



# FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

JANUARY 2020



## PILGRIMAGE - ANDEAN STYLE

*Dear Friends,*

Fr. John Prochaska, a priest of the diocese of Oakland, CA, is one of our missionary priests, ministering in the Prelature of Sicuani, high in the Peruvian Andes, responsible for several parishes at an elevation of 13,000 ft above sea level. Recently he was telling me about a pilgrimage he undertook to the sanctuary of Huampo Huampo in Peru. I asked him to share his reflection with us:

Pilgrimages have been a religious tradition for people of many different faiths including us Catholics. I have had the blessing and privilege to lead a number of pilgrimages during my priesthood: Holy Land; Footsteps of St. Paul (Greece & Turkey); Italy; Fatima, Lourdes, & Spain; and in November 2018 to the home of Pope Francis (Buenos Aires), Lima, and Cusco.

Spiritual pilgrimages are a blessed opportunity to grow in our relationship with God; to be renewed mind, body and soul; to form a small faith community (even if only for a short time); and to connect with peoples, cultures, and histories of other places – those significant and not so significant.

*Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor in Latin America since 1958.*



Here in the Andes, spiritual pilgrimages are also very important. The people don't have the thousands of dollars to go to the Holy Land or Europe, but there are many local pilgrimages that they can make to popular sanctuaries in the area: Señor de Huanca, Señor de Qoylloriti, La Virgen de Copacabana, and La Virgen de Chapi.

Thousands of people flock to these sanctuaries for the annual fiestas, or one can visit them when there are very few people and it is much more peaceful to pray. I have done both.

There are no high-end hotels to stay in. We camp or some people will just take their blanket and curl-up for the night in the chapel. Sometimes it can get very cold. When I joined the 10,000 people on the pilgrimage to Qoylloriti a couple of years ago, the moisture from my respiration froze in my one-man tent.



Walking is common in all pilgrimages. Holy Land and European pilgrimages require a fair amount of walking. Here in the Andes, most require hiking up mountains.

The Qoylloriti sanctuary requires a five mile hike. If you have had the blessing of journeying to the top of Mt. Sinai during a Holy Land pilgrimage, you will understand.



Another commonality is the importance of mountaintops during pilgrimages. We know Moses encountered God on Mt. Sinai/Horeb and received the commandments there. Jesus was transfigured on Mt. Tabor, and the gospels tell us that Jesus went to the mountain to pray. Here the mountains are a spiritual place as well. On the peaks of hills and mountains, people will form an "apacheta", rocks piled on top of each other. This tradition has a long history going back to the Incas as an offering and/or petition to God. On Good Friday in one of my parishes,



people carry rocks from the riverbed at the base of the hill to its peak as a form of penance as we pray the Stations of the Cross.

Dance is another way that the people here offer their praise of thanksgiving to God during their pilgrimages. At the Señor de Qoylloriti shrine, there are so many groups that want to dance during the fiesta that they have to adhere to a strict schedule. There are groups dancing throughout the cold night at over a dozen designated locations. This is part of the popular religiosity that Pope Francis frequently mentions that needs to be preserved.

In the Prelature of Sicuani where I have my ministry, we have an annual 2 day/1-night pilgrimage in September to the small community of Huampo Huampo where there is a sanctuary in honor of the Nativity of Mary. People travel four to five hours in buses, vans, and in the back of pick-up trucks or medium size cargo trucks to Livitaca, the town closest to the sanctuary site. Then we walk for two to three hours up the mountain to the sanctuary, praying and singing along the route. Every year we have a different activity on the first day: youth groups performing Gospel parables; watching a religious movie; and this year going door-to-door inviting people to journey with us to the sanctuary. We don't get to bed until after midnight and then we are up at 5:00 am to pray the rosary as we climb a hill above the sanctuary. (The only effect on me of living at 13,000 feet has been the need to sleep more than in the San Francisco Bay Area. So the short night is my biggest sacrifice during the pilgrimage.)



On the second day after the rosary procession and breakfast, there are small-group vocational and catechetical talks, confessions, or people just pray silently in the chapel. We conclude the pilgrimage with Mass and a procession in honor of Mary.



I think all pilgrimages have an element of sacrifice, whether it be the long travel, the walking distances, lack of sleep, or different foods. Of course, sacrifice is an essential element in our relationship with God, keeping us humble in the spiritual journey of life. In my experience, God surprises us with multiple blessings when we offer a bit of sacrifice.

I hope that you will journey periodically on a spiritual pilgrimage, getting away from your day-to-day activities to renew your

relationship with God. The people of the Peruvian mountains show us that you don't need lots of money. Perhaps a journey to a cathedral or a retreat center or even a long walk in God's creation will be the pilgrimage to which God is calling you.

As we begin another new year, perhaps it's an opportune time to plan a spiritual pilgrimage at some stage during 2020, making it part of our New Years Resolutions!!

*With Every Good Wish in Christ,*

*Rev. David Costello  
Director*



For the purpose of wills, bequests, and living trusts, our official name is:

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