

The Pilgrimage for Restoration: A Young Mom's Journey



by Katie Lloyd Martin

Pilgrims walk through a wooded area.

For to thee will I pray: O Lord, in the morning thou shalt hear my voice (Ps. 5:4).

For years I was adamant: *I will not go on the Pilgrimage!* It is not that I did not know how worthwhile the Pilgrimage for Restoration was. My dad is the organizer and I had grown up going on it, each September. It was there in present-day Auriesville, New York that Saint Isaac Jogues and his fellow missionaries were martyred for their faith, the ground made holy by their blood, now 378 years ago.

Making pilgrimage in the footsteps of the martyrs was a worthwhile endeavor – but for other people, not

for me.

Maybe it was the three babies in three years that made me think it was unrealistic. Maybe it was my hatred of camping. (I am someone who considers myself camping if the power is out for over an hour.) Maybe it was the dirt and chaos that comes from taking three toddlers into the great outdoors. I mean, let's face it: if I wanted more penance, I could just let them loose in the house with a box of graham crackers. And you should

see what they do in the backyard. Did you know that the combination of chalk and a garden hose creates a nice semi-permanent paint for your

deck? My husband was free to go, I said, contingent upon taking our wild five-year-old boy with him.

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But this past year it was different. I started to realize that grace isn't free. I mean, on one hand it is. It's a gift, pure and simple, and it's waiting for us. But on the other hand, we are supposed to ask for it. Last year was

one of those years in which I realized that I needed to ask for it. Only grace was going to heal me. So I resolved – with my husband and three toddlers – to make the pilgrimage. It was not an enthusiastic resolution. It surprised all who know me. But at least my extended family (mouths agape) refrained from asking which hotels I was planning to stay in.

Truth is, it surprised even me.

What surprised me more than anything was that the whole thing was rather... enjoyable – penance and all. The joy far outweighed the inconveniences, even for this nature-challenged mother.

Imagine practicing the Faith as our fathers did. For three days you pray the old liturgy as the dawn breaks. Your breath, visible in the early light, rises, bringing to mind the words of the Psalmist, “Let my prayer rise up as incense before Thee” (Ps. 140). You kneel on hallowed ground, where the early morning frost once mingled with the blood of martyrs. Beside you are hundreds of other Catholics: priests, religious, laypeople, young families just like yours.

Later during the day, most pilgrims walk the first leg of the journey, about twenty miles. But what do families do? It's easy enough to see how a college kid could walk all that way (although there are shuttles for weary pilgrims to take breaks if needed), but how can parents and small children walk twenty miles a day? The short answer is: they don't. Even this crazy mom would not have done that. Although give me a few years... No, I'm kidding... I think.

The families – and there are several every year – make pilgrimage in a modified way. Just as the other pilgrims form “brigades” in which to march, pray, and sing, the families join together and make their own brigade. They stay in camp, hear Mass together, pray the Rosary to-

gether, eat together, go to Confession, listen to talks by the family chaplain, and caravan to the next campsite. The children get to see communal Catholic living in action and enjoy first hand how our ancestors prayed for centuries. If we want them to rebuild Catholic culture, we first have to show them what it IS, and that it is possible.

Last year, as the families caravanned to the next campsite, we came upon the main column – the several hundred pilgrims who walk all day.

We all honked and cheered and generally revelled in the camaraderie of it all. As they prayed and sang, talked and laughed, confessed and listened to lessons, we knew we were doing the same in camp. As the children played and attended catechism class with old-time sisters, parents conversed with new friends and helped each other set up tents. At the end of the day, families

unfolded their strollers and went out to meet the main column for the last two miles and the march back into camp with them.

When the day's walking is done, everyone comes together in camp. You sing around the campfire, you put on skits, and you rest. Sure, you have sore feet, aching bones, and blisters but you also have refreshment and graces to sustain you throughout

the coming year.

I could paint you a picture of what it is like to make pilgrimage as a family. I could tell you all the minutiae of what will make it smoother for you. For example, you should bring a metal pitcher for hot water in the morning instead of trying to feed your spawn instant oatmeal out of eight tin cups which you know will get lost before day two; and maybe if you have fewer than four children you should sleep in the car instead of a tent. (The links at bottom provide

more helpful tips for pilgrim families.) But what I really want to impress on you is this: graces wait for you.

— What do you need this year? What are you struggling with? What goals do you have for your family that seem thwarted year after year? What has you burned out? For which family member do you wish you could obtain

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Young boys and other pilgrims

graces? Is there a child or a loved one veering in a direction that you wish you could stop? Some demons can only be cast out by prayer and fasting.

