

**At its heart, the journey of each life
is a pilgrimage,
through unforeseen places
that enlarge and enrich the soul**
John O'Donohue

Pilgrimage:

Pilgrimage is an ancient religious practice. Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have chosen to make sacred journeys to holy places. These physical journeys have a spiritual purpose - they proceed from and toward the mystery of God. The inner pilgrimage is one of encounter with and discovery of the Divine. As St Thomas More observed: *"There is never a pilgrim who returns home without one less prejudice and one new idea."* They are a gift of grace.

A **pilgrim** (from the Latin *peregrinus*) is a traveler (literally one who has come from afar) who is on a journey to a holy place. Typically, this is a physical journeying (often on foot) to some place of special significance to the pilgrim.

What the Well-dressed Medieval Pilgrim Wore

The poem by Sir Walter Raleigh, "*A Passionate Man's Pilgrimage*", features the dress and accessories the medieval pilgrim would wear on his pilgrim way to the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela: *Give me my scallop shell of quiet / My staff of faith to walk upon, / My scrip of joy, immortal diet, / My bottle of salvation, / My gown of glory, hopes true gage, / And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.*

The staff represented **Faith**, the dress, **Hope** and the bag, **Charity**.

The scallop shell, with its two valves, was the symbol of the two rules of charity observed in medieval life - love one's neighbour and love God above all others.

The staff was a stout stick, up to eight feet long, often hooked at one end. It was useful for support when climbing hills or on slippery tracks, and for beating off stray dogs, wolves or brigands. The staffs were blessed by priests at the start of the pilgrimage.

The scrip was a shoulder bag made of leather or linen. Inside would be the pilgrim's supply of food for the day, perhaps a chunk of bread, and some cheese.

The bottle was made of leather or was a hollow gourd, slung from one end of the staff. It contained red wine, or weak beer, as the water in those times was generally not potable.

The pilgrim's gown was of coarse home-spun wool or linen, with a cord tying it at the waist. It was long, ending just above the leather sandals or boots the pilgrims wore. A cape made of grey wool was worn in bad weather and acted also as a raincoat and blanket.

The hat was of felt with a broad brim turned up at the front. A scallop shell was often pinned to it.

At the beginning of his journey the local bishop would issue the pilgrim with his pilgrim's clothes. To prove that he had visited the holy places the pilgrim would bring back various "souvenirs" – small medallions with symbols of the holy site.

It was important for the pilgrim not to tarry too long on the journey because if he had not returned one year and one day after his stipulated time, his property was transferred to his heirs.

A Prayer for Pilgrims:

John O'Donohue in 'Benedictus'

Every time you leave home,
Another road takes you
Into a world you were never in.

New strangers on other paths await.
New places that have never seen you
Will startle a little at your entry.
Old places that know you well
Will pretend nothing
Changed since your last visit.

When you travel, you find yourself
Alone in a different way,
More attentive now
To the self you bring along,
Your more subtle eye watching you abroad;
And how what meets you
Touches that part of the heart
That lies low at home:

How you unexpectedly attune
To the timbre of some voice,
Opening a conversation
You want to take in
To where your longing
Has pressed hard enough
Inward, on some unsaid dark,
To create a crystal of insight
You could not have known
You needed
To illuminate your way.

When you travel,
A new silence
Goes with you,
And if you listen,
You will hear
What your heart
Would love to say



Make sure, before you go,
To take the time
To bless your going forth,
To free your heart of ballast
So that the compass of your soul
Might direct you towards
The territories of the spirit.
Where you will discover
More of your hidden life;
And the urgencies
That deserve to claim you.

May you travel in an awakened way,
Gathered wisely into your inner ground;
That you may not waste the invitations
Which wait along the way to transform you.

May you travel safely, arrive refreshed
And live your time away to its full.
Return home more enriched, and free
To balance the gift of days which call you.

At the end of each day.....

Take time to reflect:

What interested me....

What have I learned....

What moved me....

What changed me....

What will I take home.....