

PILGRIM COMPANION

September 20-30, 2026

A JOURNEY OF DIVINE MERCY

WITH FR. VINCENT, FR. JC, AND DEACON ANDY



In the School of Divine Mercy



Name: _____

Our Lady of Mercy, Park Ridge, NJ



A LETTER TO OUR FELLOW PILGRIMS



Dear Fellow Pilgrims,

As our departure for Poland draws near, I find myself increasingly grateful and excited. Soon we will leave the familiar behind and begin walking together through a land marked by deep faith, tremendous suffering, courage, beauty, and mercy. Fr. Vincent, Deacon Andy, and I are looking forward to sharing this journey with you.

This companion was prepared to help us enter each day with prayer and attention. It is not another assignment to complete or a guidebook that must be read from beginning to end. Use it as you need it. Carry it with you. Write in it. Return to a story or prayer that speaks to your heart.

Each morning, we will begin with the prayer of the Church through the Liturgy of the Hours. The prayer card of the saints will tell us where to turn and will offer one intention that we can carry together. Any additional petitions in the companion may be offered after the official intercessions. Our pilgrim prayer will be prayed personally after Morning Prayer has concluded.

As we travel, I hope we will remain open and awake. We will visit magnificent churches, beautiful cities, mountain landscapes, and places that carry painful memories. May we give ourselves the gift of being fully present in each place, allowing its beauty and meaning to reach us. The photographs we take and the moments we share can then become honest memories of something we first received with attention, reverence, and prayer. At Auschwitz-Birkenau, we will enter with particular reverence, honoring Jewish memory and allowing silence to teach us.

The Mass information in these pages is simply a schedule reminder. It gives the liturgical celebration, time, and place. Our separate worship aid provided by Lori of Amazing Pilgrimages will contain everything needed for Mass.

We also need to care for one another. Please arrive on time, protect the peace of the group, and be patient during meals, airport lines, hotel check-ins, and long transfers. Pilgrimage brings grace, but it also brings tiredness, delays, and moments when we will need to forgive one another quickly! These ordinary moments are part of the pilgrimage too.

My hope is that we return home with more than photographs and beautiful memories. I pray that something in Poland reaches each one of us personally: a saint's courage, a family's faith, a nation's memory, the quiet strength of Mary, or the mercy of Jesus. Before we return, I invite each pilgrim to choose one concrete work of mercy to begin at home.

Thank you for saying "yes" to this pilgrimage. I look forward to praying with you, listening with you, laughing with you, breaking bread and sharing meals with you, and discovering together what God has prepared for us along the road.

May Our Lady of Mercy watch over our journey, and may Jesus teach us to trust Him with every step.

