

Written by Bishop Roman Danylak, September 2001

Reflections on Pilgrimage – 2001

Garabandal - Limpias - Covadonga - San Toribio

The Trip

For a while it looked as if we would not be going on this pilgrimage in this year, the first of the new millennium. We had begun our planning somewhat late. We had only our mailing and phone lists and our website, Workers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (<http://www.ourlady.ca>), to advertise. The initial responses were few; and even those initially interested had their own schedules. People wanted to extend their holidays after the pilgrimage. How to work this into the airline schedules? These were difficult to manipulate when we finally found an agent that was willing to work with us at the best price. Michael and Helen were ready to throw in the towel. And from across the Atlantic, from my residence in Rome, I would urge them to hang on. And then the first miracle happened. When they announced to the people regularly attending the Wednesday prayers and healing Mass at the Cathedral of the Transfiguration (Slovak Greek Catholic in Unionville, Canada) many of those present perked up. They were not on the Internet and they weren't on our regular mailing lists. The response was overwhelming. In a weekend we had twenty-six who wanted to go. They came up with their deposits. The final booking arrangements were made with Lufthansa/Air Canada. And in the last minute I changed my traveling plans to return to Toronto to join the group.



We left – twenty-three of us - for Frankfurt, Bilbao and Garabandal. Joanna from Poland, her husband, Janusz and daughter, Amanda, had to make it on their own to Garabandal. They rented a car, visited Lourdes and Fatima and finally joined up with us in Garabandal. As we made our excursions in Spain, Maria from California joined us. Maria was born in Mexico. She had migrated years earlier to California, had married, raised a family and worked as a waitress in a lower class restaurant. She had made it to Garabandal through the generosity of a friend who invited her to travel with her. Once there, Maria became one of us. Like each of our twenty-six, she had her story to tell. And during our prayer gatherings several times she rested in the Spirit to experience powerful healings. She also became our Spanish interpreter.

Now for the travelogue:

The price was right. The flight arrangements were the best. The waiting time at airports was minimal. Everything was just on schedule. We left Toronto Saturday evening and arrived in Frankfurt the following Sunday morning. We found the Catholic chapel, but there was not enough time to celebrate the Sunday Mass. Our flight to Bilbao was leaving in 90 minutes. When we arrived in Bilbao about 1.30 p.m., we picked up our bags and the chartered bus was waiting to take us.

The first stop was Limpias, a small Spanish village, 30 miles east of Santander. Michael had found out about it in the *Garabandal Magazine*. We arrived in Limpias after 3 p.m. I went to check whether the church was open and soon found the custodian in charge. He called the local pastor to request permission to celebrate the Eucharist. We celebrated the Sunday Mass at the principal altar, before the remarkable crucifix of Limpias. The custodian warmly welcomed our group after Mass in the adjoining religious store.

Limpias



In 1919 Limpias had 1,300 inhabitants. The simple Gothic Church was unexceptional, save for the life-size marvelous wood sculpture of the crucified Christ, the work of a seventeenth century master, Pedro de Mena. It was brought from Cadiz in southern Spain to Limpias around 1776. The local faithful revered this “Christ of the Agony” during the nineteenth century. With the decline of population – many villagers had moved to larger towns – the pastor be compelled to think of closing this church as a parish. Before making his decision he invited a team of Capuchin friars to preach a mission in March 1919.

As Fr. Agathangelo, OFM Cap., preached, groups of young girls began to approach his companion Fr. Jalon to report that they had seen the face of Jesus come alive. Christ had closed his eyes on the cross. Over the ensuing months more and more people praying reported many other phenomena they had witnessed: the eyes of Jesus moving, following individuals as they moved before the crucifix. On October 26, 1919, some witnessed scenes from the agony of Christ. Among these was a medical student who described his own experiences as he saw the figure of the crucified Christ come alive, opening his eyes, bowing his head and smiling at the people. Several doctors testified to having witnessed a variety of phenomena.

As the ‘Cristo’ looked at them, His expression showed blame and anger or satisfaction - depending on the doctors’ thoughts and decisions – pain and suffering. They saw Him turn His head, move His eyes, bleed and open His mouth. The phenomena continued over the following year. The parish church continued to remain open and has since become a shrine for local pilgrim groups.

Village of Garabandal

We left Limpias after 4 p.m. and continued our drive past Santander, along the southern coastline of the Bay of Biscay, admiring the rugged and natural beauty of the Basque countryside. We entered the Cantabrian mountain range, in which Garabandal lies nestled. We arrived about 8 p.m. Paquita was waiting with supper for the hungry, tired, but grateful pilgrims. Our pilgrims were assigned their living quarters; some stayed in

the posada of Serafin, the late husband of Paquita; the others went elsewhere throughout the village. Michael, Helen and I were the house guests of Beville and Helen Outlaw, an American Catholic family that had built this refuge in Garabandal; who commute between Garabandal and their home in Florida. Every evening our group would gather in their home for community prayers and our healing services (yes and there were healings). At the end we celebrated Mass in the conference room before our final departure at 7 a.m. Saturday, May 19.



