

The Pilgrim Roads

(Pilgrim – one who travels from place to place)

The practice of making devotional journeys to places of significance is very ancient, there are sacred sites dating to 30,000 BC, caves that were not lived in but were visited specifically for cult purposes. In the Celtic world and among 'modern primitives' there were places of great power recognised by all the people. In ancient Mesopotamia pilgrimages were undertaken to Eridu, in Egypt to the major shrines of the gods. In the Greek world to Delphi and the shrine to Zeus at Dodona. We know that there were a number of pilgrimage sites in ancient Israel and Judah until the 7th cent BCE when pilgrimage was restricted to temple at Jerusalem. In India the sites connected with the Buddha were drawing pilgrims from China in the centuries before Christ. Neither is pilgrimage a uniquely Christian devotion, there remains Hindu pilgrimage and Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Christian pilgrimage to sites connected with Jesus in the Holy land and Jerusalem began early in the 4th century when the faith had expanded into the west. Christians were encouraged by St Jerome to have personal contact with the places where the significant events in Christ's life had happened, Bethlehem, Bethany, (the resurrection of Lazarus), the Sea of Galilee, Mount Carmel, the House of Peter at Capernaum, Mount Tabor, (the site of the Transfiguration) and Jerusalem. Churches were established in the Holy Land by Helena the mother of Constantine and her son funded the creation of a basilica on the supposed burial place of St Peter. By the 6th century pilgrimage had increased to include sites associated with the apostles and the saints and martyrs of the early Church. After the council of Nicaea (325) established the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos pilgrims were visiting Ephesus, believed to be her home after Pentecost and the place of her death/dormition.

Not everyone could visit the Holy Land but Rome was an acceptable substitute, Caedwalla the king of the West Saxons undertook pilgrimage to Rome in 688 and was buried in old St Peter's, his tomb inscribed 'The height of achievement, wealth, royal power, victories, spoils and all that his own and his ancestors had amassed warlike Caedwalla abandoned for love of God, he is become one of the company of Christ's sheep'. He was followed by Aethred the king of Mercia and Offa the king of the East Saxons and by the early 8th century such large numbers of Anglo Saxon nobility were coming to Rome that special guides to the holy places were produced for them and a part of the city called the 'Borgo' (Latin version of the Saxon word 'borough' or district) was set aside for their lodging houses. At this point pilgrimage was undertaken as an act of devotion, a way of being closer to the faith and those who had created and defended it.

In addition to the major pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land there were pilgrimages to important shrines on the sites where Christian missionaries had been martyred (St Denis), St Martin at Boulogne, St Boniface at Fulda near Frankfurt) or where miraculous events had taken place. One such was at Monte Sant'Angelo in Gargano dedicated to the Archangel Michael. According to the story told in the Golden Legend the Archangel appeared several times to the Bishop of Sipontum in 490 asking for a shrine to be dedicated to him in return for protecting the town from pagan invaders. A basilica was built and became a place of pilgrimage in the 7th century when the Lombards 'adopted' the warrior Archangel and believed that he appeared several times to aid them in their various fights against the Byzantine Greeks. The trail of pilgrims came south along the old Roman Via Traiana, soon nicknamed the Via Sacra Langobardorum; - the Holy Road of the Lombards and churches, hostels and monasteries were built along the way. The Gargano shrine never declined in importance, it was visited by those travelling south to take ship to the Holy Land.

Pilgrimage received another boost in the 8th century when the Western Church imposed it in place of public penance for sins. At that time the practice of private confession and absolution was confined to the Celtic Church. A remorseful sinner who asked for penance or an unremorseful one facing excommunication was excluded from communion and committed to a course of prayer, fasting and almsgiving; after a period determined by the gravity of the sin the penitent was allowed to return to the congregation with the proviso that he lived a good life. A pilgrimage to a place decided by the Bishop 'stood in' for public penance, it was not necessarily a soft option, the pilgrim penitent was expected to travel on foot and without luxuries; it was also a 'one off', further sinning resulted in exclusion. Later pilgrimages offered indulgences giving remission in Purgatory and in the Jubilee Year of 1300, Rome offered pilgrims to the city plenary indulgences, dispensation for sins over a whole lifetime and a fast track to heaven. There were many reasons why people took the road to Rome or Jerusalem but pilgrimage as atonement became increasingly common.

Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the places most associated with Christ and the disciples were in Muslim hands by the 8th century but despite the claims of the papacy at the time of the First Crusade there was no bar to Christian (or Jewish) pilgrimage, the roads leading to Jerusalem from the coast were generally safe and large numbers of people were undertaking the journey by the 10th century. Shipping was efficient and the roads were better but a major incentive was the belief, based on the prophesy in the Apocalypse of St John that the end of the world would come in the year 1,000. Wealthy individuals anxious for a spiritual clean slate were funding pilgrim monasteries, hostels and churches where the travellers could perform devotions. Groups blessed by their local Bishop travelled together, identified by uniform of a long, coarse garment and a broad brimmed hat (later the uniform of St James) The groups were a social mix, clergymen, townspeople and aristocracy, some journeyed on the charity of others who, in the spirit of atonement were willing to pay for their lodgings and passage.

By the 11th century more churches in the West were attracting pilgrims because they possessed relics believed to be of the Disciples. The Gospels contain very little information on the lives of most of the disciples after Pentecost; the Cannon Acts are mainly concerned with Peter and Paul and their immediate companions. Early Christians were curious about the disciples who had known Christ and by the late 1st century AD texts were already being written concerning their missions. On the basis of the Apocryphal Acts some 5th and 6th century works put forward the hypothesis that some of the disciples had come further west than Rome and had in fact been responsible for founding the first Churches. It is not hard to understand why the idea was so powerful, if the Faith had been brought to the west by the actual followers of Christ, the European Churches were as 'first generation' as those founded by Peter, Paul or John. It was a short step from this to the possibility that their remains might still be here. Any monastery or church able to claim the body of a Disciple was in a position to attract powerful patronage and pilgrims. The first to do this was Compostella in Galicia, North Western Spain.

A short 5th century Greek tract called the Breviarium Apostolorum gives a list of the apostles, where they preached, how they met their deaths, where they were buried and when their feasts were celebrated. The Latin version was well known in Europe by the late 7th century and the Latin editor elaborated and emphasized the idea that not all the apostles had restricted their labours to Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean and the lands beyond the Eastern Imperial frontiers. According to the Latin Breviarium Philip evangelized Gaul and James, the son of Zebedee preached Spain. The Latin Breviarium states that James returned to Judea and was martyred at the time of Herod Agrippa and makes no mention of the return of James' body to Spain. It was his connection with the peninsula as its first evangelist that was stressed by writers like the 8th century Beatus and yet one hundred years later Usuard of St Germain des Pres in his Martyrology states that *'his (James) most holy remains were translated from Jerusalem to Spain and deposited in its uttermost region, they are revered with the most devout veneration by the people of those parts'*.

