

In 2008 I was asked to be a chaplain on an Archdiocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem, we stayed at a nice hotel called The Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center. It's right across the street from the Old City. The weather had been very hot – over 100 degrees. I was tired that first night we arrived at the hotel from Galilee, so I was looking forward to some air-conditioned sleep.

But just as I went to bed, I heard a horrible noise outside my window. It was a pressure washer. Some workmen were pressure washing the side of the building. I was three stories up. They were on a big ladder – and they had a bright spotlight to help them. The light came right through my window. As you can imagine – sleep was kind of difficult! It went on for hours. The workmen went back and forth across the building, spraying the water on the windows as well as the outer walls – sometimes nearer and sometimes farther away. But still there. Until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. I was not happy!

The next morning, I saw the priest in charge of the hotel. I went up to him. “What’s the deal with the all-night pressure washing!?” He just looked at me and asked, “Father, you’re on pilgrimage. Why do you think you should be comfortable and have everything as you desire?” Well . . . that sounded like a prepared answer! (Obviously, he had answered that question before). But – he was . . . right.

Pilgrimage. What is it to be a pilgrim? Some of us have made pilgrimages in life. There’s the Holy Land, of course, or Rome, Lourdes. Many are once again following the mediaeval Camino route to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. Maybe we have taken a shorter pilgrimage to a local church as part of a Jubilee year. Pilgrimages are part of the Catholic devotional life.

But, in fact, the entire life of a Christian should be a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage has several characteristics. It is a deliberate journey to some holy place for the sake of God. The pilgrimage route and goal are not up to the pilgrims but given to them to follow. So, it has a

goal and end in mind. A pilgrimage is taken along a path or way often marked with clear landmarks to guide one. Not always, but often, a pilgrimage is taken as part of a group of fellow believers - a communal exercise. It should involve prayer – individual prayer along the way – common prayer with fellow pilgrims.

Doesn't that sound like the life of a disciple of Christ? In our Gospel today we have Jesus telling several brief parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, which He compares to the finding of a treasure and a merchant searching for a pearl of great price – worth everything. Jesus wants us to realize that this life is a treasure hunt. And He is that priceless treasure we're created to look for, whether we realize it or not.

As with an earthly pilgrimage, so in life we have a destination in mind. That goal is priceless -- union with Jesus. It's a journey that has ups and downs. We get tired on life's journey. (There are all-night pressure washers in wait). To make it through, we need prayer and a

community. And the road to heaven has markers and signs to guide us to the treasure – the commandments, scriptures, spiritual practices that past pilgrims have left along the path.

But do we understand our life is a pilgrimage? Because there's another way to see the journey. I think many of us go through life with the outlook, not of a pilgrim, but of a "tourist." There is nothing wrong with tourism in its place. But a tourist is very different from a pilgrim. Tourists travel where they want to go – spurred by their own interests, pleasure, and needs. They seek to satisfy their curiosity or distract themselves from boredom. They may have a goal, but it's often simply to relax or have new experiences. And the tourist's plans and purpose arise, not from a relationship with, and under the direction of God, but from within that person. Again, there is nothing wrong with any of this as an occasional part of one's life. But it is not the vision of life that seeks the Kingdom.

I've lived as both as tourist and pilgrim – as can be captured in my relationship to a single building – St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. When I was 20, I dropped out of the UW for a while and backpacked through Europe. When I got to Rome the first thing I did after finding a place to sleep – was go to St. Peter's. I was an atheist at the time, but I wasn't going to miss St. Peter's. So off I went. St. Peter's was packed with people but lived up to the hype. It was huge. Hey there's the Pieta! I was glad I visited, but God wasn't the draw.

In 2001 I went back to Rome – this time as a young priest. It was a very different experience. This time I went to St. Peter's at 7:00 AM . . . so I could celebrate mass. I got there early so I could go down to the small altar that is placed directly against the wall separating the small chapel from the tomb of St. Peter found in the old Roman cemetery archeologists excavated under the basilica. This time I was a pilgrim and I consciously walked with God during those days. I

was aware of the size and beauty of the building, but they weren't the draw.

Change is possible – that's what a conversion means – learning that life is a pilgrimage to Christ. Our lives are often complicated – a mix of motives. We may be both tourists and pilgrims at different times. Remember my Jerusalem experience. I was literally on pilgrimage with the archbishop – but I had the mindset – at least that morning – of a tourist. It was about my desires.

But life's not – about our desires. It's about finding the treasure, the pearl of great price - Christ. So, let us each ask ourselves, "Am I living my life today more as a pilgrim or a tourist?"