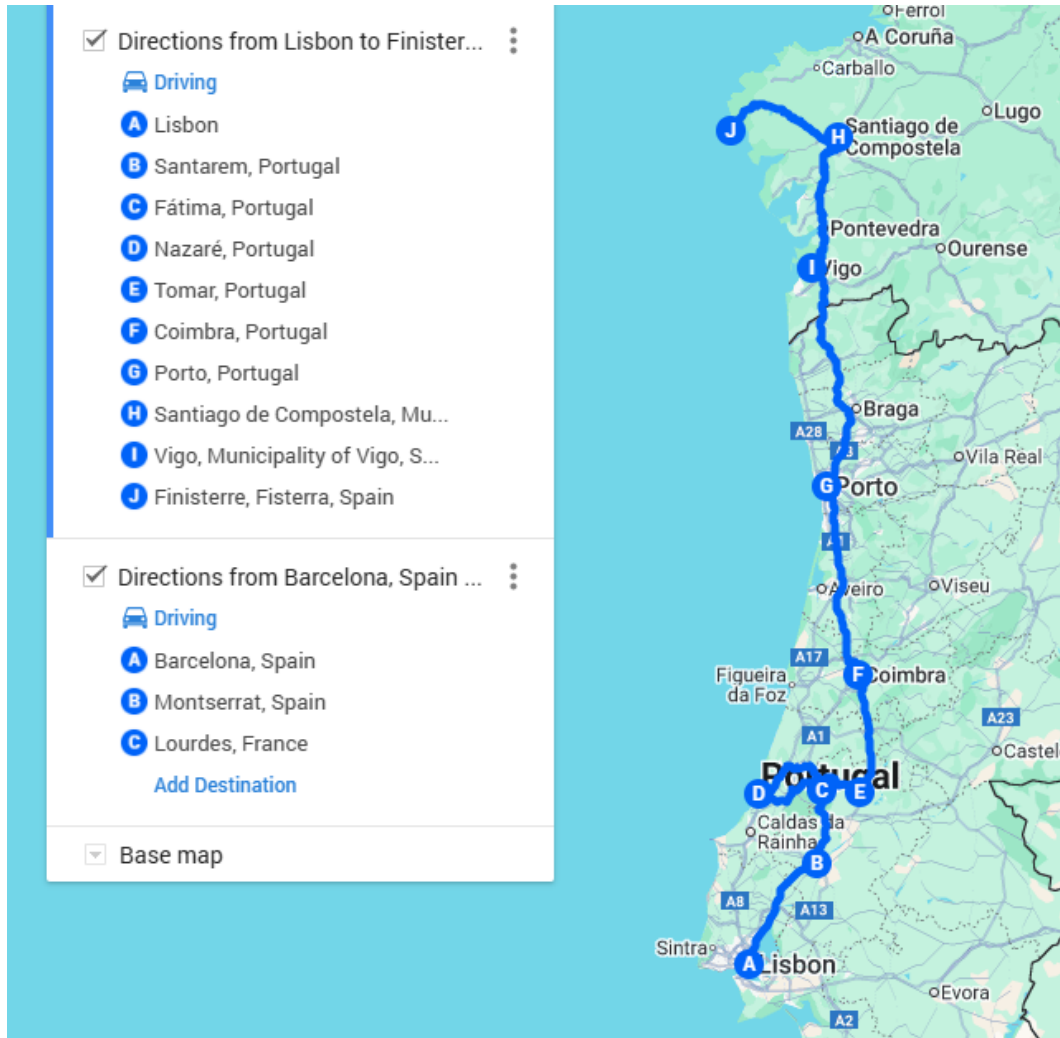


St. Andrew, Roswell, GA

2025 El Camino Pilgrimage to Portugal Spain and France

June 16, 2025 - July 1, 2025



Overview Comments

All in all, our pilgrimage was what Pat and I expected: an arduous and blessed journey, while at the same time being more than we imagined...if that makes sense.

Working with Good Shepherd Travel, we intentionally chose to stay multiple nights in key cities and less time covering more distance, so we could savor more of the sacred and cultural makeup of each place we visited. It became apparent as we traveled that the sacred and cultural were tightly intertwined throughout the history of the Iberian Peninsula as Christians, Moors and Jews clashed and blended in the area since the Middle Ages. I was impressed how their legacy of seafaring commerce and exploring, and ancient conquerors, kings, dictators,

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Bishops and Popes can still be seen everywhere in the very Catholic cultural fabric of modern Spain and Portugal.

In 16 days we traveled over 9,400 miles by airplane....and over 1,000 miles by motorcoach...and walked nearly 200,000 steps in 20+ cities and villages! Yes, some days we did say “I want to go home, NOW!” Yes, we had information overload! Most evenings by the time we returned to the hotel, we were too tired to update our family and friends back home. And, of course I came down with a cold that slowed me down for 3 days, as a few other pilgrims dealt with such as well. The heat was brutal for a few days, but we kept hydrated and rested as needed. 10 days would have been better, but I really can’t think of a day I would want to eliminate from the itinerary. That’s a pilgrimage...

We wanted up to 30 people on the pilgrimage, but truth be told, we all Loved, Loved, Loved the small size of the group...16 from Lisbon to Santiago de Compostela, and 14 on the Barcelona - Lourdes extension. We spread out on the bus, and we could all fit into “the room where it happened” on the tours. That’s a pilgrimage.

Someone asked me, “in your conversations on the pilgrimage, what was said that stuck with you?” I’ve been thinking about that for days.

- I brought a book with me that I read occasionally, Richard Rohr’s Tears of Things. He says it’s his last book...he’s getting old...I can relate. In this book Richard’s speaking to us about the Prophets...to understand them you have to read them completely to see their evolution from violence and fear in their lives, to lamentations and sadness, and finally to God’s infinite love....we too often only see the first part. “Every priest needs a prophet” became “everyone needs a prophet.” But, Prophets don’t tell us what we want to hear....I had some brief but profound discussions about Richard and his books that stuck with me.
- We were a small but diverse group including folks from other Atlanta parishes, and some from Nashville and Detroit and Spain, who brought us new perspectives. The key I think was we were comfortable enough to shuffle around at meals and other grouping times to get to know everyone pretty well.... I had many brief but profound discussions that stuck with me.
- These conversations were the gifts of the pilgrimage that I would not have recognized if I hadn’t heard that question...it stuck with me. That’s a pilgrimage.

I am so glad we traveled light...we checked one bag each, and each had a small carryon (backpack or tote bag)!! Brought enough underwear and socks to have a clean pair each day....wore some shirts twice and rotated 3 pairs of pants. That’s a pilgrimage.

Everyone recognized and appreciated how much Marianne Ledvina contributed to our pilgrimage, in spite her not being physically with us...her experience traveling and organizing pilgrimages paid off for us each and every day...from refining the itinerary, using What’sApp to communicate, and her goodie bag we all used up, to the “Mary’s Way of the Cross” Stations (a gift from Margaret O’Malley), Marianne was with us every day! And, her husband John has a new hip, months ahead of schedule!! Her treasure in heaven is bountiful for sure!

Our escort guide, Jesus Garcia Vivas, was phenomenal! His knowledge of religious and cultural sites was truly amazing. He adjusted the itinerary for us to see as much as we possibly could in every area we visited. Wherever we went people knew him...and, boy did he know how to resolve little issue lickity-split! And, his overall demeanor was upbeat and humorous and patient!

- “Heah Guys...”

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- **Best advice:** “Don’t bring the hotel key envelope with your room number with you when we tour. If your key card is pickpocketed, they will know your hotel **and** room number...to steal everything from your room!!!
- **Best New Word: funicular** or cable car...saw several along the way...the Nazare funicular, the Bom Jesus funicular, the Montserrat funicular....

Portugal was much different than our expectations. It became obvious why prices were relatively low, especially for food...it is a poor country...rents are high and wages are low. The cities seemed somewhat shabby chic to us.

- That said, Portugal is by far the most Catholic country I ever visited. It was obvious how ingrained devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. James. and many other saints of the church were in every community we visited. From names of streets to buildings at every turn. Portugal is also a land of cobblestones ...small square cobblestones woven in bold patterns ...on walkways and streets everywhere.
- Portugal is also a land of tiles...indoors and out, beautiful tiles...the visit to the National Tile Museum in Lisbon was fascinating to discover how the Moors and Italians influenced/competed with the Portuguese in their tile designs and methods.
- No other food is better associated with Portugal and Portuguese identity than bacalhau or codfish. This is evident in the presence of this fish in the ingredients of many Portuguese recipes.
 - Portugal is the largest consumer of codfish in Europe. But believe it or not, this fish is not native in the Portuguese sea. So how come it’s such a gastronomy icon in the country? And to think codfish has become a symbol of Portugal’s national identity!
 - The consumption of bacalhau in Portugal became widespread in the 1500s, but this fish arrived in the Iberian Peninsula in the ancient times — through the Vikings, who bartered codfish for salt. Portugal began to culture bacalhau in the 1950s through the following decade. Today, 70% of the country’s codfish consumption is locally produced.
- We really got into tracing our Camino by stopping in restaurants, hotels, stores and churches to receive stamps for our “Camino Passports...the **Credential Peregrino a Santiago de Compostela!**” What fun it was to commiserate with our fellow pilgrims and find another stamp for our Camino Passport!

It was an absolute privilege to have Father Juan and two of my brother Deacons, Ed Rubio and Brians Edwards (from Nashville) on the trip. What striking churches we celebrated Mass in: St. Anthony of Padua (of Lisbon the Portugues claim), the Santarem Church of St Stephen, the Fatima Chapel of Apparitions, Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte, Santa Marie de Montserrat, and the Grotto of Massabielle stand out! And, what a string of Feast days we celebrated: the Memorial of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, the Nativity of John the Baptist, and the Saints Peter and Paul! And, it didn’t surprise me that this group of pilgrims got into the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours...Morning and Evening prayers reinforced our relationships with God and each other....can’t overlook our St. Andrew Pilgrim Prayer as our daily beginning as well. That’s a Pilgrimage.

“Dear God, bless the path on which we pilgrims go. Be with us in each place, at each lying down and each rising up, in the breeze of the air, on the crest of the hills, on each step of the journey we take.

Jesus be with us wherever we pray. Spirit be with us wherever we stay. Amen”

For the first 11 days we basically followed the Portugues Camino or The Portugues Way...in a motorcoach...visiting THE places where it happened!

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The discovery of the remains of St. James the apostle by a shepherd in the 9th century led to the creation of the Camino de Santiago, or walk to Santiago. As a result, a whole phenomenon of Pilgrim trails across Europe has lasted for over 1000 years.

- In June 2024, we were in Speyer, Germany on a Viking Rhine River Cruise, and the main street came across a 15 foot bronze statue of St. James walking on his Camino to Spain!

The Camino de Santiago is made up of a network of ten pilgrimage routes, some that have been uninterrupted since the 9th century:

1. Camino Frances, the French Way, north east from France
2. Del Norte, The Northern Way, along the north coast of Spain Mozárabe-Vía de la Plata,
3. The Silver Route from Seville
4. Primitivo, The Primitive Way/St. James Way, North East of Santiago
5. Inglés, The English Way/The Irish Way, from a port north of Santiago
6. Sanabres, The Sanabria Way, connects to the French Way
7. Camino de Invierno, The Winter Way, east of Santiago
8. Camino a Fisterra y Muxía, The Way to Fisterra, west of Santiago
9. Camino Lebaniego, a detour before reaching Santiago
10. Portugues, The Portuguese Way

A Camino Holy Year is a Jubilee Year when St. James Day, July 25th, falls on a Sunday. Because of leap years, Holy Years follow a pattern of 6-5-6-11 years. 2021 was the most recent Camino Holy Year. 2027 will be the next (6 years later), followed by 2032 (5 years later) and so on.

An average of 3,000 – 4,000 pilgrims arrive in Santiago every day....more in the warm months than during the winter. The number of pilgrims on a Camino de Santiago pilgrimage increases significantly during the Camino Holy Year, particularly in July, as many pilgrims aim to arrive in Santiago de Compostela in time for Saint James Day celebrations.

Preparing this travelogue helped me compare the Marian shrines of Fatima and Lourdes. Both obviously were profoundly devoted to Mary. Honestly, experiencing this devotion was overwhelming to me...I found myself missing Jesus. But, I came to realize that what Pat and I loved about each place was so different as each shrine is so different. Fatima felt much more remote to me. The apparitions of the Lucia and her cousins Francisco and Jacinta in 1917 were in very remote places miles from the small hamlet where they lived. The modern town of Fatima was built up around it. Lourdes was different. Bernadette's apparitions occurred just outside of an ancient village. Fatima is massive; Lourdes is even bigger...and yet both have an intimacy that is hard to explain. I'll share what we loved about each in the days listed

The 2440 Fraser pilgrimage photos can be accessed via this sharing link:

<https://www.amazon.com/photos/groups/share/YBZuNhFbTnK5DoQyHEAi8Q.aZTb1WJ5-eFQx5qhRZNEHi>





Day 1 Monday June 16 - Atlanta - Montreal – Lisbon

ATL High: 89°F Low: 73°F Sunrise: 6:26AM Sunset: 8:50PM

Steps: 8,540

- Left home at 8:30am. Drove to Parking Spot 1, Camp Creek Parkway
- LV Atlanta Airport ATL, Air Canada flight AC812 2:10pm – ARR Montreal Airport YUL, at 4:55pm (dur 3H 11m) (994 miles)

Breakfast: At home

Lunch: At ATL

Dinner: YUL Hurley's, Dorval, Canada and on plane: chicken was tasty

Breakfast: On plane snack.