Compostella had been a Christian centre since the first century AD; (the name is derived from the late Latin componere - to bury), on the site of the present church were large number of Christian burials dating from around 40 AD to 600 AD at which point it seems to have been abandoned. In the early 9th century in the reign of King Alfonso II of Asturias, remains claimed or perhaps truly believed to be those of St James were discovered by Bishop Theodemir at Compostella. How the remains came to be found is not known, all the accounts were written two hundred years later but it seems that the Bishop - or else a hermit called Pelayo is supposed to have been led to the tomb by stars which clustered around it, hence the romantic source for Compostella - Campo Stellae, field of stars. Alfonso II caused a small church to be built, a very modest affair and especially by comparison with the splendid buildings he was then funding at the capital of the Christian north at Oviedo. The Asturian kings were evidently not much interested in St James until the 9th century when everything changed dramatically during the reign of Alfonso III (866-910) and his bishop Sisnando. The defense of Christian Spain and the necessity to win lands back from the Moors had occupied the Asturian kings for more than a hundred years. In addition there had been the recent threat of the Norse men (Normans) who began invading the Atlantic ports of Galicia in 844. Alfonso III was the first of the Asturian kings able to look beyond his immediate frontiers and he had hopes of uniting the whole of the Christian north under his rule. He also wanted his kingdom to have the same prestige and papal recognition as the Frankish kingdoms., he understood that a king of Christian Spain needed a patron saint with an international reputation like the Franks' St Denis. In 906 Alfonso wrote to the clergy of Tours enclosing documents attesting to the fact that the apostle venerated at Compostela was James son of Zebedee. The letter goes on to say that the shrine was already the goal of pilgrims and that a number of miracles had already taken place there.

In the grant documents the Saint is called the 'patronus' of the king - the giver of victory. Together with Bishop Sisnaldo Alfonso rebuilt the church at Compostella, basilican in form with a nave some 80 feet long, side aisles and a rectangular apse it was decorated with marble and sculpture brought by sea from Roman and Visigothic sites in Portugal. The consecration in 899 was attended by 17 Bishops and relics of several minor saints were deposited there. Retrospective miracles were ascribed to the saint supporting his patronage of the royal house; he was supposed to have appeared at the battle of Clavijo in 844 and to have personally slaughtered 60,000 Moors (Santiago Matamoros). To set the seal on the authenticity of Compostella the pope decreed that the saint's day should be celebrated on July 25th the supposed day of the burial of his body at Compostella, rather than on the day of his martyrdom, March 25. In a short time the shrine became a goal for pilgrims second only to Jerusalem and Rome and a succession of ever more elaborate churches were funded with pilgrim money. At some point the cockle shell became the badge of the Santiago pilgrim. (coquille St Jaques) This was an ancient symbol of fertility and then in the Christian era of rebirth, possibly it connected with the 'rediscovery' of James or perhaps with the spiritual rebirth of those who had undertaken the pilgrimage. By the 13th century the legend of St James had become 'fact'. After the Ascension of Christ James went to Spain at some point in AD 40. He made his base at Zaragoza where the Virgin appeared to him on top of a pillar of jasper and commanded him to build a temple on the spot. The story accounted for the foundation of the church of Nuestra Senora del Pilar. He stayed in Spain for seven years before returning to Judaea where he was beheaded at the order of Herod Agrippa. His followers placed his body in a boat and embarked with him trusting in God to determine the place of burial. Angels guided the boat to the shores of Galicia where the disciples laid the body of James on a great stone which immediately softened and shaped itself into a sarcophagus. The disciples then went before queen Lupa and asked her to appoint a place for the burial, she sent them to the king of Spain who threw them into prison but an angel set them free and the soldiers sent in pursuit were all drowned when the bridge they were crossing collapsed. The chastened king allowed the disciples to convert him and his city to the faith. They returned to Lupa to let her know that the king had assented to the burial of James in her lands; the wicked queen told the disciples to harness some of her oxen to carry James' body to their chosen place knowing that the oxen were guarded by a fierce dragon and that in any case were savage and would kill anyone who came near them. When the dragon came against the disciples they held up a cross before him and he burst apart and the oxen were tamed. Without any guidance the beasts drew the saint's body in its' stone to the middle of the queen's palace. Lupa was converted and her palace became a magnificent church.