With gratitude and great anticipation,

Fr. JC Merino



How We Will Walk

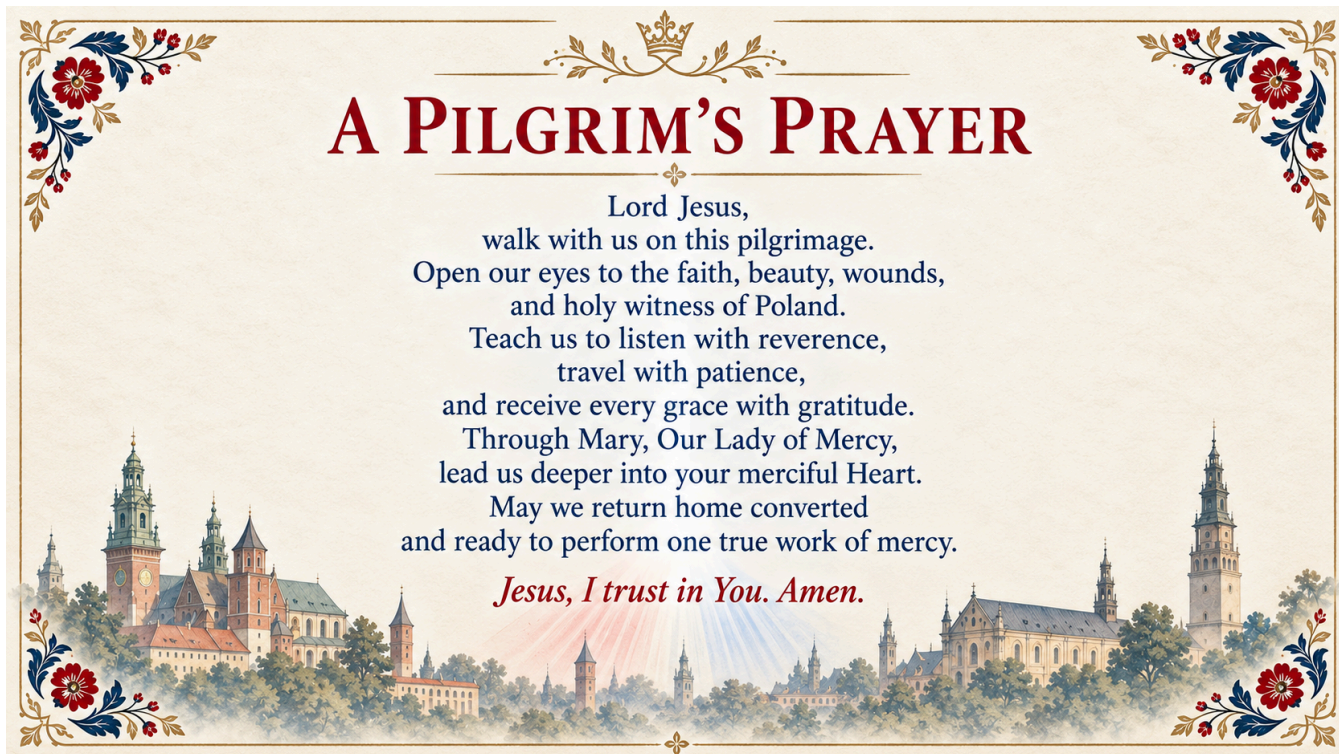
OUR POSTURE

We are pilgrims, not tourists. We are called to engage, be converted, and sent home in mercy.

...I hope we will pause long enough to look again and listen a little longer. Poland cannot be understood quickly. Its churches and streets carry royal history, a deep love for Mary, centuries of Jewish life and the terrible wound of the Shoah, artistic beauty, communist oppression, the faith of families, and the courage of saints. These stories meet one another everywhere we go, and each deserves to be received.

I offer these pages as your priest and fellow pilgrim. The stories belong to real men and women who prayed, suffered, made difficult choices, and learned to follow Christ in the places we will visit. Some became saints; many remained unknown. Their lives can help us reflect upon Jesus Christ, conscience, suffering, mercy, and our own walk with God. At places that ask for fewer words, especially Auschwitz-Birkenau, this companion will step back and allow silence to accompany us.

Bring your curiosity, your sense of humor, and an open heart. Enjoy Poland's churches, art, food, music, mountain air, and the gift of one another's company. Take photographs and share memories, but first allow yourself to be present. Listen, pray, learn people's names, and remain patient when we are tired. Above all, ask God to show you what this pilgrimage is meant to awaken within you, and carry home one work of mercy through which the journey can continue.



MUSIC PLAYLIST

PILGRIM

ENYA

From the Album: Enya, a day without rain

Scan me!



THE ROAD BEFORE US

Pilgrimage at a Glance

Day	Date	Route and principal places
1 • Sun	Sep 20	Depart Newark; overnight flight to Warsaw
2 • Mon	Sep 21	Arrive Warsaw; St. James Church
3 • Tue	Sep 22	Warsaw: Bl. Jerzy, Old Town, Ghetto Heroes Monument
4 • Wed	Sep 23	Jasna Góra, Częstochowa; continue to Kraków
5 • Thu	Sep 24	Kraków: Wawel, Main Market Square, St. Mary's
6 • Fri	Sep 25	Wadowice: basilica and John Paul II family home
7 • Sat	Sep 26	Zakopane: Krzeptówki, Gubałówka, Krupówki
8 • Sun	Sep 27	Łagiewniki: Divine Mercy and St. John Paul II Center
9 • Mon	Sep 28	Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial
10 • Tue	Sep 29	Wieliczka; St. Barbara; farewell dinner
11 • Wed	Sep 30	Return from Kraków to Newark

Hotels

- Warsaw: Polonia Palace Hotel • two nights.
- Kraków: Sheraton Grand Kraków • seven nights.

Group air schedule

- Outbound: Austrian Airlines OS 038, Newark to Vienna, departing 5:40 p.m.; connection OS 663 to Warsaw, arriving 2:15 p.m. local time.
- Return: Lufthansa LH 1371, Kraków to Frankfurt, 6:50 a.m.; connection LH 402 to Newark, arriving 3:45 p.m.

TRAVEL NOTICE

Airline, gate, transfer, and meeting instructions can change. The tour director's final travel notice governs on the day of travel.

A PEOPLE CARRIED BY MEMORY

Poland Before We Arrive

A PILGRIM'S QUESTION

*What have these people had to remember and endure in order to remain itself?
And what does that kind of memory and perseverance ask of us?*

I reckon that to come to Poland as pilgrims is to enter a land where faith, suffering, memory, family, and national identity have been woven together for more than a thousand years.

Poland's Christian story is traditionally traced to the baptism of Mieszko I in 966. From that moment, Christianity became deeply intertwined with the unfolding life of the Polish people. In later centuries, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth emerged as one of the great political and cultural worlds of early modern Europe. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, Poland was divided among neighboring empires and disappeared from the political map of Europe for 123 years.