Day 2 Tuesday June 17 Lisbon

LISBON High: 90°F Low: 70°F Sunrise: 6:11AM Sunset: 9:03PM

Mass: in a side chapel of the Lisbon Cathedral, Father Juan (preach) and Deacon Roger

Steps: 11,232

- LV YUL Air Canada flight AC8570 June 16 9:35pm – ARR Lisbon Airport, LIS, June 17 at 9:20am (dur 6H 55m) (3254 miles)
- Met our Escort Guide Jesus and our bus driver Joao at the airport. Off we went to explore Lisbon!!
- Lisbon: Churches, cobblestones, trolley cars, art and sights to see.

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- The Cathedral of Saint Mary Major, often called Lisbon Cathedral. It is the oldest church in the city, built in 1147. The cathedral has survived many earthquakes and has been modified, renovated, and restored several times, resulting in a mix of different architectural styles.
- The Church of Saint Anthony of Lisbon is also known in the Christian world as Saint Anthony of Padua. According to tradition, the church was built on the site where the saint was born, in 1195. THE place where it happened!
- Up the Rua Augusta from Bastardo Fish Cafe, we saw the Triumphal Arch...at the end of the busiest pedestrian street in Lisbon. It symbolizes the strength of Lisbon reborn after the fury of the earth, fire and sea that consumed it in the earthquake of 1755.
- Skipped Santa Justa Lift (Elevador de Santa Justa)...long line... it was inaugurated as part of the city's public transport systems in July 1902...lift's capacity of only 24 people...was a much-needed connection between Baixa and Carmo Convent, a journey which is very steep on foot!

Breakfast: On plane

Lunch: Bastardo Fish Café (at a corner of Rossio Square, air-conditioned, good food, owned by our hotel... *"Bastardo, Portuguese for Bastard, is the illegitimate son of the Portuguese cuisine. Born to break rules and the fruit of true love, the forbidden one. We cook in Portuguese but we mix cultures, styles and concepts in a traditional cooking that never stops evolving. From grandma's stews to contemporary creativity, we please every crowd."*

Dinner: Lutecia Smart Design Hotel, Lisbon, Portugal



Day 3 Wednesday June 18 Lisbon

LISBON High: 90°F Low: 70°F

Sunrise: 6:11AM

Sunset: 9:04PM

Mass: The Church of Saint Anthony of Lisbon, Father Juan and Deacon Ed (preach)

Steps: 12,847

- Our Local Guide Caetano was informative and entertaining with his British accent.

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- Belhem Tower was closed for renovation. This monument was erected as a gateway to the city of Lisbon but also as a defense system against possible invasions and attacks from the Tagus. It also protected the Jeronimos Monastery.
- In 1919, a U.S. Navy seaplane landed in Lisbon, Portugal, completing the very first transatlantic flight. Charles Lindbergh's record-breaking solo flight was still nearly a decade in the future! This first flight was completed by a crew of six Navy and Coast Guard pilots. They made the trip in a huge "flying boat": the NC-4.
- The Monument of the Discoveries is located on the northern bank of the Tagus River in the Belém district of Lisbon. It was inaugurated in 1960 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator, a pivotal figure in the early days of the Portuguese maritime exploration. The monument stands 170 feet tall and is designed to resemble the prow of a ship, symbolizing the voyages of discovery undertaken by Portuguese explorers during the 15th and 16th centuries
- Ate lunch at the Pastéis de Belém pastry factory founded in 1837. Pastéis de Belém follows an ancient recipe from the Jerónimos Monastery. That secret recipe is recreated every day in the bakery, by hand, using only traditional methods. THE place where it happened!
- WE visited the church. Situated in Santa Maria de Belem in Lisbon, the Jeronimos Monastery stands as a monumental symbol of the history and culture of Portugal. This UNESCO World Heritage Site was constructed in the Age of Discovery, which is a pivotal era when Europeans ventured into uncharted waters. Originating from a dilapidated church, it served as a last refuge for sailors before their voyages. Commissioned by King Manuel I and dedicated to St. Jerome, the monastery housed Heironymite Monks. It seamlessly blends Manueline, Mannerist, Renaissance, and Late Gothic styles and also memorializes the journey of Vasco da Gama to India.
- We visited the National Tile Museum, set in Madre de Deus Convent, founded in 1509, and its collections allow a journey through the history of tile, from 15th century until present days. The Museu Nacional do Azulejo is one of the most important of the national museums by the singularity of its collection, Azulejo (tile), an artistic expression that differentiates Portuguese culture, and by the uniqueness of the building in which the Museum is set, former Madre de Deus Convent, founded in 1509 by Queen D. Leonor. Belonging to the convent, the Madre de Deus church is decorated in full Portuguese baroque splendor, with gilded and carved wood, paintings and tile panels.
- I had a few Super Bock at dinner, a tasty Portuguese lager style beer.

Breakfast: Lutecia Smart Design Hotel, Lisbon, Portugal

Lunch: Pastels de Belem Lisbon, Portugal

Dinner: Lutecia Smart Design Hotel, Lisbon, Portugal



Day 4 Thursday June 19 Lisbon – Santarem – Fatima

FATIMA High: 79°F Low: 63°F

Sunrise: 6:22AM

Sunset: 8:58PM

Mass: The Church of St. Stephen, Santarem, Father Juan and Deacon Roger (preach, see attached)

Steps: 12,221

- We visited the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, also called Santarém Cathedral, is located in the historic center of Santarém. This Jesuit church, dating from the seventeenth century, was erected on the site of the royal palace of the Alcazaba Nova, abandoned since the time of King John II. Later, with the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portugal by order of the Marquis of Pombal, the building became host to the Patriarchal Seminary and it remained in that use until the twentieth century.
- We visited this church. Although its official name was the Church of Saint Stephen, it is now called “The Sanctuary of the Eucharistic Miracle” (Santuário do Santíssimo Milagre). simple Chapel of the holy Miracle was built, on the site of the house where the woman had lived (in Travessa das Esteiras).
 - The legend of the Holy Miracle says that during the year of 1266 a poor woman living in Santarém, who had fallen victim to her husband’s infidelity, resorted to the services of a witch to see if she could put an end to her suffering. As a cure for her unhappiness, she was told that she would need a consecrated host. After hesitating for some time, she went to the St, Stephen Church and, during the communion, she concealed the host and then went with it to the witch’s house. On the way, blood began to run from the cloth around the host and the woman was forced to run home and hide it in a chest in her bedroom. During the night, an intense and mysterious light came from the chest and strangely invaded the house, forcing the woman to tell her husband the truth. They both repented and spent the night in prayer, deciding that the next day they would go and tell the priest what had happened. The news spread and the population ran to behold the miracle. The Miraculous Host was then returned in a procession to the holy place to which it belonged, the St. Stephen Church. Since then, it has been kept in a silver gilt monstrance, which can still be admired today.
 - The episode is recounted in four large early Baroque (17th-century) paintings to be found inside the church, having been commissioned by a believer in the miracle.

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- We walked from the Church to the woman's house, where in 1653, the simple Chapel of the holy Miracle was built, on the site of the house where the woman had lived (in Travessa das Esteiras). THE place where it happened!

- Between May and October 1917, Lúcia dos Santos and her cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto reported visions of a luminous lady, who they believed to be the Virgin Mary, in the Cova da Iria fields outside the hamlet of Aljustrel, near Fátima, Portugal. The children said the visitations took place on the 13th day of each month at approximately noon, for six months. The only exception was August, when the children were detained by the local administrator. That month they did not report a vision of the Lady until after they were released from jail, two days later.
 - We visited the little village of Aljustrel in the township of Fatima where Blessed Lucia and Saints Francisco and Jacinta lived. THE place where it happened!
 - Blessed Lúcia de Jesus Rosa dos Santos, OCD, (28 March 1907 – 13 February 2005) was also known as Lúcia of Fátima and by her religious name Maria Lúcia of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart. She was a Discalced Carmelite nun. Lúcia was the youngest child of peasants, the Santos family, but they were not poor, owning land in the area.

On 13 February 2008 (the third anniversary of her death), Pope Benedict XVI announced that in the case of Sister Lúcia he would waive the five-year waiting period established by canon law before opening a cause for beatification. On 13 February 2017, Sister Lúcia was accorded the title Servant of God, the first major step toward her beatification. She was declared venerable by Pope Francis on June 22, 2023.

- Saints Francisco de Jesus Marto (11 June 1908 – 4 April 1919) and Jacinta de Jesus Marto (5 March 1910[1] – 20 February 1920) were born in the tiny house and across the street the house where they lived with 7 brothers and sister. Here, it is possible to visualize a little more about the history of the little shepherds and to understand the habits of the highland families of Portugal in the early twentieth century. The decorative objects such as the kitchen utensils, agriculture equipment, clothing, rosaries and pieces of furniture are contemporary of the time of Francisco and Jacinta Marto. The two Marto children were canonized by Pope Francis at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima, in Portugal, on 13 May 2017, the centennial of the first Apparition of Our Lady of Fátima. They are the youngest Catholic saints, with Jacinta being the youngest saint who did not die a martyr.
- Before the apparitions of Our Lady in 1917, at Cova da Iria, Fatima, Lucia dos Santos and her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta township of Fatima, had three visions of the Angel of Portugal, also called the Angel of Peace. These apparitions took place between spring and autumn 1916.
 - The angel first appeared either in the spring or summer of 1916 at Loca do Cabeço, a rocky outcrop near the top of a knoll called Cabeço, not far from Aljustrel. THE place where it happened!
 - The second apparition of the Angel of Portugal occurred in the summer of 1916 over the well at the house of Lucia's parents, next to which the three children were playing.
 - The third apparition occurred either at the end of the summer or the beginning of the fall of 1916, once again at Loca do Cabeço.
- We visited the Parish Church of Fatima, which is also known as the Parish Church of Fatima and the Little Shepherds, the Church of Our Lady of Pleasures, and the Mother Church of Fatima, Outside there are statues of Sts. Francisco and Jacinta... Catholic statues honor and preserve the memory of the saints, notable people who had incredible lives on earth that shaped our history.

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- On the way to the hotel we saw the The Rotunda dos Pastorinhos (or Rotunda Sul) on one of the main roundabouts in the city of Fátima, Portugal. It belongs to the place of Cova da Iria, the noble area of the city of Fatima and the Center region, where, currently, there are numerous convents, hotels and luxury condominiums.

Breakfast: Lutecia Smart Design Hotel, Lisbon, Portugal

Lunch: O Sino Restaurante Fatima, Portugal

Dinner: Hotel Estrela de Fatima, Portugal



Day 5 Friday June 20 Fatima

FATIMA High: 73°F Low: 61°F

Sunrise: 6:23AM

Sunset: 8:57PM

Mass: The Chapel of the Apparitions, Fatima, Father Juan and Deacon Brian (preach), Luisa readings.

Candlelight Procession, Father Juan and Deacon Brian carrying the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Steps: 15,215

- OMG, what start to our day! THE place where it happened!
Mass at the Chapel of the Apparitions with Father Juan presiding, Deacon Brian serving and preaching, and Luis Rubio reading!!!
- We visited The Shrine of Fátima, also known as Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima. It is a group of Roman Catholic Church religious buildings and structures located in Cova da Iria, in the civil parish and city of Fátima, in the municipality of Ourém, in Portugal.
- The Chapel of the Apparitions is a small chapel located in Cova da Iria that was first constructed in 1919, and again in the early 1920s, to mark the exact location where three little shepherd children reported having received the famous apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Fátima, Portugal.
 - The open-air chapel is open year-round for regular services and can be virtually visited by a high-resolution webcam. The original chapel was built in 1919, was blown up on the night of March 6, 1922, by those who suspected the church of staging the miracles.
 - Inside the modern chapel is a single white column over the site of a small holm oak tree over which the Virgin Mary appeared on May 13, 1917. That oak fell victim to souvenir collectors long ago, but a large replacement tree grows near the entrance to the sanctuary by the rectory.