Our daily schedule between Monday and Friday began with breakfast in the Posada of Serafin and Paquita. We usually had our lunches and suppers there as well (see photo album). Mass was usually celebrated in the local parish church of San Sebastian, except for the Thursday in Covadonga. Monday morning Helen led our entire group through the village streets, retracing the events of the visitation of the Blessed Virgin to the homes of the four young girls, their families and the village folk. Through the day the pilgrims prayed the Stations of the Cross, or the rosary, as a group or individually. They would follow the stations erected along the stony path to the pines. At the pines the group gathered for prayer. Towards the end of our stay we visited the local cemetery to pray at the grave site of the late Serafin, husband of Paquita and brother of Conchita Gonzalez. He had died last year; and is now buried in the village cemetery.

Friday evening we gathered in the Outlaws' conference room; the bishop led us in healing prayer, and then prayed over each one individually, anointing with holy oil. Following this anointing, the pilgrims venerated the medallion of Our Lady of Garabandal. Michael, Helen and Maria C. continued to pray over every one individually. It was this evening that Mexican Maria, who joined us on our various outings, rested in the Spirit (one of many pilgrims who also had this experience), and received special healings of soul and body.

Catholic Spain: Covadonga



Tuesday morning we traveled to Covadonga and the Cave Sanctuary, about 2 hours bus ride from Garabandal to pray in the principal shrine and to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Cave chapel that afternoon at the altar of the venerated and ancient statue of Our Lady.

I had first visited Covadonga and the shrine of Our Lady in 1997. As our bus passed an ancient bridge with the cross of Asturia I was surprised as I looked at it. This cross of Asturia is a copy of an ancient cross of the sixth century, venerated in Rome in the Scala Sancta, the Holy Stairs: the ancient jeweled cross presented to this shrine by the Emperor Justinian. And as I continued to read the story of the heroic defense of Christianity against the massive forces of Islam that had invaded Spain, I was more deeply moved. This second visit moved me even more deeply as I continued to reflect on the profound historical and spiritual significance of the victory of Don Pelayo here in Covadonga against the armies of the Moors that had invaded and occupied Spain.

Speaking to Fr. Stefano Gobbi and the Marian Movement of priests on June 17, 1989, the Blessed Virgin explained at length the contemporary dangers to the Church. She spoke about the mystery of iniquity, the red dragon, the black beast and the antichrist, whose name is 666. The Virgin expounded on the several

implications of this apocalyptic number. 'The number of the beast. 666, represents in the first place the year *'six hundred and sixty-six*. In this period of history the antichrist was manifested through the phenomenon of Islam, which directly denies the mystery of the divine Trinity and the divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Islamism with its military force broke loose everywhere, destroying all the ancient Christian communities of Asia Minor and beyond, in the latter half of the seventh century. The ancient Roman and Christian communities in the near east were engulfed in the deluge that followed, and disappeared almost completely' The Arab expansion swept across the northern coast of Africa and entered into Spain.

Spain had become a part of the Roman Empire under emperor Augustus, at the beginning of the first century of the Christian era. It was in this period that Spain was also evangelized, and the Christian Church established. A legend narrates the apostolic mission of the Apostle James the lesser, who died a martyr in Jerusalem in 43 A.D. The shrine of Santiago' (James) of Compostella is the national shrine of Catholic Spain.

In the fifth century Hispano Roman Spain, was invaded by the 'barbarian' tribes from Asia: the Alans, the Vandals and other nomad tribes. They soon mixed with the older population. The dominant groups in Spain were the Visigoths (west Goths) who rapidly established their rule over the country by the end of the sixth century. Over the next two centuries the old and new inhabitants began to form the ethnic substance of a new nation. This process continued in the crucible of conquest by the Moors.

In 711 a. d. the Arab conquerors established a new Islamic kingdom in Spain. They became the unquestioned leaders. Both Christian bishops and princes submitted to them. This Moorish presence continued until the end of the fifteenth century.

The only one to resist this initial onslaught of Islam was Don Pelayo. King Rodrigo had perished in the early part of the invasion. Pelayo with a small band of knights and soldiers retreated to the dark hills and mountains of Asturia. Their little army hid for seven years preparing for the final battle. In 718 the Moors sent an entire army into Asturia with orders to destroy Don Pelayo and his men. Pelayo retired with his men to the sanctuary of the Madonna, the cave of Covadonga. Pelayo spent the night in prayer and solemnly vowed to win a victory or be ready to perish in the fray. When the Moors appeared with their immense army Pelayo and his men seemed doomed. Arrows darkened the sky, and the mountain air was filled with darts and lances. Suddenly the contenders realized that these weapons did not reach them but merely bounced off the rocks. The Moors began to flee in confusion. Pursued by this small Christian band, the enemy made for the safety of the plains at Mont Auceva. A tremendous rainstorm broke over the hills; the river Deva overflowed the banks, and a landslide of mud crushed the Saracen army.

