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Clergy SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TEACHES, INSPIRES

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Summer finds most of us traveling for other purposes than business.

I have just returned from Slovakia, in central Europe, where I spent time with the European half of my family. One of my favorite types of travel, and included in this trip, is pilgrimage.



Edwards

Pilgrimage is both an ancient and a universal human experience.

It entails moving, both physically and spiritually, from where we normally abide to a place of spiritual significance for our faith community and ourselves.

The Christian experience of pilgrimage is rooted in that of our Jewish ancestors in their 40-year pilgrimage from slavery to freedom in the promised land, in the 40-day journey of Elijah to the mountain of God's revelation to the three annual pilgrimages made to Jerusalem in the fall, spring and summer.

Luke's gospel indicates that Jesus, Mary and Joseph made the Passover pilgrimage every year.

For me, this summer's pilgrimage included the annual visits to the parish church in our village where my great-grandparents were baptized and married.

This is the place where my own Christian faith had its rooting.

I also visited the Slovak national pilgrimage site in Levoca and the famous shrine in Czestochowa, Poland.

Both are places where our people fiercely hung on to their faith in spite of Communist oppression. A visit to Auschwitz moved me deeply.

I sat on a stone wall and prayed for a long time at the site of the unloading platform where countless Jews were led to death.

I stood in awe at the cell where the Polish priest, St. Maximilian Kolbe, was starved to death, having offered his life in exchange for another condemned man.

Do you have to make a physical pilgrimage to encounter God?

Of course not!

Christian faith is clear; God's grace and mercy are available to us in Christ at any time and in any place.

What's the value of a pilgrimage? It helps us humans, who are always on the move, to go to a place where God has revealed himself, where he has touched our world and us in a significant way.

As we break the ordinary movement of our lives to make pilgrimage, to pay attention to God's action in human life, we find the inspiration and the encouragement to go on with our life's pilgrimage to the kingdom of God.

You've never made a pilgrimage? It's easy.

Find a place in your life where God has touched you, perhaps the church where you grew up or some other place where you had a deep spiritual experience, and go there.

Spend some time in quiet prayer and reflection.

Open your heart and your soul once again to the God who created you, who loves you, who sustains your daily journey.

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