In the same way Mary Magdalene became one of the first evangelizers of Gaul. By the 5th century the Magdalen had become a composite of various other women mentioned in the Gospels, the woman from whom Christ had driven 7 demons, the sister of Martha and Lazarus and the woman who had anointed the feet of Christ and dried them with her hair. As a 'composite' the Magdalene was a supreme example, a sinful woman who was redeemed through her love for Christ and because of her profound love she was granted the first revelation of his resurrection. Pope Gregory's sermons on the Magdalene established her fame in the west where there was a wave of missionary activity under his Papacy. A mass of new and sometimes conflicting stories were already accumulating around her person, an Anglo Saxon martyrology of the early 9th century relates how, after the ascension the Magdalen had such longing for Christ that she went into the desert and lived alone - every day angels came and lifted her to heaven and so she lived for 30 years, after her death great miracles took place at her grave. Another story had Mary joining John the Beloved and the Virgin Mary at Ephesus where she was martyred and buried near the grotto known as the Cave of the Seven Sleepers. A number of miracles were said to have taken place there and her remains were supposed to have been transferred to Constantinople in the 9th century where they were buried beside those of Lazarus her 'brother'.

Reverence for the Magdalen accorded with the penitential climate within the Church of the 10th century and a number of churches or chapels were dedicated to her. It was however the 11th century Abbey Church of Ste Marie-Madeleine at Vezelay in Burgundy that laid claim to her body (also Lazarus at nearby Autun) basing their claim on the works of a late 1st century historian Flavius Josephus who had written that Mary Magdalene, her sister Martha and her brother Lazarus along with Mary Cleophas and Maximin had been exiled from Palestine in a boat with neither rudder or sail. Josephus stated that they made landfall in the west and had begun the work of evangelization there. (Fortified Church on the Camargue coast - Sts Maries de la Mer) Later works claimed that the landing place was Marsaille (one of the first Christian centers in Gaul) where Mary had converted the pagan prince and a number of others. Lazarus became the first bishop of Marsaille, Maximin the bishop of Aix and Martha defeated devils at Tarascon. In due course Mary retired to a cave in the mountains

where she lived for 30 years without nourishment being lifted daily to heaven. Eventually she was conducted to Aix by angels to receive the last Sacrament from Maximin after which she died before the altar and the church was filled with the perfume of roses remaining long after her body had been buried. The Abbey at Vezelay took the body for safekeeping when Aix was threatened by the Saracens in the 8th century and a splendid church was eventually built with donor and pilgrim money.

To the east in Italy the emerging 9th century Venetian state needed a stamp of authenticity provided by a proven connection with the first Christians and a 'first generation' holy relic provided when the body of St Mark the Evangelist was removed from Muslim held Alexandria in 828. According to The Golden Legend a pair of merchants called Buono Tribuno da Malamocco and Rustico da Torcello bribed the priests in charge of St Mark's body to allow them to remove it to Venice. When the body was lifted from its tomb a beautiful perfume spread over the city and on the voyage home the corpse performed a number of miracles. A more prosaic account has the merchants stealing the body and smuggling it out of Alexandria in a consignment of pork. Simply owning the body was not sufficient, Venice's claim to St Mark was based on an account in the Apocryphal Acts of the saint taking refuge in a lagoon from a storm in the open sea. This nebulous connection was strengthened in the 14th century account which has the Saint taking refuge on the very site where the Church of San Marco would be built where an angel appeared and told him 'Pax tibi Marce evangelista meus. Hic requisicet corpus tuum' Peace be with you Mark my Evangelist. Here shall your body rest. After Mark's body was installed at Venice the saint confirmed his authenticity by performing a number of miracles of healing and protection. San Marco was not a dedicated pilgrimage church, it was the Chapel of the Doges but it was counted a one of the great shrines on the road to Jerusalem. Venice was also in competition for St. Nicholas when his relics were stolen from Myra (Turkey) in 1087 ostensibly to keep them safe from the Saracens. They went instead to Bari where the great church built to house them became an important stop, along with Monte Sant'Angelo for pilgrims taking ship east from Brindisi.