After the victory of 718, Spain was not yet saved. The greater part of the country remained for centuries under Moorish domination. Nevertheless this victory had the greatest significance for the future of the peninsula and for Christianity. Don Pelayo, chief of the Visigoths, became King of Asturia and united the remaining Visigoths and the Hispano-Roman tribes.

Deeper Significance

What was the deeper significance of this battle? It was the first resistance to the onslaught of Islam and the first victory for the Christians against this immense force that threatened to destroy Christian Europe as it had succeeded in destroying the Christian Church of Palestine and all of Asia Minor in the mid east. It was through the intervention of the Blessed Virgin that this victory was achieved. This victory of Pelayo and his courageous men stemmed the tide of the onslaught. Over the ensuing centuries Spain continued to push back the Moors, until the final push during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella at the end of the fifteenth century.

Spain was saved for the Church. This struggle of the Church and the Christian nations was to continue into the seventeenth century. The Christian victory was finally sealed with the victory of the Christian fleet at the battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571; and ultimately with the victory of the Christian armies under Jan Sobieski of Poland and the Cossack army of Kulchitsky against the Turkish army at the Battle of Vienna in 1683.

666 indicated once expresses the year 666, *six hundred and sixty-six*. The threat to the early Church with the rise and spread of Islam. 666 indicated twice, expresses the year 1332, *thirteen hundred and thirty-two*. In this period the antichrist is manifested through a radical attack on the Christian faith, on the Word of God. Through the philosophers who begin to give exclusive value to science and then to reason, there is a gradual tendency to constitute human intelligence alone as the sole criterion of truth. The trial and the threat of antichrist continued for a thousand years. In the first period. So does the error and threat of rationalism and secularism continue to the present day.

666 indicated thrice, for the third time, expresses the year 1998. In this period of history, Freemasonry, assisted by its ecclesiastical form, will succeed in its great design: that of setting up an idol to put in the place of Christ and His Church. A false christ and a false church.... and ultimately the antichrist. You have thus arrived at the peak of the purification, of the great tribulation and of the apostasy...' (Cf. Fr. S. Gobbi: Our Lady Speaks to Her Beloved Priests, n. 407)

San Toribio



Our last pilgrimage on Thursday was to the Monastery of Saint Toribio to venerate the true relic of the Sacred Cross.

In the heart of the area of Liebana is the place where Toribio, a monk returning to Spain after years spent in the Holy Land (530-540) chose to build a monastery in seclusion from the world. It was here that Saint Toribio was laid to rest, and the relics of the Cross were kept. According to tradition the bishop had brought these relics from Jerusalem to be preserved within Christian territory. The present chapel of the Cross, the 'Lignum Crucis', in which the reliquary of the Cross is kept, was built at the beginning of the 18th century.

It was in this chapel that our pilgrims chanted the ancient hymn: 'We bow down before your cross, o Christ, and we praise your holy resurrection.' The bishop blessed everybody with the relic of the true cross (See story of Naomi's knee), and invited everyone to venerate and kiss the relic, which was placed on a sideboard. The Franciscan Father then gave us souvenir holy cards, pictures of this relic, that were touched to the true cross. Everyone was able to obtain a third class relic of the true cross.

Again my thoughts spanned the centuries to the year 326 a. d. when Saint Helen, mother of the emperor Constantine, and Saint Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem began their search for the true cross. Under the emperor Hadrian the old city was leveled and a new city to honour the emperor and the pagan deities Jupiter and Venus built over the ancient ruins. Instructed by an elderly Christian who remembered as a child hearing from Saint Polycarp the testimony which Saint Polycarp in his childhood had himself heard from Saint John, the Beloved disciple, that the three crosses had been cast into a deep well near the place of Golgotha, the empress ordered the search.

When they found the well they lowered a man to search. He found the three crosses. These were raised to

the surface. But which of the three was the cross of Christ. The holy bishop stopped a funeral procession that was passing on its way to the cemetery. He had the body of the deceased brought to the three crosses. Seeking divine guidance, he touched the crosses to the cadaver. It was only when the body was touched to the third cross that the dead man came to life; and spontaneously all present burst into a chant of praise: 'Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us adore our Holy Lord Jesus, who alone is without sin. We bow to Your Cross, o Christ, and we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection. You are our God, and besides you we recognize no other, and we invoke Your Name. Come all you faithful and let us bow to the holy Resurrection of Christ. For through the cross joy has come to all the world Ever praising the Lord, let us extol His Resurrection, for having endured the crucifixion, He has vanquished death by His death.'

Back Home

Saturday morning we boarded the bus to return to Bilbao. There were only minutes to spare before the lift-off. Then Frankfurt and Toronto that same evening. Baggage claim, customs and our friends and family, and home.

***ED. NOTE:** Yes, it was a special pilgrimage ([see Trip in Pictures](#)) and from *The Workers of Our Lady*, we wish to thank Bishop Roman Danylak for being our spiritual guide and friend on this trip. In addition, we wish to thank him for his beautiful homilies, the time he spent with each one of us and also for this article of "Reflections..." We hope that through this article more of our friends will be able to join us in future pilgrimages.*