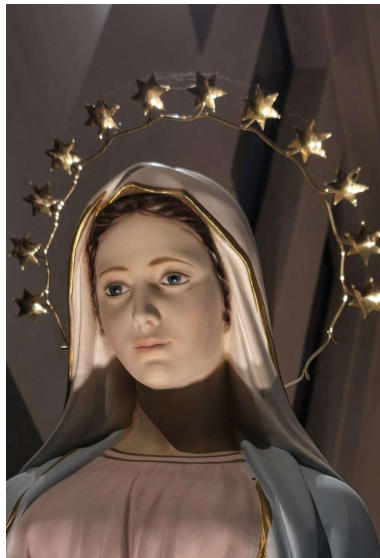
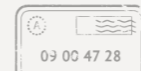

PILGRIM'S TRAVEL COMPANION

August 27 - September 9, 2025

A JOURNEY OF HEART, HEALING, & HOPE
WITH FR. JC MERINO



A Silence That Speaks Louder Than Words

These past weeks with Papa have been marked by more silence than speech. In the hospital room, there are long hours of waiting, of listening to the steady rhythm of the machines, of watching for small signs of healing. In those moments, I realize that silence often carries more meaning than any words could. Silence becomes a language of presence, of patience, of love.

St. Paul reminds us in **Thessalonians** to “aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands.” This quiet life, rooted in love, does not mean passivity, but attentiveness. It means making room for God to work, for healing to unfold, for grace to speak in the depths of the heart. In caring for Papa, I

see that love is often most powerful in the quiet tasks—the hand held, the meal given, the prayer whispered.

The Gospel of **Matthew 25:14-30** speaks of talents entrusted to servants. Each of us has been given something by the Lord, not to bury in fear, but to offer back in faith. Right now, the talent entrusted to me is not measured in achievements or activity, but in faithfulness—being present to Papa, tending to his healing, and continuing to serve God’s people in whatever small ways I can.

In the end, silence itself becomes a kind of offering. It is not empty, but full—full of trust, full of listening, full of surrender. My journey with Papa has taught me that silence, borne with love, speaks louder than words. Our Blessed Mother Mary is with us, standing in waiting - walking with us.

A Pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Rocks



August 31, 2025

Day 5: A silence that speaks louder than words

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage" (Psalm 84:5)

We set out this morning, hearts light, crossing the borders into Montenegro. Behold the Montenegrin coastal charm, marked by dramatic cliffs and medieval towns cradled between sea and sky.

This leg of the pilgrimage carries a sense of adventure - stepping into a different country in just a few hours, entering a place shaped by centuries of Venetian, Ottoman, and Orthodox influences. Montenegro means "Black Mountain", and true to its name, the misty peaks stand watch as we approach our destination: the Bay of Kotor, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In the heart of the bay, floating gracefully on the water, is a small man-made islet: OUR LADY OF THE ROCK - a shrine built out of faith and stones laid by sailors over generations. Legend holds that fishermen found an icon of the Virgin Mary on a rock here in 1452, and vowed to build her sanctuary on the sea. Through centuries, they fulfilled this promise - stone by stone - rock by rock, vow by vow.

We take a small boat from the town of Perast to the island, the sea air crisp, the view awe-inspiring. Let us take it all in (in silence and in gratitude), as we remember the countless blessings God has given us.

As we soon step into the chapel, adorned with votive offerings and frescoes painted by local Baroque artist Tripo Kokolja, we're enveloped in a silence that speaks louder than words! The Virgin Mary, watching over sailors, travelers, and now us - pilgrims seeking shelter - seeking peace - in her gaze.

We pause. We pray: for safe journeys, for those lost at sea (of life), for our own "storms" and uncertain paths. Here, the rock becomes a metaphor - a reminder that a faith built steadily over time can support a sanctuary, even in the middle of deep waters.

As we leave Kotor, we carry Montenegro's beauty in our minds: red-tiled roofs nestled in the mountains, Orthodox domes shimmering in the sun, and quiet streets echoing the footsteps of pilgrims past. It's a place where history meets eternity.

...Tonight, we re-enter Croatia, watching as the golden light of late afternoon washes over the hills leading to Dubrovnik - the "Pearl of the Adriatic".



Montenegro

Historically, Montenegro has been a religious borderland. While the majority of Montenegrins are Eastern Orthodox (under the Serbian Orthodox Church), a vibrant Catholic minority—especially along the coast—has preserved their faith and cultural identity despite centuries of Ottoman domination and shifting alliances.

The Catholic Church in Montenegro has often served as a bridge between cultures, fostering dialogue and peace in times of division. Its presence is strongest in coastal cities that were once under Venetian influence, where Latin Christianity flourished in tandem with local traditions.

- Kotor (Cattaro): A UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the spiritual hearts of Catholic Montenegro. Its stunning Cathedral of St. Tryphon (built in 1166) stands as a testament to medieval Catholic devotion and the city's historic importance as a bishopric.
- Perast: Home to the islet and shrine of Our Lady of the Rocks (Gospa od Škrpjela), a unique Catholic pilgrimage site built on a manmade island. According to legend, fishermen discovered a miraculous image of Mary here, and it became a symbol of Marian devotion, unity, and protection.

In modern Montenegro, Catholicism continues to play a role in promoting dialogue, peace, and ecumenical collaboration. Pope Francis has spoken of the Balkans as a place of "wounded memories," and the Church in Montenegro quietly offers healing and hospitality amid those wounds.



Dubrovnik, “Pearl of the Adriatic”

Dubrovnik, often called the “Pearl of the Adriatic,” holds a deeply rooted historical and cultural significance in Catholicism—rich in faith, tradition, and resilient witness.

Founded in the 7th century, Dubrovnik (formerly Ragusa) became a flourishing independent republic governed by a unique blend of Catholic values and civic responsibility. The city's motto, “Libertas” (Liberty), was not just political—it was also spiritual. It upheld religious freedom while maintaining a strong Catholic identity, resisting both Ottoman and Venetian pressures through diplomacy and devotion.

Dubrovnik sat at a crossroads between East and West, balancing influence from Byzantium and Rome. Its Catholicism is robust and resilient, forged through plague, earthquakes, war, and siege—yet always turning to the sacraments, prayer, and saints for strength.

Today, Catholics come to Dubrovnik not only for its beauty, but to honor its living faith. The Feast of St. Blaise (Feb 3) remains a vibrant celebration of community and devotion, attracting thousands. Pilgrims walk its marble streets like those who came before, drawn to its fusion of history, holiness, and hope.

Our journey brings us in Dubrovnik, we gather for dinner in the Old Town. As plates of seafood and local fare are shared, laughter and reflection mingle around the table. Every pilgrim knows that the journey isn't about the places visited - but the people beside us, the prayers whispered in the quiet sanctuaries, and the grace found along the way.

Tonight, we rest in this charming city of stone walls and sacred stories, knowing tomorrow brings more steps, more wonders, more encounters with the Divine.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus,
just as your Mother
was discovered in the rock
by faithful hands,
help us to uncover your presence
in the ordinary stones of our lives
—moments, people, trials, and joys.
Teach us to build sanctuaries
in the places you've called us
to journey through.
Amen.

IT'S
always
SEEMS
IMPOSSIBLE
until IT'S
DONE

THE best
TIME is
now

Pilgrim Tip:

As you drift to sleep tonight,
revisit the memory of Our Lady of the Rock.
What "rock" in your life has carried you
through storms?

Give thanks—and let your heart rest in
peace.

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TODAY'S MEMORIES