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- We visited The Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, a minor basilica in the Sanctuary of Fátima. It is the older of the two basilicas and serves as the heart of the Sanctuary of Fátima. Construction began in 1928 to commemorate the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to the three shepherd children—Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta. Designed in a Neoclassical style, the basilica features a tall central bell tower that rises 213 feet above the sanctuary grounds, making it one of the most recognizable landmarks in Fátima. The tower is topped with a bronze crown and cross, while a statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary stands prominently at the entrance.
 - One of the most poignant aspects of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary is the presence of the tombs of the three shepherd children: Sts. Francisco Marto and Jacinta Marto tombs, and that of Blessed Lucia.
 - Near the entrance to the sanctuary by the rectory is a Berlin Wall Monument, containing a 5,732-pound chunk of the wall donated by a Portuguese emigrant to Germany after it fell in 1989. He offered it as a memorial of God's intervention in bringing down Communism, as promised at Fatima
- At the other end of the plaza we visited The Basilica of the Holy Trinity which is the more recent addition to the Sanctuary of Fátima, completed in 2007 to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims visiting the site. With a capacity of 9,000 people, it is one of the largest Catholic churches in the world.
 - In contrast to the Neoclassical style of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Basilica of the Holy Trinity features a strikingly modern and minimalist design. The simplicity of the interior design is intentional, providing a space for peaceful meditation and worship. The focus is on the altar, with a large crucifix hanging above it. The space is filled with natural light, which streams in through large windows.
 - St. Pope Paul VI's statue is unfortunately less popular than the statue of St. John Paul II. The Pastoral Center was inaugurated by Pope John Paul II on his first visit to the Shrine in 1982.
- We visited the Monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, located near Chapel of the Apparitions in the middle of the plaza. The monument stands over a spring and is considered "the instrument of many graces".
 - We blessed a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which I am giving to St. Brendan's sister parish Notre Dame de Fatima in Bassin-Zim, Haiti...I have visited this parish 5 times over the last 20 years.
- Behind The Basilica of the Holy Trinity, is The Pastoral Centre of Paul VI (Centro Pastoral) was designed to honor of the first Pope to make a pilgrimage to Fatima, in May 1967. The large auditorium, known for its excellent acoustic quality, is one of the largest in the country, with a capacity of 2,092 seats.
- What Pat and I loved about Fatima was the remote Stations of the Cross. While it was still somewhat cool, we walked the Stations using "Mary's Way of the Cross" and sang between stations,
 - This absolutely this was one of the highlights of our pilgrimage!
 - The monumental outdoor Stations of the Cross wind through the olive and cork trees of the Fatima countryside once frequented by the three Shepherd Children and their flock.
 - The Stations begin at the Roundabout of St. Teresa of Ourem (Rotunda Sul), located where there was a pond of dirty water in 1917. It was at this pond, where they watered their sheep, and where Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia themselves drank from, in a spirit of reparation for sins.
 - Along this "Via Dolorosa," there are signs pointing to nearby points of interest, including Valinhos, Aljustrel, and the Loca do Cabeco.

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- Easily overlooked were the small plaques in a seldom seen foreign language affixed to the base of each Station. Inscribed are the names and places of the donor Hungarians of the “free-world” who, between 1959 and 1962, erected these impressive monuments as an expression of prayer for the fall of atheistic Communism in Hungary.
 - To add a deeper level of appreciation for these “Hungarian Stations of the Cross” at Fatima, details and reflections for the plaques mounted to each Station can be found on the Internet.
- That evening, we attended the iconic rosary and candlelight procession in Fatima where Father Juan and Deacon Brian carried the Virgin Mary statue around the plaza!!
 - The procession began at the Chapel of the Apparitions after the rosary was said in many languages...Mary Sue Shulin said the 5th decade reading. We pilgrims held our lighted candles as we walked, creating a sea of light symbolizing the spiritual journey of the faithful. The candlelight procession is a time-honored tradition that has been taking place in Fatima since 1917.
 - While out buying candles for the Procession we were shocked to see some strange beeswax “body parts” for sale. These aren’t actually souvenirs, but instead tokens of religious devotion. The Portuguese call them “wax promises.” They’re molded as the objects of answered prayers such as, a premature baby who pulled through, breast cancer that went into remission, or homes and businesses that survived a financial crisis. It’s a matter of faith.
- Truly a day to remember, in THE place where it Happened!

Breakfast: Hotel Estrela de Fatima, Portugal

Lunch: Ave Maria Fatima, Portugal

Dinner: Hotel Estrela de Fatima, Portugal



Day 6 Saturday June 21 Fatima – Batalha – Nazare – Fatima

FATIMA High: 73°F Low: 61°F

Sunrise: 6:24AM

Sunset: 8:57PM

Mass: In the side Chapel in Sanctuary of Our Lady of Nazaré, Father Juan (preach) and Deacon Ed

Steps: 10,363

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- We visited the Monastery of Batalha a Dominican convent in the municipality of Batalha, historical Beira Litoral province, in the Centro of Portugal. Originally, and officially, known as the Monastery of Saint Mary of the Victory, it was erected in commemoration of the 1385 Battle of Aljubarrota and would serve as the burial church of the 15th-century Aviz dynasty of Portuguese royalty. It is one of the best and original examples of Late Flamboyant Gothic architecture in Portugal, intermingled with the Manueline style.
 - The Monastery is also the site of the Portuguese Unknown Soldier and were fortunate to see the changing of the guards ceremony.
- Made our way to Nazare home of Portugal's 100feet waves!
 - Had a wonderful lunch of octopus, which can be tender and tasty, overlooking the Praia da Nazaré beach.
 - Nazaré is a small fishing village surrounded by a long stretch of sandy beaches. This city has a long, rich history, but in recent years it is growing in popularity because of its enormous waves. During the winter months, the largest surfable waves in the world crash on Nazaré's shore, making this a surfing mecca. Nazaré is centrally located on the west coast of Portugal, referred to as the Silver Coast.
 - This town is home to two very long beaches, Praia da Nazaré and Praia do Norte. These beaches are divided by a rocky peninsula, and on this peninsula sits Sitio (a hilltop neighborhood) and São Miguel Arcanjo Fort (a great spot to watch the legendary waves).
 - We took the bus up to Sitio. But, another popular way is paying a few euros on the Nazare Praia da Nazaré funicular, a cable car up the side of the peninsula...you could walk the switch back path next to the funicular.
 - Saw the unique open-air Boats of Nazaré on the beach.
 - Saw the Seca do Peixe, the Dried Fish Museum, just a few steps from the open-air boat. Here fish are dried along the beach in the old traditional way of preserving the fish.
 - O Sitio is the neighborhood that sits on top of the rocky peninsula. This area is home to one of the first settlements in Nazare, as its location high above the beaches protected the citizens from pirates.
 - We visited for Mass the Nossa Senhora da Nazare, a baroque church, also called the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Nazare, on the main square of Sitio. Built in the 14th century, its construction began under the request of King Ferdinand, who visited Nazaré on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Nazaré.
 - Paintings inside the church depict the appearance of Our Lady to Dom Fuas Roupinho. There is also a painting with the image of the Madonna nursing baby Jesus on her lap.
 - Beautiful Portuguese tiles are everywhere.
 - We gave up our Mass reservation in the main sanctuary to defuse a contentious situation with another group and celebrated in a tiny "closet-sized" side chapel. We celebrated our Mass without a 2nd thought.
 - Ermida da Memória, is also called the Memory Heritage, the Chapel of Miracle's Memory, and the Chapel of Our Lady of Nazareth. It is a small chapel in Sitio is the home to the Legend of Nazaré and possible a hiding spot for the Black Madonna.
 - The Legend of Nazaré is a tale in which Dom Fuas Roupinho was chasing a deer in foggy conditions, almost fell from the cliff, cried out to Our Lady of Nazaré for help, and was saved. After this event, he went down to the grotto to pray and give

thanks for this miracle. This happened in the same spot where an original statue of the Black Madonna was taken from Nazareth to Iberia in 711, to be kept safe. A chapel was built in this same spot, not only to protect the Black Madonna, but to also memorialize the miraculous event that saved Dom Fuas Roupinho. The chapel is built across the square from the Church of Nossa Senhora da Nazare, and next to Miradouro do Suberco.

- Also according to the Legend of Nazaré, the town derives its name from a small wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, brought from Nazareth in the Holy Land, to a monastery near the city of Mérida, Spain, by a monk in the 4th century. The statue was brought to its current location in 711 by another monk, Romano, accompanied by Roderic, the last Visigoth king of today's Portugal. After their arrival at the seaside they decided to become hermits. Romano lived and died in a small natural grotto, on top of a cliff above the sea. After his death and according to his wishes, the king buried him in the grotto. Roderic left the statue of the Black Madonna in the grotto on an altar.
- Saw ocean vistas of both beaches from the Sitio, Praia da Nazaré and Praia do Norte (no 100 foot waves that day...more like 3 feet.)
- The Nazare fishing village is known the traditional attire worn by its women—the ‘sete saias’ (seven skirts). More than just clothing, these layered skirts embody resilience, cultural heritage, and the deep, almost mystical bond between the people of Nazaré and the ocean. The skirts are a proud symbol of Nazaré’s enduring traditions.
 - The origins of the seven skirts remain a mystery, but the number seven carries profound significance—it may represent the seven virtues, the seven deadly sins, seven ‘dias’ (days) of the week, or even the colors of the rainbow.
 - Beyond symbolism, the skirts served a practical purpose. Sitting on the beach, awaiting the return of their husbands and sons from fishing, women used the skirts to shield themselves from the relentless coastal winds, folding the layers over their heads, backs, or legs for warmth and modesty.
- Drove back to our hotel in Fatima.

Breakfast: Hotel Estrela de Fatima, Portugal

Lunch: Restaurante Sao Migual, Nazare, Portugal

Dinner: Hotel Estrela de Fatima, Portugal



Day 7 Sunday June 22 Fatima – Tomar – Coimbra – Porto

PORTO High: 72°F Low: 57°F

Sunrise: 6:20AM

Sunset: 9:00PM

Mass: Carmel of St. Teresa Church Coimbra, Portugal. Father Juan and Deacon Roger (preach see attached)

Steps: 12,871

- Met our local guide, Maria Joseph at the Convent of Christ in Tomar, Portugal. Originally a 12th-century Templar stronghold. When the order was dissolved in the 14th century the Portuguese branch was turned into the Knights of the Order of Christ, that later supported Portugal's maritime discoveries of the 15th century.
 - The castle was founded by the Order of Poor Knights of the Temple (or Templar Knights) in 1118 on a strategic location, over a hill and near river Nabão. It has an outer defensive wall and a citadel with a keep inside. The Keep, a central tower of residential and defensive functions, was introduced in Portugal by the Templars, and this is one of the oldest in the country. Another novelty introduced in Portugal by the Templars (learned from decades of experience in Normandy and Brittany and elsewhere) are the round towers in the outer walls, which are more resistant to attacks than square towers. When the town was founded, most of its residents lived in dwellings located inside the protective outer walls of the castle.
 - The Romanesque round church was built in the second half of the 12th century by the Knights Templar. From the outside, the church is a 16-side polygonal structure, with strong buttresses, round windows and a belltower. Inside, the round church has a central, octagonal structure, connected by arches to a surrounding gallery (ambulatory). The general shape of the church is modelled after similar round structures in Jerusalem: the Mosque of Omar and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
 - The Convent of Christ has a total of eight cloisters, built in the 15th and 16th centuries.
 - In 1581, after a succession crisis, the Portuguese Nobility gathered in the Convent of Christ in Tomar and officially recognized Philip II of Spain (Philip I of Portugal) as King. This is the beginning of the Iberian Union (1581–1640), during which the Crowns of Portugal and Spain were united in a dynastic union. The aqueduct of the Convent was built during this period (aqueduct completed in 1614).
- Tomar was Pat and my favorite village on the pilgrimage...a beautiful river in town...quiet, narrow-streets

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- We visited the Church of Santa Maria do Olival (Saint Mary of the Olive Grove) in Tomar. The church was built in the second half of the 12th century by the provincial master of the Order of the Knights Templar in Portugal, Gualdim Pais. It was used as a burial place for the Knights Templar of Tomar and, later, by the Knights of the Order of Christ, which succeeded the Templars in the 14th century. Gualdim Pais is buried in the church, and his original tomb slab, dated from 1195 and bearing a gothic inscription, is still preserved inside.
- We visited the Museu Luso-Hebraico Abraao Zacuto, the Synagogue of Tomar, the only Jewish religious building that has remained intact, almost unchanged and fully preserved, from the mid-fifteenth century, when it was built.
 - It is a Renaissance building, erected at a time when the Jewish community of Tomar was very close to Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), who commissioned the work when the city grew in population and wealth.
 - With a very discreet façade, like almost all Jewish temples in the Christian world, the interior is a surprise. The ceiling is supported by four columns, each with capitals decorated with geometric and vegetal motifs, which represent the Mothers of Israel: Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah and Leah. Between the columns are connected 12 arches, symbol of 12 tribes of Israel, and in the upper corners of the worship room there are two holes, corresponding to the mouthpieces of eight clay amphorae placed inverted in the masonry, creating the amplification of the sound of the ritual chants.
 - In 1496, with the expulsion of the Jews from the national territory, the synagogue was closed, having gone through several uses; until it was acquired in 1923 by Dr. Samuel Schwarz (1880-1953), who donated it to the State in 1939, on the condition that the Luso-Hebrew Museum he had founded would remain there. It presents an important collection of tombstones, from various parts of the country, and attests to the importance of Hebrew culture in Portugal, including books and objects of Jewish tradition and worship.
 - Recently an adjoining room was found, intended for the mikveh, the ritual bath for the purification of women.
- We drove to Coimbra and visited for Mass the Carmel of Saint Teresa Church at the Monastery of St. Teresa. It is a remarkable convent located in the heart of Coimbra, known for its tranquil atmosphere and stunning architectural beauty. This sacred site is home to the Discalced Carmelite nuns who live a life of prayer, simplicity, and devotion. Coimbra itself is a city steeped in history and culture, with the Carmel of Saint Teresa serving as a spiritual oasis within its vibrant landscape.
 - As a Discalced Carmelite Convent, this is similar to many other Carmelite convents; however, there has been one notable occupant of the convent: Sister Lucia, one of the visionaries of Fatima. In 1925, she entered the Institute of the Sisters of St. Dorothy as a postulant in the convent in Tui, Spain (**we visited on Day 9**), just across the northern Portuguese/Spain border. She returned to Portugal in 1946, where she visited Fátima incognito. In 1948 she entered the Carmelite convent here in Coimbra and took her vows on May 31, 1949, taking the religious name Sister Maria Lúcia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart. As a cloistered nun, she had little contact with the outside world (perhaps her most famous visitor was Pope John Paul II). She lived here until her death in 2005.
- We visited the Coimbra University, one of the oldest in Europe and one of only five in the world listed as a World Heritage Site. It was founded in 1290, and occupies its current building since 1544. It's the former royal palace, but very little remains of the royal residence, as it was remodeled and extended over the centuries, and especially in the 1700s.