And still, the Polish people remembered who they were.... They remembered. They remembered through their language. Through the stories told at family tables. Through poetry and music. Through the Catholic Church. Through feast days, prayers, customs, and the quiet handing on of memory from parents to children. Long before Poland regained its independence in 1918, this nation continued to live in the hearts of its people.

The 20th century would bring wounds almost beyond imagining. In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland from the west, followed by the Soviet invasion from the east. The years that followed brought occupation, executions, forced labor, deportations, the Holocaust, and the destruction of entire communities and cities. Millions of lives were lost.

We must remember, especially as pilgrims, that Jewish life was never a small or peripheral part of Poland's story. Jewish communities had lived here for centuries and helped shape its cities, scholarship, commerce, music, and culture. Before the Second World War, Jewish people made up nearly one tenth of Poland's population. The destruction of Polish Jewry during the Holocaust is therefore not a side chapter in Poland's history. It is a profound wound at the very center of it.

After the war came another difficult chapter: Poland's borders changed, families were displaced, and Soviet domination brought decades of communist rule. During those years, churches, shrines, homes, and communities often became places where memory could still be spoken, where faith could still be practiced, and where human dignity could still be defended. We should resist the temptation to make any nation or institution appear flawless. Poland's history, like every human history, contains both courage and failure, holiness and sin, generosity and contradiction.

And yet grace continued to move.



In 1978, the world watched as the Archbishop of Kraków, Karol Wojtyła, became Pope John Paul II. His return to Poland the following year awakened something profound in the people. His voice, together with the courage of countless ordinary men and women and the rise of the Solidarity movement, became part of Poland's long journey toward the democratic changes of 1989.

But Poland's story is not carried only in history books or monuments. It is carried in Warsaw's rebuilt streets, where a city once destroyed by war rose again. It is carried

through Kraków, where royal history, university life, parish churches, poetry, music, cafés, markets, and ordinary family life meet one another. It is carried in Marian hymns, cemetery candles, woodcarving, folk music, roadside shrines, and the prayers of generations.

Even the table tells a story: Potatoes and beets, cabbage and buckwheat, mushrooms, apples, poppy seed, pickles, preserves, smoked meats and cheeses speak quietly of the seasons, of the land, of hardship, of resourcefulness, and of celebration. In the Tatra Mountains, Góral traditions of timber, sheep farming, music, costume, faith, and hospitality are not simply performances preserved for visitors. They remain part of a living memory of Polish culture and history.

And so, as we travel through Poland, I would invite us to receive this country rather than simply observe it. Do not expect everything to be simple. Public expressions of faith do not mean that every Polish person believes in the same way. A cathedral may hold within its walls royal pride, family memories, the wounds of war, resistance to communism, prayers of the faithful, and the tensions of contemporary life all at once.

That is precisely why we come as pilgrims and not merely as tourists. A tourist may ask, "What happened here?" A pilgrim asks something deeper: "What has God been doing here, through the faithfulness and failures, the wounds and hopes, of a real people?"

Let Poland speak to us in all its complexity. Listen to its churches, and its silence. Listen to its beautiful music, and its wounds. Listen to the prayers of those who came before us. And perhaps, along the way, the story of Poland will help us listen more carefully to our own story as well.

For pilgrimage is never only about discovering another land. It is about allowing God, through another people's story, to enlarge our own hearts and enrich our own faith and life.

This is what it means for us pilgrims as we journey this path of God's mercy.

MUSIC PLAYLIST

BE NOT AFRAID

MICHAEL TALBOT

Catholic Hymn

Scan me!



Useful Polish Words and Phrases

Polish	Meaning
Dzień dobry	Good morning / good day
Dziękuję	Thank you
Proszę	Please / you're welcome
Przepraszam	Excuse me / I'm sorry
Szczęście Boże	May God grant success; a Catholic and miners' greeting
Jezu, ufam Tobie	Jesus, I trust in You
Pokój z tobą	Peace be with you
Do widzenia	Goodbye

A practical posture

- Carry water, a small umbrella, a light layer, comfortable walking shoes, and the whisper receiver each day.
- Dress modestly for churches; remove hats when appropriate; never cross roped sanctuary areas.
- Ask before photographing worshippers. At memorial sites, follow every museum rule and keep phones silent.
- At Wieliczka expect substantial walking, many stairs on the descent, and a cool underground temperature.
- At Gubałówka the ascent is normally by funicular and remains weather dependent.
- At meals, greet, give thanks and say grace, practice moderation, and remember that graciousness toward staff is a work of mercy.

MUSIC PLAYLIST

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

Audrey Assad

From the Album: Fortunate Fall

Scan me!