By the 11th century pilgrimage had become 'big business' and became bigger after the First Crusade; preached as the 'Pilgrim's War'. Jerusalem had been under Muslim control for almost 400 years and free passage had been allowed to the Christian Holy places. This was sadly disrupted by the Crusade during which the city was sacked and the countryside became infested with bandits. Various military Orders were created to take care of those still willing to undertake the journey. The Knights Templar, The Knights Hospitaller and so on. (the True Cross, by tradition discovered by St Helena and kept at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem was stolen or possibly burned during the First Crusade) Santiago became truly important as a substitute for Jerusalem, the first guide for pilgrims was written in 1130 by Aymeric Picaud. The 900 mile road from France led through Paris, Vezelay, le Puy and Arles and over the Pyrenees through the pass at Porto de Stomport. From Italy the sea journey came into Catalonia and west through the monasteries of the province. British pilgrims came in through the ports of northern Spain or else through Aquitaine or followed the road from Paris. All the roads passed through places where there were important shrines, a pilgrim might make devotions at a dozen or more before crossing into Spain. In northern Spain the routes merged to become the Camino Frances through Castille, Burgos and Leon to Santiago patrolled by the Knights of the Order of Santiago of the Sword founded in 1167. The routes were lined with monasteries, pilgrim hospices and shrines competing for patronage and the relics bought back from the Holy Land. Pilgrims to Santiago travelled in groups some on mule or horseback some on foot. After being blessed they set off in spring or early summer protected by law, able to cross borders freely, exempt from tolls and entitled to charity. The journey was to be undertaken in the right spirit, the 12th century Codex Calixtinus says '*All those who wend their way to the altar of the apostle, be they rich or poor and alike on arrival or departure are to be well received and humbly by all in a spirit of goodwill*'. The groups were very mixed, rich and poor, clerics, returned Crusaders, those seeking pardon for sins or healing and those looking for spiritual help. Criminals went as an alternative to a prison term, to prove that they had completed the journey they had to have a document issued at Santiago called a 'compostella'. There were thriving markets in forged compostella in several towns along the way. On arrival at Santiago pilgrims were entitled to free board and lodging in accommodation provided by the Church which was receiving a massive amount of revenue in other ways. Magnificent gifts were made along with donations of money. Special masses must be paid for and only the possession of a Santiago compostella enabled pilgrims to buy metal brooches (made in several qualities) of scallop shells sold by licensed dealers in the city.

A new architectural style developed in the churches built to accommodate the numbers of pilgrims traveling the roads to Compostella, Rome and the Holy Land. (Palmer's to Jerusalem, Romeros to Rome and Peregrinos who walked the Way of St James) A number of these were built with a dome rather

than a tower at the crossing and those that housed important shrines adopted a plan in which the aisles ran right round the transept arms and ambulatory. This allowed visitors moving to the reliquary chapel to pass around the edges of the church without interrupting any services which might be taking place. The shrine itself usually lay in a crypt under the choir which raised the floor level of the chancel and the high altar. The need to accommodate pilgrims and provide space for individual devotions and (paid for) private masses introduced side chapels in the nave, transepts and then around the apse.

