ.



Insert from article by Keith Warner about what it means to follow in the Footsteps of Jesus:

“What does it mean to leave footprints? One has to have feet for walking, and Francis is well known for his devotion to the humanity of Christ. Second, one must travel or go on a journey to leave such marks behind. Third, footprints are clues to the means of locomotion and direction of the traveler. Even though he did travel by boat and mule, Jesus mostly walked, and by following his footprints, one can determine the path he took. Lastly, in order for others to follow his footprints, Jesus had to leave a mark where he traveled. For Francis, the world is capable of receiving the footprints of God’s son, of holding markings which lead us in the way to the Father.”