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- The university's iconic clock tower is 112 feet tall and was added in the early 1700s. It was used for astronomical observations, which explains its lack of a roof, which is quite rare in similar towers around the world.
- We visited St. Michael's Chapel, entering through an intricate Manueline doorway, bordered by two pillars and intertwined with sea symbols. At the center is the Portuguese royal crest.
 - The chapel is small but richly decorated. It was built in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It's dedicated to the Archangel Michael.
 - It was originally conceived as a palace chapel in the reign of King Manuel I. The walls are spectacular, clad in "azulejos de tappet," carpet tiles forming a repeating pattern.
 - The 1605 main altar is a gaudy Mannerist affair, dating from the 17th century and dedicated to Our Lady of Light.
 - There is an equally gaudy gold organ with 2000 pipes and trumpet blowing angels, built in 1733 by Manuel Gomes. Some of the pipes jut straight out right into the room.
- Drove to Porto for a late check in and dinner.

Breakfast: Hotel Estrela de Fatima, Portugal

Lunch: A Canoa Tapas, Tomar, Portugal

Dinner: Mercure Porto Centro Catarina, Porto Portugal



Day 8 Monday June 23 Porto

PORTO High: 81°F Low: 59°F

Sunrise: 6:21AM

Sunset: 8:59PM

Mass: Cathedral of Porto. Father Juan and Deacon Ed (preach)

Steps: 11,712

- We met our local guide Dora who toured us around Porto
- We visited for Mass the Porto Cathedral located in the historical center of the city of Porto, Portugal. It is one of the city's oldest monuments and one of the most important local Romanesque monuments.
 - The cathedral was built in 1899 on the site of an old chapel or hermitage founded by Henry of Burgundy and his wife in 1108. The pre-Romanesque church is mentioned in the De

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Expugnatio Lyxbonensi as still extant in 1147, so construction of the present building began in the second half of the 12th century and work continued until the 16th century. There were major Baroque additions in the 18th century, and further changes were made in the 20th century.

- The cathedral is flanked by two square towers, each supported with two buttresses and crowned with a cupola. The façade lacks decoration and is rather architecturally heterogeneous. It shows a Baroque porch and a beautiful Romanesque rose window under a crenellated arch, giving the impression of a fortified church.
- The Romanesque nave is rather narrow and is covered by barrel vaulting. It is flanked by two aisles with a lower vault. The stone roof of the central aisle is supported by flying buttresses, making the building one of the first in Portugal to use this architectonic feature.
- We saw buildings covered in magnificent Portuguese tiles!
- We visited the Igreja do Carmo and Igreja dos Carmelitas, two churches in Porto that stand side by side....with a hidden house in between!
 - Igreja do Carmo was built between 1756 and 1768 in the rococo or late Baroque, style by a disciple of Nicolau Nasoni, Jose de Figueiredo Seixas. The Igreja do Carmo has an outstanding azulejo-covered exterior with the azulejos added in 1912. The tiles were made locally in Vila Nova de Gaia and designed by the artist Silvestro Silvestri. They depict scenes of the founding of the Carmelite Order and Mount Carmel.
 - The exterior facade of the church is richly crafted with a rectangular portal, flanked by two religious sculptures of the prophets Elijah and Elisha carved in Italy.
 - The interior of the church has a single nave with seven lavish gilt altars, the work of sculptor Francisco Pereira Campanha, as well as a number of fine oil paintings.
 - Igreja dos Carmelitas is the earlier of the two churches and was built in the mid-17th century with the exterior completed in 1628. The church was part of a convent that no longer exists.
 - The facade is done in granite with three arched entrances topped with statues. There is a single bell tower on the left, the top of which is covered with blue and white azulejos tiles.
 - The interior has a single nave with six ornately decorated side chapels. The white ceiling adds a special lightness to the interior aided by the many large windows. The organ has been restored thanks to in part from contributions from the general public.
 - The 3-storey house Casa Escondida ("Hidden House") was, according to legend, built so that the two churches would not share a common wall and to prevent any relations between the nuns of Igreja dos Carmelitas and the monks of Igreja do Carmo.
 - Another, more prosaic reason, and more likely the correct one, is that the building was constructed for purely aesthetic reasons to prevent an unsightly gap between the two churches.
 - The house served as a residence for chaplains and it also housed the artists who worked on the interior and exterior decoration of the churches as well as doctors serving at the Igreja do Carmo's hospital.
 - Various secret meetings took place at the house during the French invasion of Portugal by Napoleon and the Siege of Porto in 1832-1833.
- We visited the Livraria Lello bookstore in Porto. It grabs a lot of publicity as the inspiration for Harry Potter, but I was not impressed. You certainly get a Hogwarts' vibe here and can easily imagine teenage magicians nosing around trying to find old spell books.

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- Reportedly, their ancient books are maintained by bats. Yes, bats! The library is infested with a colony of small pipistrelle bats as welcome guests. They emerge at nightfall and consume flies, gnats, and other bugs that might threaten the priceless books or manuscript pages. A tiny bat can eat up to 500 paper eating insects a night. They may have taken up residence approximately 300 years ago when the library was built. The librarians at least trace them to the 19th century. The library still uses special fabric to cover the inlaid wooden tables to protect them from the bats. You won't see them while visiting. They reportedly only come out at nightfall or on rainy days.
- We visited the Porto river front and braved the growing crowds on the eve of The Birth of John the Baptist holiday....people were running around with plastic hammers bopping others on the head for good luck...you had to be there to believe it!!
- Ate a good lunch at a nice river-side Café do Cais...and the crowds were growing
- We went on a nice river cruise up and down river to see Porto from the water...
- As the crowds grew, we made it back to the hotel just in time!
- Pat and I were sleeping when the mini hot air balloons with candles were launched around Porto at 9:30pm and the fireworks at Midnight, which some folks saw from the hotel rooftop.

Breakfast: Mercure Porto Centro Catarina, Porto Portugal

Lunch: Café Do Cais, Porto, Portugal

Dinner: Mercure Porto Centro Catarina, Porto Portugal



Day 9 Tuesday June 24 Porto – Braga – Valencia Do Minho – Vigo

VIGO High: 72°F Low: 64°F

Sunrise: 7:20AM

Sunset: 10:02PM

Mass: Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte, Braga, Portugal. Father Juan (preach) and Deacon Ed

Steps: 11,448

- We visited for Mass the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte in Braga...quite an impressive place to celebrate Mass!

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- The Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte, or Good Jesus of the Mount, is a Portuguese Catholic shrine in Tenões, outside the city of Braga, in northern Portugal.
 - This sanctuary is an extraordinary Christian pilgrimage site with a monumental, Baroque stairway that climbs 381 feet...the staircase has 583 steps for the Stations of the Cross.
 - Many hilltops in Portugal and other parts of Europe have been sites of religious devotion since antiquity, and it is probable that the Bom Jesus hill was one of these. However, the first indication of a chapel on the hill dates from 1373. This chapel - dedicated to the Holy Cross - was rebuilt in the 15th and 16th centuries. In 1629 a pilgrimage church was built dedicated to the Bom Jesus (Good Jesus), with six chapels dedicated to the Passion of Christ.
 - The present Sanctuary started being built in 1722, under the patronage of the Archbishop of Braga, Rodrigo de Moura Telles. His coat of arms is seen over the gateway, in the beginning of the stairway.
 - Under his direction the first stairway, with chapels dedicated to the Via Crucis, were completed. Each chapel is decorated with terra cotta sculptures depicting the Passion of Christ.
 - He also sponsored the next segment of stairways, which has a zigzag shape and is dedicated to the Five Senses. Each sense (Sight, Smell, Hearing, Touch, Taste) is represented by a different fountain.
 - Around 1781, archbishop Gaspar de Bragança decided to complete the ensemble by adding a third segment of stairways and a new church. The third stairway also follows a zigzag pattern and is dedicated to the Three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity, each with its fountain..
 - At the top end of this stairway, a magnificent Baroque church was consecrated in 1834 with a stunning back wall 3-D altarpiece depicting the Crucifixion on Calvary.
- In 1882, to facilitate the access to the Sanctuary, the water balance Bom Jesus **funicular** was built linking the city of Braga to the hill. This was the first funicular to be built in the Iberian Peninsula and is still in use.
- We visited The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sameiro or Sanctuary of Sameiro a sanctuary and Marian shrine in Espinho, near the city of Braga. The Shrine of Our Lady of Sameiro remains one of the most frequented places of Marian devotion in Portugal, the complex itself surpassed in size only by the Sanctuary of Fátima.
 - At the top of a hill, Monte Sameiro, more than 1150 feet above Braga, its setting offers a renowned view over the city and the valley of the Minho. Most spectacular is the prospect from the top of the basilica's dome.
 - This site forms part of a Marian Shrine Route in Portugal. Mary, often revered as “Nossa Senhora” or “Our Lady,” has long held a special place in Portuguese history. As national identity took shape, a parallel and exceptional devotion to Mary saw the founding of monasteries, chapels, churches and sanctuaries that are still the focus of celebration and popular festivals. It is to Mary that the majority of cathedrals throughout Portugal are dedicated.
- We visited Fortaleza de Valença...the Valença do Minho Fortress was one of the main military fortifications in Europe, with 16,400 feet of walled perimeter, overlooking the river Minho, in front of Tui.
 - Exploring Valença do Minho Fortress is a popular tourist stop in North Portugal!

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- Its history starts in the 13th century when the first fortifications and strongholds were built on the privileged hilltop position overlooking the Minho River and the Spanish border. In order to provide even better protection of Portugal from invasions, during the 17th century, the fortress we see today came to life. Over the years Valença fortress walls were destroyed several times, but always restored, thanks to which now we can admire it in very good shape.
- Valença Fortress sits on two small hills separated by a ditch and connected by a bridge. The main entrance is called Porta do Sol (Sun Doors). Before you enter the fortress, be sure to wander outside the walls to admire these impressive fortifications from the outside and discover why it was so successful at resisting attacks.
- Rather than being an empty old fort, the inside is filled with shops and cafes. Over the top vistas, great hiking, perfect shops and very inexpensive good food for lunch.
- The Camino takes you through this historic fortification set high on the hills before you cross the bridge into Spain.
- **From here we walked from Portugal over the river Minho to Tui, Spain!**
- We visited a small convent in Tui, the community of the Doroteas de Tui, the Institute of the Sisters of St. Dorothy.
 - In the convent house on Rúa Martínez Padín, one of the visionaries of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in Fatima, Sister Lucía Dos Santos, who in Tui was called "Irmã Dores", lived and worked. The superior says that "here they never talked about their identity, to preserve their history." Sister Lucia dedicated herself to domestic chores and became friends with students that she continued when she entered the Carmelite convent of Coimbra, **(we visited on Day 7)** where she died.
 - We met with the Mother Superior in the chapel of the convent where Sister Lucia had one of her visions of the Virgin Mary. We were "IN the room where it happened!"