Pilgrimage was a source of revenue for the churches but also for the merchants and craftsmen who flocked to the major pilgrimage sites providing objects for the church itself and souvenirs and gifts for the pilgrims. Markets and fairs were held in the towns and large villages along the roads where the makers of all kinds of goods could display their wares. The pilgrimage monasteries benefited from providing lodgings and many received gifts and donations from their guests. The traveling musician/story tellers known as jongleurs in the Midi, gleemen among the Saxons and minstrels in the Anglo-Norman world were working along the networks of pilgrim roads, performing in the market squares and cathedral forecourts of towns along the roads of the three Greater Pilgrimages (Holy Land, Rome and Compostella) and those leading to innumerable other centers in England, France and Italy. The jongleurs functioned as independent individuals, as informal bands or sometimes as families. They were musicians with a range of traditional instruments, singers and sometimes jugglers, acrobats and mummers. To take to the road as a jongleur or to be born into a jongleur family automatically set one aside from feudal society, because no loyalty was owed to any single lord or country the protection of feudal law was lost, crimes committed against the jongleurs were deemed to have not happened. On the other hand the jongleurs had a high degree of freedom, they could travel across lands and frontiers and into the cities. The best jongleurs and jongleuse (gleemaidens) were highly regarded and were employed at Court, there are several accounts of jongleurs entering the service of the Saxon and Norman kings (Rahir jongleur to Henry I earned a great fortune that he left for the founding of St Bartholomew's Hospital) Some were full-time employees in the aristocratic households but there were many who preferred a life of absolute freedom despite the penalties. By the late 11th century there were guilds of gleemen and gleemaidens called the Guilds of St Julian in several European towns organized to support and protect the wandering players and hold courts at which complaints and disagreements between the players might be settled. It was through the jongleurs that stories of heroes and chivalry were first spread through Europe along the pilgrim roads The Chansons du Geste, set at the time of Charlemagne tell of the battles of the Christians against the Saracens. The best known was the 'Song of Roland' that appeared from France to the Sicily. In the same way the stories of Arthur, King of the Britains were told up and down the Pilgrim roads before they were recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth and the poet Chretien de Troyes.

The 12th and 13th centuries saw an increase in the numbers of pilgrimage sites; quantities of relics were being brought back from the Holy Land or from the sack of Constantinople and offered as gifts or sold to churches. Fragments of True Cross or thorns from the Crown of Thorns were especially prized as were fragments of Christ's shroud or relics of the Virgin Mary the bones of major saints came a close second. A vast number of these relics were bogus but the faithful who acquired them believed them to be real and the possession of an important relic more or less assured the fortunes of a church or monastery. For example, in 1205 a number of relics were 'liberated' from Count Baldwin of Flanders by a priest who subsequently offered them to the Cathedral at St Albans. Among the items was a little cross made from two fragments of wood from the True Cross. St Albans presumably was not convinced so the priest took it to the tiny Cluniac monastery at Bronholm in Norfolk. Within a short time spectacular miracles were taking place (39 raised from the dead and 19 blind restored to sight). The monastery received Royal patronage from Henry III and became one of the wealthiest and most important pilgrimage sites in England. The Santo Stefano Cathedral at Prato in Tuscany was given the Sacred Girdle of the Virgin Mary in the 12th century. According to tradition the Virgin had not died, she had fallen asleep and then ascended bodily to heaven. Her assumption was witnessed by all the disciples who had been transported miraculously from all parts of the world to Ephesus. As she rose the Virgin let her girdle fall to be caught by St Thomas who subsequently left it to a priest, one of whose descendants married a crusader from Prato who bought it home. This very sacred relic ensured that the little Romanesque cathedral became a place of pilgrimage, Prato was packed on the Feast of the Assumption when the girdle was displayed and the cathedral could afford the very best artists.

The Latin Church had always accepted the veneration of relics on the grounds that the tiniest fragment of a saint would contain the 'essence' of the person and objects that had once belonged to Holy persons would concentrate the mind of the worshipper on the accomplishments of the owner but there were

many within the Church who found them idolatrous. The vast numbers of relics arriving in the west after the Crusades cast severe doubts on their authenticity – ‘enough wood of the True Cross to build an Ark and enough thorns to fill a forest’ never mind the thousands of bones purporting to belong to saints, sufficient fragments of the Virgin’s cloak to clothe an army and so on. Some were truly inventive, linen shifts stained with drops of milk from the Virgin’s breast, phials containing the tears of the Virgin, pieces of the Christ child’s cradle, the list was endless. There was a strong feeling among reformers that at least some churches were well aware of the dubious nature of their relics but were quite prepared to exhibit them for the worship of the credulous faithful. In Protestant countries the problem was solved by simply destroying all of them, in Catholic countries it was not until the 17th century that any real effort was made to sort out the possibly genuine from the patently fake and that extended only to the major churches