My dad likes to call it “the pilgrimage of small graces.” This year one of the veteran pilgrims called him out for it. “This is not the pilgrimage of small graces,” she said. “Have you asked what pilgrims have

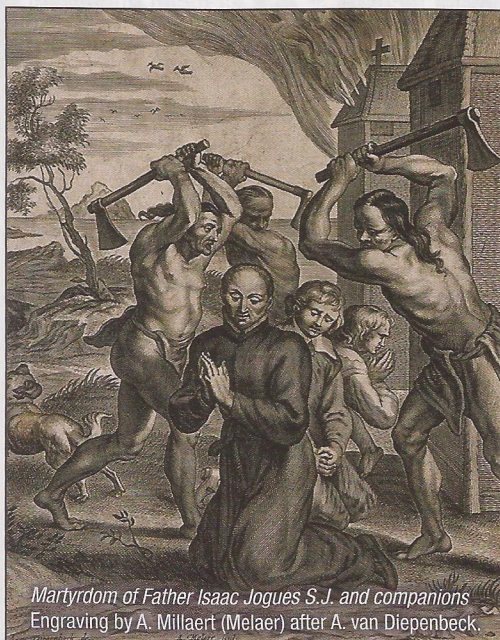
received over the years? This is the pilgrimage of big graces!”

Certainly this does seem to be the case. During my short acquaintance with the pilgrims just this past season alone, I heard many testimonials

of big graces attributed to past pilgrimages. Couples have met and married. Young people have discerned their vocations to religious life, including one young man who returned to the pilgrimage years later to celebrate holy Mass. Mothers have delivered healthy babies after multiple losses and against all odds, including one woman who obtained the grace of a normal pregnancy and healthy baby after her past medical issues and high risk pregnancies prompted her own doctor to refuse her care.

This past year, a long-time friend of the pilgrimage, a woman who for over twenty years eagerly waited to watch the column file into camp the second evening, converted on her deathbed. In 2018, doctors gave her just a few months to live, but she held on, longing to see the Sisters who had visited with her every year.

As the Divine Physician would have it, this year the Sisters could not manage the visit before her bedtime. Hearing of it, one of the priests, a zealous Religious clearly worn out after two days of non-stop duties on the road,



Martyrdom of Father Isaac Jogues S.J. and companions
Engraving by A. Millaert (Melaer) after A. van Diepenbeck.

We don't have to go to Europe to have this rare experience. It was here in our own land that Saint Isaac Jogues and his fellow missionaries were martyred for their faith. Our faith. It was here that their bodies were thrown into ravines and their bones left for the dogs, here that their fingers were chewed off, their skulls split with tomahawks, and their hearts taken out, still beating, as feasts for their killers.

that has been all but forgotten in the collective memory of even traditional Catholics. We don't have to go to Europe to have this rare experience. It was here in our own land that Saint Isaac Jogues and his fellow missionaries were martyred for their faith. Our faith. It was here that their

sprang into action, coming to her door. Overjoyed, she agreed “now is the acceptable time.” Father heard her confession and anointed her with the holy oils. Receiving holy Communion the next morning from the hands of another priest – come all the way from Africa – she praised God, weeping tears of joy. “And now,” said my dad who knew her from all her years of cheering on the pilgrims, “you are a pilgrim, too.”

This is pilgrimage. This is our heritage. Pilgrimage: an ancient inheritance

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As one fellow pilgrim puts it, the blood of the American martyrs is indeed the seed of the faith here, in the U.S. Perhaps . . . just perhaps, we can convert our nation through this pilgrimage. Certainly our homes and our own hearts can begin to be purified through it.

I asked a friend who brings her family of ten every year how she does it and what she would say to families who, like me, think it beyond them? Her response was simple. “Ask Our Lady if this is something she would like you to do this year. If she wants it, she will make it happen for you. And maybe, just maybe, the reasons you think you *can't* do it are the very reasons you should.”

To register, or for information about dates and discounts, visit pilgrimage-for-restoration.org or call 610-435-2634. Visit the Pilgrimage blog at pilgrimage-for-restoration.org/blog/ to read other pilgrims' accounts, including a mom's tips for bringing your family.

This article is dedicated with special thanks to the co-founders of the Pilgrimage and of the apostolate that administers it – National Coalition of Clergy & Laity – for their decades of pilgrimaging and devotion to the martyrs of Auriesville, and their generous support of all the pilgrims from the very beginning, already a quarter century ago. ✠



Katie Lloyd Martin is a young homeschooling mom of four, ages 6, 4, and 2, with one due in July. Her only other credentials of note include being married to the world's easiest husband.