Breakfast: Mercure Porto Centro Catarina, Porto Portugal

Lunch: Café Portugal Valença, Portugal

Dinner: Hotel Coia, Vigo, Spain



Day 10 Wednesday June 25 Vigo – Santiago De Compostela

SANTIAGO High: 73°F

Low: 59°F

Sunrise: 7:18AM

Sunset: 10:02PM

Mass: The Santiago de Compostela Cathedral. Father Juan concelebrated

Steps: 9,840

- Arrived in Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims, pilgrims everywhere!
- Met our local guide Adrian who walked us around Santiago de Compostela and the Cathedral.

- We visited the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral. It is part of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain.
 - The cathedral basilica is the reputed burial place of Saint James the Great, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. It is also among the remaining churches in the world built over the tomb of an apostle, the other ones being St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, St Thomas Cathedral Basilica in Chennai, India and Basilica of St. John in İzmir, Turkey.
 - The basilica is a Romanesque structure, with later Gothic and Baroque additions.
 - According to legend, the apostle Saint James the Great brought Christianity to the Iberian Peninsula. In Acts 12:2 it is written that the apostle James the son of Zebedee was killed by Herod in Jerusalem.
 - Today, St. James officially is considered to be the patron saint of Spain. However, the invention of the miraculous voyage of the Saint's body across the Mediterranean in the ninth century is doubtful.
 - At the turn of the first Millennium, a series of high-level political meetings were orchestrated in Rome, Clermont-Ferrand and Santiago to negotiate the solution we may read about in the Veneranda Dies sermon.
 - The compromise was that the Saint had been part of the first Apostolic mission to Spain. And yes, his remains had been brought back to Galicia from Jerusalem by his sub-apostles. (**see Finisterre**) However, he had never sailed on a rock to Spain, nor had his decapitated head been left behind in Jerusalem (or been transported elsewhere).
 - According to legend, St. James was buried in a tomb in Santiago was rediscovered in AD 814 by Pelagius the Hermit, after he witnessed strange lights in the night sky above the Libredon forest. Bishop Theodomirus of Iria recognized this as a miracle and informed king Alfonso II of Asturias and Galicia (791–842). The king ordered the construction of a chapel on the site. Legend has it that the king was the first pilgrim to this shrine. This was followed by the first church in AD 829 and then in AD 899 by a pre-Romanesque church, ordered by king Alfonso III of León,[5] which caused the gradual development of this major place of pilgrimage.[6]
 - In 997 the early church was reduced to ashes by Al-Mansur Ibn Abi Aamir (938–1002), army commander of the caliph of Córdoba. St James' tomb and relics were left undisturbed. The gates and the bells, carried by local Christian captives to Córdoba, were added to the Aljama Mosque. When Córdoba was taken by king Ferdinand III of Castile in 1236, these same gates and bells were then transported by Muslim captives to Toledo, to be inserted in the Cathedral of Saint Mary of Toledo.
 - Construction of the present cathedral began in 1075 under the reign of Alfonso VI of Castile (1040–1109) and the patronage of bishop Diego Peláez. It was built according to the same plan as the monastic brick church of Saint Sernin in Toulouse, probably the greatest Romanesque edifice in France.[according to whom?] It was built mostly in granite. Construction was halted several times and, according to the Liber Sancti Iacobi, the last stone was laid in 1122. But, the construction of the cathedral was certainly not finished. The cathedral was consecrated in 1211 in the presence of king Alfonso IX of Leon.
- Mass at Santiago de Compostela Cathedral was nothing less than spectacular!
 - Father Juan concelebrated and added incense to the Botafumeiro!
 - The Mass for a large crowd lasted 50minutes including swinging the Botafumeiro after the Mass!
 - We heard our St. Andrew Pilgrimage name called out by the presiding Bishop.

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- The ‘Botafumeiro,’ the famous giant thurible or censer in the cathedral, flew right over our heads!.
 - It has been used since the Middle Ages, originally to clean the air when crowds of pilgrims, having completed the Camino de Santiago, arrived in Santiago de Compostela after their long journey.
 - The Codex Calixtinus, the first Camino de Santiago ‘guide-book’, refers to the ‘Botafumeiro’ as Turibulum Magnum, which means this ritual has been taking place at least since the 12th century.
 - The current ‘Botafumeiro’ dates back to 1851, and it’s made of silver-plated brass, weighs 122 lbs. Eight men, called ‘Tiraboleiros’, are required to operate the ‘Botafumeiro’.
 - After being filled with charcoal by the ‘Tiraboleiros’ incense, the 4 feet-high ‘Botafumeiro’ is tied to a rope hanging in front of the altar and set in motion with great precision, forming an impressive 210 feet-long arched trajectory along the cathedral. In only a minute and a half, the ‘Botafumeiro’ reaches 40+ miles per hour.
 - The pilgrims went NorthEast out of town to spend the afternoon walking several kilometers on a relatively flat section of the Camino de Santiago!
(I stayed at the hotel to sleep off my cold...2 hours sleep did wonders for me.)

Breakfast: Hotel Coia, Vigo, Spain

Lunch: Restaurante Dakar, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Dinner: Exe Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela, Spain



Day 11 Thursday June 26 Santiago – Finnisterre – Santiago

SANTIAGO High: 77°F Low: 57°F Sunrise: 7:19AM Sunset: 10:01PM

Mass: The Church of Santa Maria a Real do Sar, Santiago, Spain. Father Juan (preach) and Deacon Brian

Steps: 11,843

- We visited for Mass at the Collegiate Church of Santa María a Real do Sar
 - Built in the 12th century on the banks of the River Sar, it is the church, along with the Cathedral, that still has the greatest proportion of its original Romanesque structure.

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- The most outstanding features outside are the small façade tower and the robust buttresses that were built between the 17th and 18th centuries in order to protect the north walls and prevent them from falling down.
- Due to a technical error in its construction, or to the bold elevation of the side naves, or to the sliding of the unstable land on which it is built and which is often flooded by the river, or to the wooden roof being replaced by a heavy stone roof, the inner walls and columns are visibly inclined outward. This singular attraction made it necessary to rebuild the barrel vault in the 16th century.
- The beautifully proportioned interior amazes all who visit it due to the inclination of the columns facing the side naves, which gives it an unstable look. The baptismal font, to the right of the main door, is an interesting archaeological piece from the 12th century.
- The cloister, now a museum, is accessed by means of the Sacristy. Only one of the original wings remains; the rest belongs to the 17th and 18th centuries. A fine collection of archaeological pieces is on display inside.
- Saw ancient Orreos or corn cribs everywhere in the countryside.
- We visited the Sanctuary of Our Lady of A Barca.
 - The Virgin of the Boat, or Our Lady of the Boat, is Muxía's most beloved sanctuary. It stands at the very end of the Camino Finisterre and Muxía, overlooking the powerful Atlantic Ocean.
 - We saw what was described as the sail and parts of the hull scattered on the rocky shore.
 - The Fisterra and Muxía Way is the only Camino route that starts in Santiago de Compostela. It leads pilgrims further west to the Galician coast, where ancient pagan and Christian traditions blend.
 - The Our Lady of the Boat shrine—Nosa Señora da Barca in Galician—sits in a special location, right by the ocean. Before Christianity, villagers already worshipped here, making it a place of ancient spiritual significance. Many locals held on to their pagan beliefs, making conversion to Christianity a slow process. Throughout the centuries, it has been a magical-religious object of worship and of veneration for thousands of pilgrims that travel the Way of St. James from Santiago to Muxía – Fisterra. The arrival at the Sanctuary becomes the expected reward for the effort made to reach the end of the Way, the place where the Virgin arrived in a stone boat to inspire courage to the Apostle James. A Barca pilgrimage is recognized as a National Tourist Interest, receiving thousands of visitors each year during the month of September.
 - “You cannot understand Muxía without A Barca. It even defines the annual calendar: 40 years ago, if you asked someone when they were going to do something, they would answer, “before or after A Barca?””.
- Made our way to Finisterre or Fisterra as the local Galicians say.
 - Had a good lunch of tender and tasty squid overlooking the ocean.
 - We visited Santa Maria das Areas de Fisterra, also called Nuestra Señora de las Arenas or Our Lady of the Sands.
 - The church is located near Cape Fisterra, the end of the last stage of the Camino de Santiago.
 - Most unusual is the altarpiece in the Sacred Christ Chapel: the crucified Christ in a white skirt and a pile of sand below his feet!
 - The 18th-century altarpiece, especially the image of the Sacred Christ of Barba Dourada (Golden Beard), a Gothic sculpture alleged to have been carved by Nicodemus in the 14th century and a central element in a number of legends.

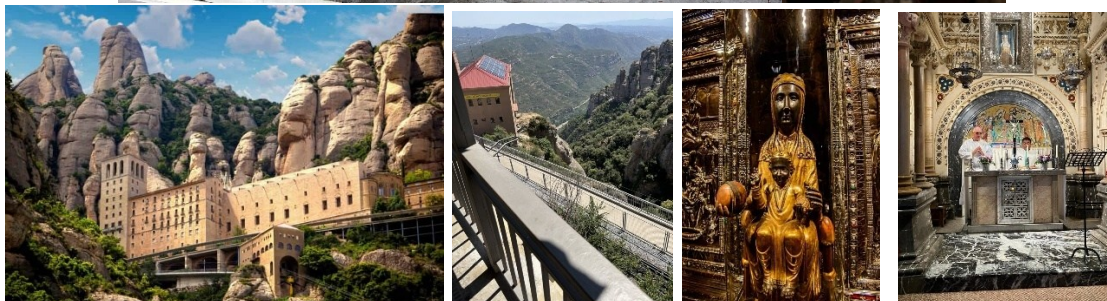
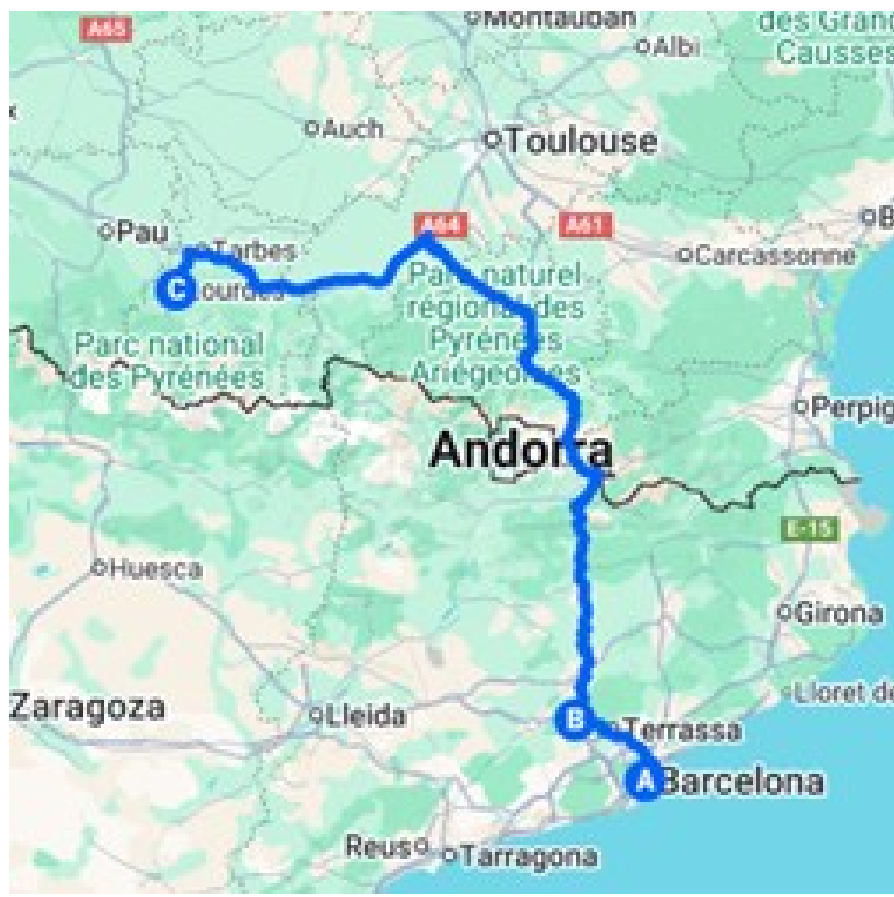
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- One such legend tells that, after stealing the figure, the robbers were forced to throw it overboard as they fled, in order to calm the storm that had resulted from their crime. The figure of Christ was later recovered by a fisherman.
- Another legend affirms that the hair and nails of the figure grow.
- Legends apart, what is true is that a Festival and a Pilgrimage to the Sacred Christ are held every Easter Sunday outside the church. When the procession reaches the church, the "Danza das Areas" (Dance of Sands) begins, an ancestral dance the roots of which have been traced by historians back to the 17th and 18th centuries.
- In the Main Chapel are the tabernacle (Baroque), the image of Nuestra Señora de las Arenas (Our Lady of the Sands) (Renaissance), patron saint of the parish, and the chapel's beautiful window (Romanesque).
- The temple does not have the typical form of pilgrimage churches. It is possible that the neighboring hermitage of San Guillerme or the walls of the old Pilgrims' Hospital were used for its construction, which would explain its strange and unusual shape.
- Cementerio de Fisterra is located on the property. The Portuguese are quite superstitious about cemeteries. The docent was not happy that we took a few pictures of the entrance to the cemetery.
- Finally, we made it to the Camino de Finisterre 0 marker
 - Our Camino would not be quite complete without a visit to Kilometre Zero at Finisterre.
 - Finisterre is reputedly the place at which the boat carrying St James' body landed on the coast of Spain, and the place where the local pagan queen denied permission for his burial, ordering that he not be buried within three days walk of the coast – and hence why he was taken inland to Santiago de Compostela – to lie beneath the field of stars.
 - Finisterre – which literally translates as the 'end of the earth', or more poetically, the 'end of the world' – was indeed what the Romans considered to be the end of the known world at that time. From here there is almost nothing but ocean between us and the Americas. Consequently, the place developed a mystique – especially when there was an ocean fog, where people could literally sail away and be swallowed up in the mist. It was considered a gateway to the underworld or the afterlife.
 - The Faro, or lighthouse was built in 1853 and is still in use today –with updated lighting!
 - And, there is a bar and hotel, with a Camino stamp of course!
- On the way back to our hotel in Santiago de Compostela, we stopped at the "Hill of Joy" to see the spires of the Santiago Cathedral 5 kilometers away.
 - Father Juan came over this hill on his previous Caminos.