English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish pilgrims took the road to Compostella if they could but there were a large number of pilgrim churches ‘at home’ The martyred saints and great evangelists had their own shrines; Edward the Confessor at Westminster, St Alban, venerated as the first Christian to have been martyred in Britain had a very rich Abbey near to London. St Cuthbert at Durham, St David’s in Wales and St Patrick at Struell Wells in Ireland. Before the 12th century none of these had sufficient international clout to attract foreign pilgrims but within a couple of hundred years the British shrines were rivalling those in France and the lesser shrines of Italy. In 1061 Richeldis de Faverches, a Saxon noblewoman married to the Lord of the Manor of Walsingham had a vision of the Virgin Mary who asked her to build a replica of the house in Nazareth, this was apparently miraculously constructed while Richeldis was at prayer. The site became very important under the Normans, a priory was built in 1150 and had royal patronage, pilgrims came to worship at the house (barefoot from their lodgings) and take the waters from the Well of Richeldis, believed to have miraculous properties. So many valuable offerings were made that the priory had to be enclosed in a fortified wall. The shrine was being criticised for its wealth by the 14th century but remained popular in Tudor times, Henry VII visited several times and Henry VIII stayed at the priory and went barefoot to the shrine where he placed a gold circlet around the Virgin’s head. In 1537 he had all the treasures removed and those who objected were executed. (at more or less the same time Loreto near Ancona in Italy received the Holy House believed to have been inhabited by the Virgin at the time of the Annunciation and miraculously transported to Loreto by angels to keep it safe from the Turks)

Canterbury had always been important to the Church, St Augustine had established his first foundation there in 597 and along with York it was one of the two archiepiscopal sees of England (took precedence in 14th century). A new splendid Cathedral had been built and an international gathering of prelates attended its consecration in 1130. However it was the martyrdom of the Abbot of Canterbury Thomas Becket in December 1170 that made the cathedral one of the most important pilgrim churches in western Christendom. Becket was not just an English martyr, he was a respected scholar, statesman and churchman and was seen as the champion of Catholic Church in the struggles for supremacy with the secular powers of Europe. It was his refusal to accept the demands of his erstwhile friend Henry II that caused the king to say the words that apparently inspired four knights to go to Canterbury and assassinate Becket. The murder provoked international indignation, the pope threatened to put England under interdict and Henry was forced to do full penance (including pilgrimage) Thomas was canonized in 1173 and Henry completed his penance by being scourged by the monks before St Thomas’ tomb. Miracles were happening before Thomas was canonized, some local people who had witnessed the murder soaked a piece of cloth in his blood and this if touched apparently instantly cured blindness epilepsy and leprosy. The monks at Canterbury Priory started selling glass bottles of Becket’s blood (?) and people began flocking to the shrine. Within a year it had become a pilgrim destination and the keeper of the shrine issued metal badges to those who had journeyed from great distances. The monks, afraid that Becket’s body might be stolen had the coffin interred in a crypt guarded by a stone wall stone wall with gaps through which pilgrims could put their heads and kiss the tomb. In 1220 the coffin was moved to a shrine, a raised platform on pillars behind the high altar. (St Omer’s Church Canterbury was a second pilgrim destination, it had a bit of the True Cross, a fragment of Christ’s tomb, some of Mary’s hair, St Thomas Becket’s tunic and a piece of his chair, hair clippings, parts of his shirt and some of his blood). The pilgrim road to Canterbury ran from Southwark through Winchester (S. Swithun) - Chaucer in the 14th cent has his pilgrims telling stories, the prize for the best one was free meal at Southwark on return. (the idea was based on Boccaccio’s Decameron which Chaucer knew from his diplomatic work in Italy). It was not Canterbury that proved to be the most revered of the English shrines, it was Glastonbury. In the early 15th century to make a pilgrimage to St Mary’s and the chapel of St Michael earned a staggering 42 years of indulgence - Westminster Abbey

earned only one year and forty days; Canterbury only 20 days and even St Peter's in Rome earned a scant three years and nine months.

