

My dear fellow Pilgrims,

We have arrived at the second half of our journey - our time of pilgrimage is coming to the end; and we are literally, half-way in distance to our finish line.

For this time of reflection, I would like us to reflect on the connection of the two apparition sites (Lourdes and Zaragoza) that we have just visited and one yet to visit (Fatima).

Our Lady of Lourdes...

Our Lady of the Pillar...

and Our Lady of Fatima...

Just to clarify - they are not sisters or distant cousins, rather - know that what we acknowledge in faith who appeared to these saints is one person - the same person that said her *Fiat* to the Lord's invitation to be the Mother of the Most High - the same one who sang her *Magnificat* on the occasion of her visit to her cousin Elizabeth - the same mother who bore and raised the Son of God, the same person who stood by the Cross of Christ to witness the greatest Sacrifice of humankind, the same person who is the Mother of all believers - the same Mother who cares and loves you and me.

During our bus ride, there was a question that came up?

"Father, how come Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza is not as 'famous' as Lourdes or Fatima? Indeed, as far as our pilgrimage is concerned, among the three Marian sites that we visit during this Pilgrimage, Our Lady of the Pillar is the least known by many - but the oldest apparition being 40AD - and to, none other than, the Apostle St James the Great.

As we have already learned from our tour guide - she said that while people who visit Lourdes to ask for healing (spiritual, emotional, or physical), people who visit Fatima give thanks to her. Furthermore, we know the requests of our Lady in these places: while in Lourdes, she asked that a grotto be built around "healing and living water" where everyone could wash themselves to be healed from all sorts of physical ailments or spiritual illness; in Fatima, on the other hand - the invitation to the three children (Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia) was that people prayed the Rosary for the poor souls in purgatory. So, What was Our Lady's invitation to St James in Zaragoza? Here is the thing.

St. James took the Lord's command literally: he wanted to "go out to the ends of the earth and to proclaim the good news of salvation". In fact, what happened was that St. James did reach "the ends of the earth" - the end of the Iberian Peninsula - which is now called *Finis Terra* (the earth's end), the area where the present Cathedral Santiago de Compostela is closely located. But it wasn't so, if not for Our Lady's encouragement and help. While in Zaragoza, Spain, St. James was very

much tired and discouraged because fewer people were listening to the good news of the Lord. Therefore, one day - sometime in the year 40AD - Our Lady appeared (bi-located) and visited the Apostle whereby she stood on a pillar to give him hope, encouragement and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle, then, regained his zeal and went on to preach the good news until "the ends of the earth".

Here lies the difference: In Lourdes and Fatima, the impact of our Lady's encouragement, prayer and supplications remained local to the apparition sites. But for Zaragoza, the impact of her invitations (evangelization, conversion of souls, change of hearts) reached "the ends of the earth". *Pilgrims coming from all parts of the world walk the Camino to heed Our Lady's encouragement - first to the Apostle James, now to each pilgrim: to evangelize, to change hearts, to transform the world - one step at a time!*

So, what is it for us, then? Jesus speaks to our hearts: don't be discouraged if the impact of the good that we do, and the sacrifices that we make, are not experienced instantly - it takes time to build on the faith - it takes a lot of preparation and hearts to make one single miracle to happen. Our Mother's message is this: Our actions and sacrifices may be small, but they have the power to change the world if done in faith of God, Her Son.

Your Spiritual Guide during the Pilgrimage,
Fr. JC Merino

“It is in the simplicity of your ordinary walk, in the monotonous details of each day, that you have to find the secret, which is hidden from so many, of something great and new: love.”

~ St. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer ~