Breakfast: Exe Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Lunch: O Terron, Fisterra, Spain

Dinner: Exe Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela, Spain



Day 12 Friday June 27 Santiago - Barcelona – Montserrat – Barcelona

BARCELONA High: 86°F Low: 75°F Sunrise: 6:41AM Sunset: 9:13PM

Mass: Santa Maria de Montserrat. Father Juan (preach) and Deacon Roger

Steps: 7,989

- LV Santiago SCQ Vueling VY1670 at 8:10am – ARR Barcelona BCN at 9:50am (dur 1H 40m) (549 miles)
- Met our new driver Samuel and drove from Barcelona past Montserrat to Manresa, another favorite stop on our pilgrimage.
 - Three bridges cross the Cardener River. The 14th-century basilica of Santa Maria de la Seu stands on a rock above the oldest bridge.
 - Saint Ignatius of Loyola stopped to pray in Manresa on his way back from Montserrat in 1522.
 - La Seu is the principal monument of Manresa. The church we see today is the architectural style of Catalan Gothic. The work began in 1325, but the church was not finished until the end of the 15th century.
 - This church is part of the Sanctuary Cave of Saint Ignatius, which is now built over the cave where Saint Ignatius of Loyola prayed and meditated.
 - Blew my mind! We were in the cave where St. Ignatius began writing his Spiritual Exercises!! In THE Place where It Happened!
- Drove to majestic Montserrat Monastery, another favorite stop on our pilgrimage.
 - Montserrat Monastery in Catalonia, Spain, officially Santa Maria de Montserrat, is a monastery located high on the Montserrat Mountain in Monistrol de Montserrat, Catalonia. It is a renowned Benedictine abbey and mountaintop sanctuary surrounded by the tranquil Montserrat Natural Park.
 - Montserrat Monastery is famous not only for its spectacular setting, but also for its sacred Black Madonna (one of just a few in Europe) and one of the oldest boys' choirs in Europe, the Escolania de Montserrat. It is an impressive blend of natural beauty, history, and culture...AMEN!
 - Montserrat literally means "serrated mountain" in Catalan, and the jagged needle-like peaks make for a dramatic backdrop to the monastery. The formations are made of pink conglomerate, a type of sedimentary rock, and look gorgeous when the sun's light falls on them. The nature park is home to hundreds of species of flora as well as wildlife and birds, and can be explored via a network of walking trails.
 - Montserrat Monastery is perched more than half way up the mountaintop and has a fascinating history. Still an active abbey, Montserrat Monastery dates back to the year 1025 though the monastery has been rebuilt more recently.
 - What a blessing it was to serve in the chapel behind the altar of the Black Madona with her above us.
- Drove back to Barcelona to check into our hotel.

Breakfast: Bag breakfast from Exe Peregrino, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Lunch: Agricola Regional SA Monasterio, Montserrat, Spain

Dinner: Catalonia Barcelona Plaza, Barcelona, Spain



Day 13 Saturday June 28 Barcelona

BARCELONA High: 84°F Low: 75°F

Sunrise: 6:42AM

Sunset: 9:12PM

Mass: Chapel of Basilica of Santa Maria del Mar, Barcelona, Spain. Father Juan and Deacon Ed (preach)

Steps: 15,369

- We met our local guide Eva, whose knowledge of Barcelona and Gaudi was impressive.
- We visited for Mass Santa Maria del Mar, "Saint Mary of the Sea", a church in the Ribera district of Barcelona, built between 1329 and 1383. It is an outstanding example of Catalan Gothic, with a purity and unity of style that is very unusual in large medieval buildings.
 - Mass was around the altar in the chapel! Like celebrating a Mass at home.
 - The first mention of the church of Santa Maria by the Sea dates to 998.
 - One of the distinctive features of Santa Maria del Mar was its backing by the common people, as opposed to the nobility. Construction work started on 25 March 1329, when the foundation stone was laid by king Alfonso IV of Aragon as commemorated by a tablet in Latin and Catalan on the façade that faces the Fossar de les Moreres. During the construction all the guilds of the Ribera quarter were involved.
 - The walls, the side chapels and the façades were finished by 1350. In 1379 there was a fire that damaged important parts of the church. Finally, on 3 November 1383 the last stone was laid and on 15 August 1384 the church was consecrated.
 - We heard the wild parakeets squawking before we saw them flying around the buildings near the church...then occasionally heard them while we were walking around Barcelona.
 - Monk parakeets are the most common of the seven species found in Barcelona. They are so prominent in some parts, they have themselves become tourist attractions within tourist attractions. Noisy flocks can be encountered at just about all city's main sights, including the Sagrada Família, Park Güell and Arc de Triomf.
- We visited the breathtaking, the spectacular, The Sagrada Família!

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- The Sagrada Família is a one-of-a-kind temple, for its origins, foundation, and purpose. Fruit of the work of genius architect Antoni Gaudí, the project was promoted by the people for the people. Five generations now have watched the Temple progress in Barcelona. Today, more than 140 years after the laying of the cornerstone, construction continues on the Basilica.
- The Basílica i Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família, otherwise known as Sagrada Família, is a church under construction in the Eixample district of Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain. It is the largest unfinished Catholic church in the world. Designed by the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), in 2005 his work on Sagrada Família was added to an existing (1984) UNESCO World Heritage Site, "Works of Antoni Gaudí". On 7 November 2010, Pope Benedict XVI consecrated the church and proclaimed it a minor basilica.
- On March 19, 1882, construction of Sagrada Família began under architect Francisco de Paula del Villar. In 1883, when Villar resigned, Gaudí took over as chief architect, transforming the project with his architectural and engineering style, combining Gothic and curvilinear Art Nouveau forms. Gaudí devoted the remainder of his life to the project, and he is buried in the church's crypt. At the time of his death in 1926, less than a quarter of the project was complete.
- Sagrada Família was inspired by a bookseller, José María Bocabella, founder of Asociación Espiritual de Devotos de San José (Spiritual Association of Devotees of St. Joseph). After a visit to the Vatican in 1872, Bocabella returned to Barcelona from Italy with the intention of building a church inspired by the basilica at Loreto. The apse crypt of the church, funded by donations, was begun 19 March 1882, on the festival of St. Joseph, to the design of the architect Francisco de Paula del Villar, whose plan was for a Gothic revival church of a standard form. The apse crypt was completed before Villar's resignation on 18 March 1883, when Antoni Gaudí assumed responsibility for its design, which he changed radically. Gaudí began work on the church in 1883 but was not appointed Architect Director until 1884.
- The stone initially used in its construction came from the Montserrat mountain, but it became clear that as quarrying there went deeper, the stone was increasingly fragile and an alternative source had to be found. Since 2018 stone of the type needed to complete the construction has been sourced from the Withnell Quarry in Brinscall, near Chorley, England.
- I could go on and on...I encourage you to continue to research the Sagrada Familia...
- The outside is too much to take in at one visit. Everywhere you look has another story.
- Inside is just spectacular, from the altar with the unusual Crucified Christ with bended legs to the awesome stained-glass windows streaming a rainbow of colors!
- Had a great lunch of my favorites: gazpacho and sautéed calamari at Bar Rovica.
- We visited, another treasure designed by Gaudi.
 - Casa Batlló is a modernist building designed by the architect Antoni Gaudí, a leader of this movement, from 1904 to 1906. It is located in the Illa de la Discòrdia,
 - The Batlló family commissioned the architect Josep Vilaseca i Casanovas to build several buildings including Casa Pia Batlló (Gran Via); Casa Àngel Batlló (Mallorca Street) and Casa Enric Batlló (Mallorca Street). All were made in the eclectic modernist style that was fashionable at the time. Josep Batlló wanted to stand out from the rest of the family by calling on the architect Antoni Gaudí, who had just won the annual competition for artistic constructions with the Casa Calvet, begun in 1900.
 - Batlló initially asked Gaudí to destroy and rebuild the building entirely. The architect convinced him to carry out only a transformation of the façade of the existing building. However, the architect's intervention profoundly remodeled the building. He reorganized the spaces,

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developing lighting and natural ventilation, added two floors, remodeled the attic and the terrace. These transformations significantly changed the dimensions of the building.

- For the transformation of the façade, which was his initial objective, Gaudí replaced those on the ground and first floors with a structure of Montjuïc sandstone forming horizontal undulations. The rest of the building reused these undulating shapes in the vertical direction. Front view of the building and its immediate neighbors. The edges of the roofs are level on each side. Gaudí adjusted the curves of the upper part of the building in order to achieve continuity with the neighboring facades.
- Gaudí made some plans, but his design was primarily based on a plaster model that he modelled until he had obtained the sinuous shapes of the façade he wanted. The model also served him to explain his project in a more effective way than plans.

Breakfast: Catalonia Barcelona Plaza, Barcelona, Spain

Lunch: Bar Rovica, Barcelona, Spain

Dinner: Catalonia Barcelona Plaza, Barcelona, Spain



Day 14 Sunday June 29 Barcelona - Lourdes

LOURDES High: 91°F Low: 66°F Sunrise: 6:47AM Sunset: 9:24PM

Mass: The Chapel of San Miguel de los Santos in Barcelona. Father Juan and Deacon Roger (preach see attached)

Steps: 10,387

- We visited for Mass a chapel of San Miguel de los Santos, near Park Guell
 - On September 29, 1591, the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, Miguel Jerónimo José was born in Vic Barcelona, in a deeply Catholic family and with a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was the seventh of eight children. His childhood was marked by suffering with the loss of his mother when he was only 3 years old, and that of his father at the age of 11.

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- This saint took the name of Michael precisely because he was born on the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. He embraced religious life in the Order of the Trinitarian Fathers. His apostolic zeal was blessed by God through the effectiveness of his preaching. He was a saint who enjoyed a tremendous mystical life.
- Miguel died at the age of 33. The life of this priest could be summed up in a few words: "the saint of the Eucharist". His remains rest under the High Altar of the Church of San Nicolás de los Trinitarios, in Valladolid.
- He was canonized by Pope Pius IX on June 8, 1862, and Pope John XXIII declared him Patron of Vic, his hometown.
- We walked to the spectacular Park Güell...one more treasure created by Gaudí.
 - Park Güell was not conceived as what it is today, a public park, but as a private project to build a residential area for wealthy families. Numerous spaces today are part of the services, roads and communications projected by Gaudí.
 - When Park Güell began to be built in 1900, Barcelona was a modern and cosmopolitan metropolis whose economy was based on the strength of its industry and which had over half a million inhabitants. Barcelona's walls had been knocked down nearly half a century earlier and the new city, the Eixample planned by engineer Ildefons Cerdà, had grown spectacularly from 1860 onwards, in what was the largest 19th century city development project in Europe.
 - Barcelona expanded very rapidly throughout the second half of the 19th century, with the Eixample spreading out over the plain. Its central area began to take shape as a large bourgeois center, while development also advanced along its flanks, in the direction of the old manufacturing areas on the plain, with a more popular and industrial nature
 - Finally, in 1900, Gaudí was given the assignment of designing Park Güell.
 - For many years the Güell family lived in the large family house (now a school) that stood on the land where the development was located, while Gaudí lived in one of the two houses that were built there.
 - The first person to buy a plot in the Park, in 1902, was a friend of Güell, lawyer Martí Trias i Domènech, who commissioned architect Juli Batlle i Gual with building his villa.
 - Gaudí himself moved there in 1906 to live with his father and niece.
 - The complex conditions for sale of the plots, under old emphyteutic lease contracts, the lack of a suitable transport system and the highly exclusive character of the development all made it unviable. A lack of buyers led to the works being abandoned in 1914, with only two of the sixty houses envisaged having been built. The park thus became a large private garden, which Güell allowed to be used for public events, while it began to appear in tourist guides to Barcelona as one of the attractions of the city.
 - Eusebi Güell died at his house in 1918, and his heirs offered the park to the City Council, which agreed to purchase it in 1922. Park Güell thus became a public park.
 - Amazing areas of the park include Gaudí's House, Three Crosses, the Porter's Lodge, the Laundry Room Portico, High/Middle/Low Viaducts, the Dragon Stairway, Hypostyle Room, Palm Trees Path, Greek Theater/Nature Square, and the Austria Gardens.
- ON TO LOURDES THROUGH THE PYRENNES MOUNTAINS
 - Drove past the Opus Dei mountain shrine, Torre Cuidad.
 - St. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, was born in 1902. When he was 2 years old, he was taken by his parents to the Hermitage of Torreciudad as an act of thanksgiving for

