

June 7, 2023



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

Image by Christine Sponchia from Pixabay

A PILGRIM'S DISPATCH: GETTING THERE

By Julie Mussché

Pilgrimage

"...pilgrimage involves both the places themselves and the practices engaged in on the way to and at them. They also point to a tension that often exists in pilgrimage between movement and place, and about whether the essence of pilgrimage is located in travel to a sacred place or primarily the actions engaged in when there...."

"In essence, both journey and place can be key elements in pilgrimage...."

PILGRIMAGE: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION, IAN READER

Reflection

When I think back to the pilgrimages of the ancient times, they always seem to entail efforts to raise resources and support as well as inspire the faithful to

take risks beyond the ordinary. A pilgrimage could be treacherous, over unknown paths and filled with dangers and challenges, and could literally take months or years to reach the sacred destination. Often travel was by foot. This reality speaks to the origins of the labyrinth, a spiritual quest and practice intended to represent a pilgrim's journey for those who were unable or without the means to venture out beyond their town or village.

Pilgrimage journeys today are much more expedient -- and at the same time there are impediments such as resources, time available, the vagaries of modern travel, and national conflicts. For those leading pilgrimages, there is the planning, preparation and stamina required to realize the actuality. Our journey of pilgrimage to Le Puy was certainly faster and less complicated than that of days of yore, and yet was not for the faint-hearted. Friends and family bid us farewell and safe travels the morning of our departure.

The first leg involved air travel of about thirteen hours with one connection to Toulouse from Amsterdam, and with transport by coach to our first destination, Carcassonne, France. Altogether, a pleasant albeit lengthy trip. Once settled in our temporary abode, we had time to explore the city's hilly citadel and to become familiar with the sacred nature of this place. Significant for its location, Carcassonne vibrated with heroism and chivalry echoing its foundation back to the first century.

The fortress city developed and was influenced over time through what geographers might call site and situation. The hill Carcassonne sits on offers a point of defense by virtue of elevation that was further fortified in the 13th century by layers of concentric walls surrounding the town center where the land owner resided. It was, and is, situated at a crossroads of trade and commerce, a "shatter belt" of French and Spanish cultures, with contributions from warring invaders such as the Visigoths and Moors. As a strategic point, many battles ensued at this location throughout history, but the city withstood all attempts to conquer it.

Like other similar peripheral regions in the world, Carcassonne is a centrifugal point of movement of diverse peoples and cultures, a place away from the mainstream monarchies and ruling centers, where innovations and radical ideas flourished. This was where the Cathars emerged with ideas of spiritual equality and collaboration, and where they perished through the efforts of the Inquisition. Overlaid by ongoing conflict, disparity of wealth and power, poverty, hunger, and disease, survival was stark and tested. Into this world was born in 1610 Fr. Jean-Pierre Medaille, founder of Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph. How would our band of pilgrims encounter him and God along the

way? More to follow.



The walled city of Carcassonne.
Photo by Julie Mussch é

For Pondering

- How do you feel time and place influence spiritual context and

understanding, and our relationship with God?

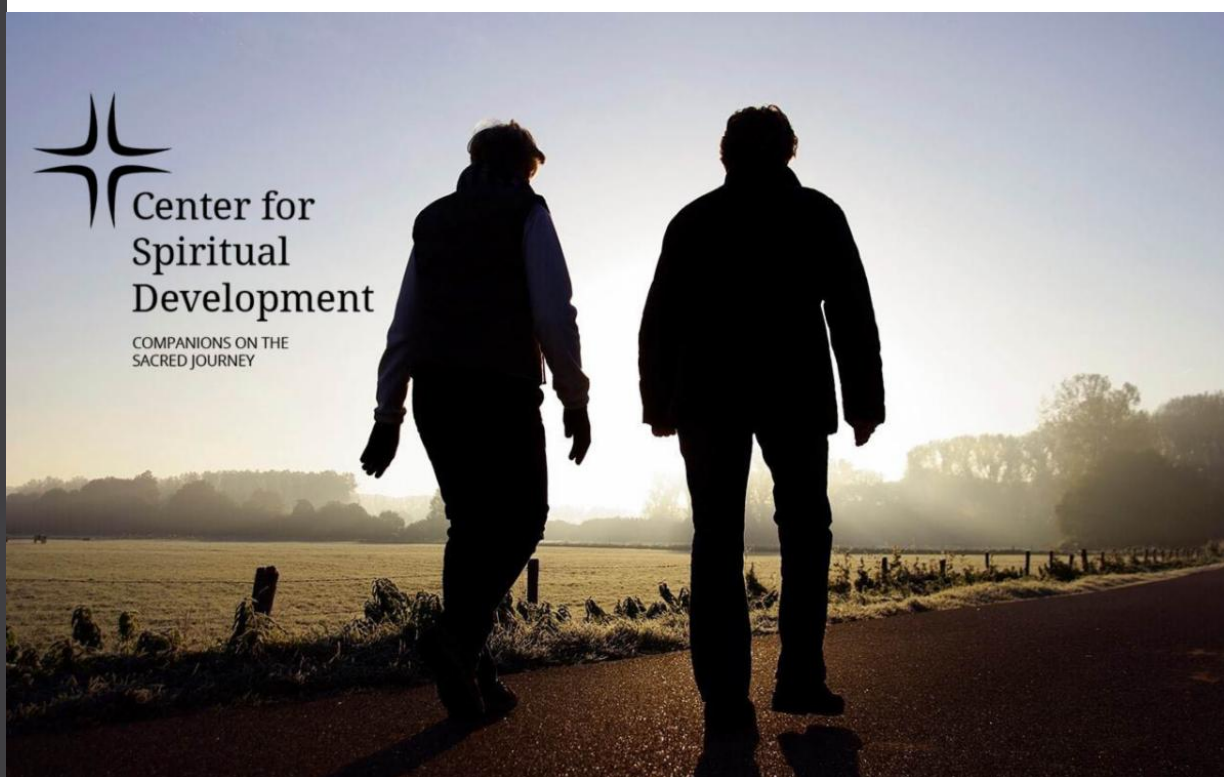
- Where have you encountered God on the margins?

For Prayer

*Spirit God,
who lights up the margins of life with grace and inspiration,
guide my steps and open my eyes and heart
to travel with the intention of finding you in all things.*

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