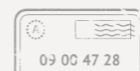


PILGRIM'S TRAVEL COMPANION

August 27 - September 9, 2025

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



Burdens Lifted

Tomorrow, Papa will be discharged from the hospital (at least that is the plan as of now). For me, this is not an ending but a transition — a new chapter in his journey of healing. What was once a place of constant monitoring and anxious waiting will now give way to something more intimate, more ordinary, and perhaps even more sacred: the quiet rhythms of home. Papa and I will be moving to Folsom, where his sister Ella currently lives.

It somehow feels like a burden has been lifted — not because Papa is completely healed, nor because the road ahead is without challenges, but because we now carry it together in a new way. Papa's journey and mine will no longer be bound to hospital corridors, to nurses, and to doctors - but to the familiar spaces of family life. There, prayer and care will mingle with the simplicity of meals shared, conversations whispered, and moments of rest.

Jesus Himself says: *"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). This rest does not mean the absence of struggle, but the presence of grace. In this transition, we are being invited to rest in the heart of God — to discover hope in each breath, healing in each step, and heart in every act of love that sustains us.

So tonight, I entrust tomorrow to Him. For while the hospital has been a place of treatment, home will now be a place of strengthening. It is here, in this transition, that we remember: every step forward is not just medical progress — it is a grace-filled journey into the care of the Wounded One who carries us.

*From Rome to the Roots of Silence:
Monte Cassino & San Giovanni Rotondo*

Day 10: Hearts Mended and Burdens Lifted

September 5, 2025

Go forth from the noise of the world to the stillness where God speaks.

After breakfast, we leave behind the eternal hum of Rome and journey southward, into the embrace of the Italian countryside. The landscape unfolds like a psalm—vineyards stretch like verses, olive groves shimmer with silver light, and orchards breathe sweetness into the morning air. This is the Italy of saints and soil, where holiness rises not only from altars but from the land itself. As we drive, the hills roll like prayers, and the skies open like a hymn, welcoming us toward Monte Cassino, cradle of contemplation, fortress of faith.

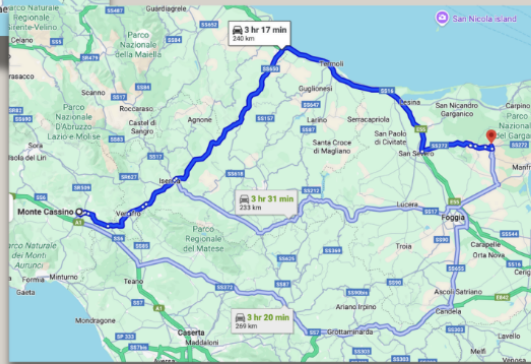
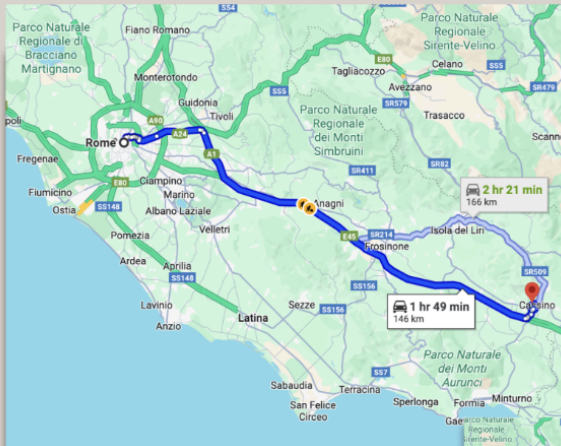
Perched high above the valley, Monte Cassino Abbey greets us — strong, silent, shining. Founded in 529 by St. Benedict, the father of Western monasticism, this is where a rule was written that would shape the world: “Ora et labora” — Pray and work. The Abbey has been destroyed and rebuilt many times—by invaders, by war, by the passage of time—yet each time it rises again, just as hope does. It stands today not merely as stone, but as testament: what is built on faith cannot be destroyed. Inside, silence is sacred. The tomb of St. Benedict and his sister St. Scholastica invites us to reflect on the simplicity of holy living—rooted in stability, humility, and love. “Listen with the ear of your heart,” St. Benedict teaches. And here, our hearts lean in. We pause too at the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, where early faith took root in song and sacrament. The mountain air sharpens our awareness. We are not only visitors — we are seekers, standing at the wellspring of Christian rhythm and balance.

We continue our pilgrimage through winding roads and sun-kissed hills, drawing nearer to San Giovanni Rotondo, the hometown of St. Padre Pio—the Capuchin friar who bore the wounds of Christ and healed souls with unseen tenderness.

As the sun begins to lower, we arrive in this quiet town where miracles were whispered, not shouted. Here, pilgrims still come not to see, but to be seen. Not to be amazed, but to be consoled. Tonight, we rest where hearts were mended and burdens were lifted by the silent prayers of a humble friar with wounded hands.

Dinner is shared in peace, the kind that follows a day of deep encounter. The conversation is slower now, reflective, gentle—like the monastic bells of Monte Cassino or the soft blessing of Padre Pio.

From Rome to Monte Cassino: ~ to San Giovanni Rotondo



...We rest tonight in San Giovanni Rotondo, hearts tender and open.
Tomorrow, we draw closer to the mystery of suffering made redemptive,
of wounds transformed into wonders.

*Do not fear your fragility -
weakness and vulnerability.
The Lord loves to work with broken
vessels.*

Today, we moved from the heights
of monastic silence to the valleys
where mercy flows. In Monte
Cassino, we found strength of
rhythm and prayer. In San Giovanni,
we approach the healing that comes
not by avoiding pain - but by
offering it back to God.



Pilgrim Tip:

As night falls, ask yourself: Where is my life
calling for rhythm? Where is my soul
asking for healing?

Write one intention to offer at Padre Pio's
tomb tomorrow—a burden, a brokenness,
or a quiet hope waiting to bloom.
Tonight, we sleep between two saints.
Tomorrow, we walk deeper into their
grace.