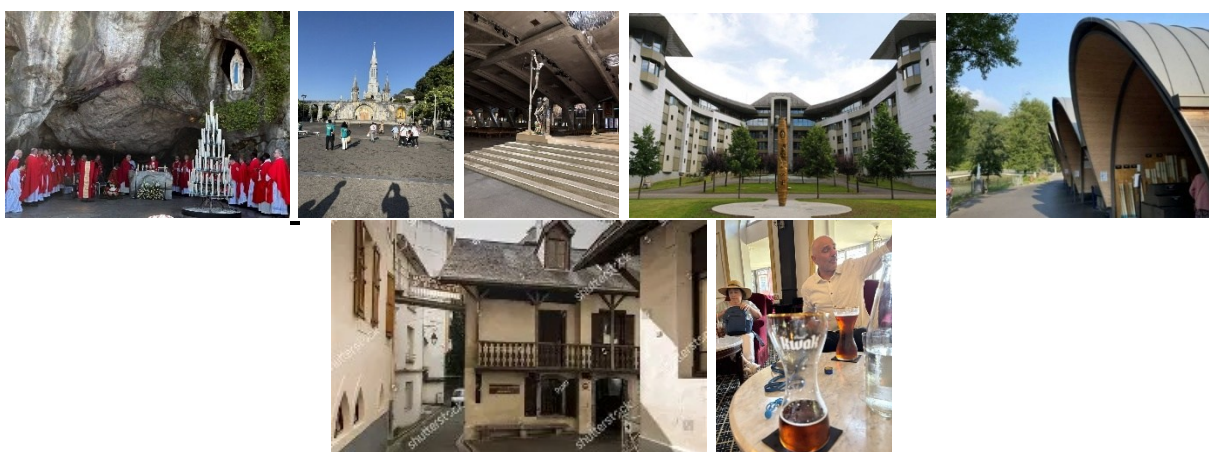
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the healing of a serious illness that afflicted the little boy. In 1975, through the direction of Saint Josemaría, the new shrine, Santuario de Torrecuidad, opened its doors.

- Drove through a 3 Kilometer tunnel.
- Drove through small villages.
- Loved the glorious mountain vistas!
- Made it to Lourdes and it's village in the Pyrenees.
 - We attended the Procession at sunset.

Breakfast: Catalonia Barcelona Plaza, Barcelona, Spain

Lunch: Punto Estrella Binefar, Spain

Dinner: Grand Hotel Gallia & Lorges, France



Day 15 Monday June 30 Lourdes

LOURDES High: 97°F

Low: 70°F

Sunrise: 6:48AM

Sunset: 9:23PM

Mass: The Grotto of the Apparitions at Massabielle, Lourdes, France. Father Juan concelebrated.

Steps: 14,676

- What I loved about Lourdes was the hospital and loving care for the sick and disabled who we saw were more prevalent at Lourdes than Fatima. Reading about the “purpose of this house” below was all I needed to realize God’s love is profoundly present at Lourdes!

The Accueil Notre-Dame hospital is in the heart of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes to welcome the numerous sick who come to Lourdes for healing.

- Since the early 20th century, pilgrim accommodation centers have been available. Inaugurated in 1997, the Accueil Notre-Dame is a six-floor hospital with five-floors of modern hospital rooms which are can accommodate up to 900 patients.
- The sick or disabled often make a considerable human effort to go to Lourdes, as well as a financial effort.
- At the Accueil Notre-Dame, the mission of the staff and volunteers is to be sure that the fragile pilgrims will not be disappointed. This is why they work hard to make them feel good, but also to ensure that they benefit from maximum comfort

and safety. They are part of an immense chain of solidarity to make sure that everyone, and especially the most vulnerable, can be hosted in Lourdes.

- The purpose of this house is to welcome pilgrims to feel solicitude at all times. Small gifts, a few words, a hand gesture or just a little smile are their way of thanking the employees and volunteers.
- When one describes the Apparitions, the young Bernadette is often presented as a poor, frail and ignorant girl, living in miserable conditions in the Cachot. True, but it was not always this way.
 - When she was born on 7th January, 1844, at the Boly Mill, she was the first child of Francois Soubirous and Louise Casterot.
 - Bernadette grew up in a close-knit family in which she was cherished. Ten years of happiness in the decisive early years of her childhood made her strong and surprisingly emotionally balanced.
 - The descent into the unhappiness which followed could not erase this human richness. Bernadette, at 14 years of age, stood only 4feet 7inches tall. She suffered from bouts of asthma. She had a lively, spontaneous, and generous nature; she was witty and incapable of deception. She was proud, which didn't escape Mother Vauzou in Nevers who described her as having "a closed character, very touchy." Bernadette's faults distressed her and she fought them with energy.
 - She had a strong personality but was unsophisticated. No school for Bernadette; she had to help her aunt Bernarde. No catechism; her memory refused to retain the abstract phrases. At 14, she couldn't read or write, and she suffered at being excluded. Then she reacted...In September 1857, she was sent to Bartrès. In January 1858, she returned to Lourdes. She wanted to make her First Communion. This she did in June that year.
- This is how the Apparitions took place in 1858.
 - On a very hot day we followed Bernadette's footsteps in Lourdes to the places that were familiar to her:
 - We visited the mill where she was born and lived as a young girl, the Moulin de Boly.
 - She lived in the mill with her parents for 10 years. She nicknamed it "the mill of happiness". At the time, it was one of the many water mills located along the "Lapacca" stream and flowing into the Gave de Pau river.
 - Inside, we saw the room where Bernadette was born, the kitchen and the old mill and its millstones (restored in 2012). THE room where it happened!
 - We visited the gloomy Cachot, where she lived with her family including at the time of the apparitions in 1858.
 - During the winter of 1857, her father had to face unemployment. The family was obliged to move to the Cachot or former dungeon (ancient prison until 1824), in one unique dark and cold room of 172 sq feet where the family lived until the fall of 1858.
 - From that place, on the 11th of February of 1858, Bernadette went to the "Massabielle" Cave to collect bones and dry wood and experienced her unique adventure: she saw the Virgin Mary 18 times.
 - In the midst of ordinary daily tasks, going to search for firewood, Bernadette was confronted by a mystery. A sound "like a gust of wind", a light, a presence. Her reaction? She showed her common sense and a remarkable discernment. Believing herself mistaken, she used all her human resources: she looked, she blinked, she tried to understand.

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- At last, she turned to her companions to check their impressions: “Did you see anything?”
- She turned then to God: she took up her rosary.
- She turned to the Church and took advice in confessing to Father Pomian: “I saw something white in the form of a Lady.” Questioned by the commissioner Jacomet, she replied with a confidence and prudence and a firmness which was surprising in a young uneducated girl: “Aquero, I didn’t say ‘the Holy Virgin’... Monsieur, you’ve changed it all.” She reported what she had seen with a detachment, an astonishing freedom: “I’m charged with telling you, not with making you believe.”
- Her accounts of the Apparitions were precise, never adding or retracting anything.
 - At one time, taken aback by the severity of Father Peyramale, she added a word: “Father, the Lady always asks for a chapel....even a very small one.” In his pastoral letter on the Apparitions, Mgr Laurence emphasized “the simplicity, the candour, the modesty of this child...she recounts it without affectation, with a touching innocence...and to all the questions put to her, without hesitation, she gave clear, precise responses, impressed with a strong conviction.”
 - Unaffected both by threats and attempts to bribe her with advantageous offers, “Bernadette’s sincerity is irrefutable: she has not wanted to make a mistake.” “But has she herself been mistaken? Victim of an hallucination?” the bishop wondered. He recalled her calmness, her good sense, the absence in her of any exaltation and also the fact that the Apparitions did not depend on Bernadette. They happened without Bernadette expecting them, and in the fortnight, twice, when Bernadette went to the Grotto, the Lady was not there.
 - Bernadette had to respond to the curious, to admirers, journalists and others, to appear before civil and religious commissions. She found herself thrown into the glare of the news; a “media storm” battered her. She needed patience and humor to stand firm in this storm and to preserve the purity of her testimony. She accepted no payment. “I want to remain poor.” She did not bless the rosaries thrust at her: “I don’t wear a stole.” She did not sell medals: “I’m not a merchant.” And faced with images of herself costing ten ‘sous’: “Ten ‘sous’, that’s all I’m worth!”
 - In these circumstances, life in the Cachot was no longer possible. It was necessary to protect Bernadette. Father Peyramale and the mayor Lacade were in agreement: Bernadette would be admitted as “a sick poor person” to the hospice managed by the Sisters of Nevers. She arrived there on 15th July, 1860.
 - At 16, she learned to read and write. One can still see today, at the Bartres Church, the writing practice strokes she made. Later, she wrote often to her family and even to the Pope! She visited her parents who had been rehoused in the “paternal home”. She looked after the sick, but above all she was seeking her vocation: good for nothing and without a dowry, how was she to become a religious? At last, she joined the Sisters of Nevers “because they did not try to attract me.” From that time on, a truth impressed itself within her spirit: “My mission in Lourdes is finished.” Now, she had to withdraw in order to give all the space to Mary.
- We visited the “Baths” before Mass.

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- One of the most desired activities when visiting Lourdes is, of course, the baths. Beginning in November 2023, the baths were closed to immersion to avoid crowds gathered in one space as well as concerns about the immersion water being changed only once a day .
- The Shrine developed an alternative plan of sprinkling the water on pilgrims, as well as, in our case, having a brief ritual of washing our hands, washing our faces, and drinking some of the water of Lourdes. Our sweet Irish Nun docent frowned when I wiped my hands with my travel towel!
- We toured the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes
 - The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes is a Marian shrine and pilgrimage site dedicated to Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes in the town of Lourdes, Hautes-Pyrénées, France.
 - The Sanctuary includes several religious buildings and monuments around the Grotto of Massabielle, the place where the events of the Lourdes apparitions occurred in 1858. Among them are three basilicas, the Basilica of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, the Rosary Basilica and the Basilica of St. Pius X, respectively known as the upper, lower and underground basilica.
 - The Basilica of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is known widely as the "Upper Church", is a minor basilica within the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes.
 - The Basilica of the Immaculate Conception was initiated in 1866. It is the chapel requested by the Virgin Mary during the 13th apparition: *“Go and tell the priests to build a chapel here and that people should come in procession”* It bears the name revealed by the Virgin to Bernadette: *“Que soy era Immaculada Concepciou”*.
 - The Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary is a minor basilica within the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes.
 - The Rosary Basilica is the third of the churches to be completed on the site (after the Crypt and the Upper Basilica). It was completed in 1899 and was consecrated in 1901. It has a capacity of 1,500 worshippers.
 - The Basilica of Saint Pius X, informally known as the Underground Basilica, is a minor basilica in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. The Basilica is the largest of the sanctuary's churches covering over 14,000 square yards (that's larger than 2 USA football fields) and can seat 5,000 while accommodating up to 25,000 worshippers. It was completed in 1958 in to handle crowds in the winters and rainy seasons.
 - Inaugurated in 1958 for the 100th anniversary of the Apparitions, this underground basilica is an architectural feat by its dimensions and its simple modern, contemporary religious design.
 - Having a central altar, the Basilica has a Blessed Sacrament Chapel with the Tabernacle.
 - Being underground and near the river Gave de Pau, massive pumps continuously pump water from beneath the Basilica. It was flooded once when the river over flowed.
 - We filled our small glass Lourdes bottles from the water taps located on the church outer walls on the way to the Baths.
 - We lit our blue and white candles in prayer in the Chapels of Light “candle huts” across the river Gave from the Grotto for our friends who are sick.

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- Across the street from the Cachot was a small convent where one of the Nuns is a friend of our Escort Guide Jesus. We spent a few minutes with her as she told us about her typical day.
 - The 5 Nuns in residence each morning spent time in community prayer
 - Their order had many convents around Europe.
 - They shared in the daily chores of the convent.
 - Most of them went to work during the day, for example at the Lourdes hospital or working across the street at the Cachot.
 - They watched the news each evening
 - It was obvious that she loved seeing Jesus...he was a good friend!
- We returned to the hotel following the “Blue Line way of Bernadette” painted on the walkways through the village. A few of us gathered with Jesus to have a water, a beer or a wine at the hotel bar to wind up our day.
 - Jesus and I had a “KWAK” the local amber ale...mighty tasty after a HOT day

Breakfast: Grand Hotel Gallia & Lorges, France

Lunch: Café Brancardiers, Lourdes, France

Dinner: Grand Hotel Gallia & Lorges, France

Day 16 Tuesday July 1 Lourdes -Toulouse – Montreal - Atlanta

ATLANTA High: 85°F Low: 73°F Sunrise: 6:30AM Sunset: 8:52PM

Steps: 8,962

- Last-day-driver Adrian took us on 2-hour ride to Toulouse at 4:30AM!
- LV Toulouse, France Airport TLS on flight AC 879 at 10:50AM, ARR Montreal YUL at 12:21PM (dur 6H 55m) (3,672 miles)
- LV Montreal YUL on flight AC 1197 at 7:25PM, ARR Atlanta ATL at 10:59PM (dur 2H 14m) (1,022 miles)
- Arrived at home on Tuesday at 1:30AM! Wake up to Heads down 29+ hours! Sleeping in spurts when you can! That’s a Pilgrimage!
- Home again, home again, jiggety jig!

Breakfast: Bag breakfast from Grand Hotel Gallia & Lorges, France

Lunch: YUL Hurley’s, Dorval, Canada

Dinner: On plane: chicken was surprisingly very good.

St. Andrew, Roswell, GA

2025 Pilgrimage to Portugal, Spain, and France

Pilgrims in front of The Santiago de Compostela Cathedral

Father Juan Anzora, Joan Ciofi, Denise Cooper, Deacon Brian Edwards, Cathey Edwards, Pat Fraser, Deacon Roger Fraser, Melina Latham, America Maldonado, Margaret O'Malley, Kathy Parker, Michelle Pittman, Deacon Ed Rubio, Luisa Rubio, Mary Sue Shulin, Jane Vaughn



**June 19, 2025 Portugal Thursday The Body and Blood of Christ
Mass at The Church of St. Stephen, Santarem
Father Juan and Deacon Roger (homily)**

Reading 1 GN 14:18-20

In those days, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Responsorial Psalm PS 110:1, 2, 3, 4

R. (4b) You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

The LORD said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool."

R. You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

The scepter of your power the LORD will stretch forth from Zion: "Rule in the midst of your enemies."

R. You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek. "Yours is princely power in the day of your birth, in holy splendor; before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you."

R. You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

The LORD has sworn, and he will not repent: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

R. You are a priest for ever, in the line of Melchizedek.

Reading 2 1 COR 11:23-26

Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. "In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Gospel LK 9:11B-17

Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves. "They replied, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people. "Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty." They did so and made them all sit down. Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves." On this Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ we must recognize we are the Body of Christ, the Church, giving others food by sharing His love and mercy with the world. How will they know God's love if we don't act? Let's begin again our Christian service with a prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer because it starts with praise of God before our petitions. So, today I offer a prayer of praise before the words from a favorite song...it's a prayer to restore compassionate care for the poor, the hated, the needy, the hopeless, the sick, the abused, The vulnerable, the innocent, the unborn and their parents, the immigrants, the refugees, the undocumented, the homeless, the marginalized, the LGBTQ, those with special needs...for the other...we pray to restore compassionate care for living creatures and mother earth...and, for all mankind, even those without a heart to serve others.

Lord Jesus may our lips praise you, may our lives proclaim your goodness, may our works give you honor and may our voices celebrate you forever and ever.

Dear Lord,
Maybe it's true what they say about
Maybe we can't make the ends meet
Maybe we'll all have to do without
Maybe this world's just incomplete
Well, we all look for truth in this life
Searching with hope inside
If it's so hard living in a desperate world
We all do the best that we can

Some people see a change
Some will remain the same
Others will live their lives under the gun
Some see the road as clear
Some say the end is here
They say it's a hopeless fight
But I say, we gotta try
Oh yes, we've got to try

Maybe it's too much to think about
Maybe there ain't nothin' left to say
But if our time is really runnin' out
Then this ain't no time to run away
Cause we're destined to look

For the truth in this life
Searching with tearful eyes
If it's so hard livin' in a desperate world
Then tell me Lord, why was I born?

Some people see a change
Some will remain the same
Others will live their lives under the gun
Some see the road as clear
Some say the end is here
They say it's a hopeless fight
But I say, we gotta try
Oh yes, we've got to try

Someone's tryin'
Someone's cryin' out
While we live under the gun
Someone's livin'
Someone's givin' up
But I say, we gotta try

And the Church says, Amem

June 22, 2025 Portugal 12th Sunday in OT
Carmel of St. Teresa Church Coimbra, Portugal.
Father Juan and Deacon Roger (homily)

First Reading Zechariah 12:10–11; 13:1

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of mercy and supplication, so that when they look on him whom they have thrust through, they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and they will grieve for him as one grieves over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. On that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to purify from sin and uncleanness.

Responsorial Psalm 63:2–6,8–9

O God, you are my God it is you I seek! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, In a land parched, lifeless, and without water. I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips shall ever praise you! I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name. My soul shall be sated as with choice food, with joyous lips my mouth shall praise you! You indeed are my savior, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.

Second Reading Galatians 3:26–29

For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise.

Gospel Luke 9:18-24

Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'" Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Messiah of God." He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

The words in today's Gospel must have been difficult for the disciples to hear: *"The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."* and *"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* These words are no easier for us to hear today. I wonder how we take these words to heart every day. I have to confess I don't dwell on them myself. It's so easy for us to go to Mass, to pray every day, to worship God...But, taking up our cross and following Jesus, that is the hard part. Following Christ is not easy!

Following Christ begins with the Eucharist, the "Source and Summit of our Christian Life"....But we must remember that this sacrament is the culmination both of God's actions and our actions...God blessing the world in Christ's actions, and our actions not only of worship, but most importantly, our actions of sharing His love, mercy and forgiveness with the world.

So you see, Eucharist can be called a verb, it is not just a passive noun. It's THE action of Christ truly present in our lives. Actually, there are four actions: Take, Bless, Break, and Give. These sum up and embody Jesus. These are the actions we are commanded to do in Jesus' memory and to do when we follow Him...nothing is left to chance.

In a few minutes at the Presentation of the Gifts, our gifts of bread and wine are Taken. They represent the gifts of Jesus' life. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the gifts we offer are Blessed – the bread, the wine, being Blessed to become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Fraction Rite the bread is Broken and the cup poured out. In Communion the Body and Blood are Given that we might become truly who we receive...Given by Christ to benefit the whole world. So you see, Eucharist is not some-thing, Eucharist is some-one acting in our lives...Christ Himself!

But, you know we are not merely watching the priest do these actions. We are acting as well and then glorifying God with our lives. We are remembering Christ's offering in a very Jewish way: it's as if we were there at the one sacrifice for all, not merely recalling or recreating His sacrifice. We are offering ourselves to be Taken by God, Blessed by God, Broken open and poured out by God, and then Given by God in love to the whole world. Remember last

Thursday when Jesus said, *“Give them some food yourself?”* We do this by joining ourselves to Christ so that we will be transformed into His hands and feet throughout the world. As St. Augustine said, *“Be what you can see, and receive what you are.”* ... *“Be what you can see, and receive what you are.”*

Truly this is amazing. God loves us so much that He invites us to join our lives to His. We don't come to celebrate Eucharist to merely get something. We come so we can BECOME someone who we are most deeply called to be. We celebrate His Body and Blood to put on the mind and heart of Christ. That is following Christ! You know, if we ever say about Mass, “I don't get anything out of it,” we are missing the point entirely...people, we are here not only to receive something...we are here to give ourselves to be changed by Christ Himself.

Eucharist is infinitely more than a moment when a bell rings during the Eucharistic Prayer. It is infinitely more than a private “me and God-in-the-host” moment. It is infinitely more than adoration and devotion as those are traditionally understood.

When Eucharist is understood as these four actions that begin with the Presentation of the Gifts, it becomes obvious what it means to be the Body of Christ, the Church. The gifts are presented by and then to those of us who are fully initiated in this Communion with God. And, we present our lives to be offered with Christ, and then we receive back our transformed selves...We proclaim our AMEN realizing who we are becoming and the responsibility that this entails! This is what full, conscious and active participation in our Eucharistic celebration means.

Eucharist is a choice to do something...to take action...to fully, consciously and actively participate in offering ourselves to follow Christ...to be Taken, Blessed, Broken open and Given out in love every, single, day...to everyone. To celebrate Eucharist is an amazing and radical life changing activity because the truth is, God will change us in ways beyond our imaginations!

As St. Augustine said, *“the Amen’ we say at Mass must ring true in our lives.”* Imagine how our Church and our world might be changed if we all participated this way!

A few years ago, Pat and I spent the weekend at my sister’s house on Lake Hartwell. We ended up attending their non-denominational church service. As we were leaving, I mentioned how I thought it was a very “Catholic” sermon Pastor Mark gave. Especially the part where we are commanded to care for the widows, the single moms, and care for the orphans, and care for the sojourners, the immigrants, and care for the poor. “Now I know what you are thinking,” he said. “Pastor Mark this sounds like a very liberal agenda. But I have to stop you right there. God’s commandments are neither liberal or conservative. Let me tell you if we are thinking that way, we are bringing God’s way of thinking down to our human way...a misguided way. Pure and simple, God’s way is love, not a political agenda.” Well, that was a very Catholic Social Teachings sermon if I ever heard one. But, what really surprised me was how we had several brief discussions about Pastor Mark’s sermon during the rest of the day... You know, I can’t help but think how we glorified God that weekend by sharing Christ’s love, mercy and forgiveness in moments when we were vulnerable telling our stories and even sharing how we have been offended by loved ones (I mean, how Eucharist can you get!)

How Blessed we are to be called to this table. How Blessed we are to be able to celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ so frequently, and to taste the Kingdom of God. How Blessed we are to be the Body of Christ carrying our cross, and Giving His love, mercy and forgiveness to the whole world!

June 29, 2025 Portugal Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles, Mass during the Day
The Chapel of San Miguel de los Santos in Barcelona, Spain
Father Juan and Deacon Roger (homily)

Reading I, Acts 12:1-11

In those days, King Herod laid hands upon some members of the Church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also... It was the feast of Unleavened Bread... He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the Church was fervently being made to God on his behalf.

On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter, secured by double chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while outside the door guards kept watch on the prison. Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, "Get up quickly." The chains fell from his wrists. The angel said to him, "Put on your belt and your sandals." He did so.

Then he said to him, "Put on your cloak and follow me." So he followed him out, not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter recovered his senses and said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting."

Responsorial Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (5) The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.

Glorify the LORD with me, let us together extol his name. I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame. When the poor one called out, the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Taste and see how good the LORD is; blessed the man who takes refuge in him.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.

Reading II 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

I, Paul, am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.

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The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly Kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Today we are celebrating the two great apostles who had a lot in common, yet were completely different in temperament, education, professional upbringing, and church role.

Both Peter and Paul had experienced several miracles of rescue. In today's 1st reading, we see how Peter was rescued from Herod's imprisonment as earnest prayers were made for him by the Church at Jerusalem. In the 2nd reading we see Paul's own testimonies too. For us on this Pilgrimage, it is interesting to note that between 62 and 65 AD, Paul brought the Gospel to Spain, which was his stated intention in his letter to the Romans. In the final analysis, both apostles experienced horrific martyrdom; Peter was crucified in Rome upside down, and Paul was beheaded in Rome, a death more suitable for a Roman citizen...both were killed by Nero.

I remember in 2004 when we visited Rome for our son and daughter-in-law's wedding. I discovered what it means to determine God's will in our lives and how sometimes even when we are very self-absorbed how God grabs our attention. On a tour of Christian Rome when we were visiting the great Basilicas and on our way to the Catacombs, I asked our guide if we could visit "the chapel of Quo Vadis". He said it wasn't much of a church to see, but immediately understood when I explained that I was a Deacon in the Catholic Church. The church is a small chapel-size Church dating back 1200 years on the old Appian Way...near the St. Sebastian and St. Calysta catacombs. It is built on the spot where Peter had a vision of Jesus when he was fleeing for his life from Nero. Peter said to Jesus "domine, quo vadis?" or "Lord, where are you going?" Legend has it that Jesus replied, "*I am returning to Rome to be crucified again.*" With that Peter knew what he had to do, he embraced death and returned to Rome to lead, and be led where he didn't want to go. In the Church there are paintings on either side of the altar. On the right a painting of Christ crucified. On the left, one of St. Peter crucified upside down. He demanded to be crucified this way, because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus.

On this Sunday, may we follow the great apostles, Sts. Peter and Paul, because they are examples of how to embrace God's will in our lives. And, they show us what a blessing we have been given to be on this pilgrimage. And the Church says, Amen!