According to the Canon gospels after Christ died on the Cross a rich disciple of Arimathea begged the body from Pilate and placed it in a new tomb while Nicodemus brought spices for the burial. In the apocryphal *Evangelium Nicodemi* (2nd cent AD) it was the same Nicodemus who made the Grail and brought it to Calvary to catch the Blood of Christ. In the 8th century the *Evangelium Nicodemi* was embellished to include the story of the expulsion of Joseph and Nicodemus from their land along with their friends and families. Before they went Nicodemus put into the sea at Jaffa a portrait head he had carved of Christ, by tradition this is the carving kept in the cathedral at Lucca in Tuscany. After this they set sail with the Grail and the Lance and finally reached Avaron in the wet lands to the west of the Occident. By the 13th century this story had become inextricably mixed with the legends relating to King Arthur known throughout the west and put into writing at the courts of France and England. The basic Arthurian legends had been extended by other ancient Welsh and Irish myths one of which is the story of the Irish demigod Finn, the son of the Fisher King (Bran, the sea god in Irish myth) who discovers his father by accident when he stays overnight in his castle and sees the magic cauldron which confers eternal life on those who drink from it. Finn does not recognize his father at once and has to undergo a series of tasks in order to find him and the magic cauldron again. In the 13th century retelling of the story; - the 'Perlesvaus' the cauldron of the Fisher King had become transformed into the Grail and the quest of Finn/Percival into the Grail quest. In the *Perlesvaus* the hero makes a return visit after the Fisher King has died, the Grail has vanished but when Perceval occupies the castle it reappears in the chapel as a chalice (the first time the grail is specifically referred to in that form) along with the lance and the sword with which John the Baptist was beheaded. Percival is told by certain ageless elders that he is descended from the line of Joseph of Arimathea; thus his father the Fisher King becomes the descendant of Joseph and the custodian of the Grail. There was a tradition, first recorded about the year 1,000 that the very first Christian preachers in Britain had founded a church at Glastonbury built in record time with divine help and consecrated to the Virgin Mary. There was certainly a very ancient building at Glastonbury which was destroyed by fire in 1184 and replaced with a fine Norman building (now also destroyed). At some point Glastonbury 'became' Avalon and the church became the very church founded by Joseph - moreover the church also became the resting place of Arthur and Guenevere and the hiding place of the Grail. Two painted chests believed to hold the remains of the legendary King and Queen were opened at Eastertide in 1278 before a huge congregation that included the King Edward I and his Queen. The remains were then rehousing in a marble monument paid for by the king. By the mid 13th century Glastonbury was quite explicit in its claims to be the mysterious Avaron to which the apocryphal Joseph had gone. The area of Somerset in which Glastonbury is situated was in fact known as Avalon - the land of apples and was situated in the low-lying marshes, the wet lands of Somerset. By the time John of Glastonbury wrote his *Chronicles* in the late 14th century the story of Joseph of Arimathea and his voyage to England had become accepted as 'fact', Glastonbury was the church founded by Joseph, it was the hiding place of the Grail and the burial place of Arthur and of Joseph himself. The cult of Joseph assumed international importance, at the Council of Pisa in 1409 the church at Glastonbury was officially recognized as the founding church in the west. At Constance in 1417 and again in 1424 and 1434 Joseph held his ground against claims and counter claims from the French and the Spanish who resented St Denis and St James being downgraded. Richard Bere who became Abbot in 1493 enlarged the church and dedicated a special chapel to Joseph and a flood of miracles were reported. It is from this time that the legend of the hawthorn trees dates. The trees were supposed to have come from the staff of Joseph, planted in the earth after he arrived at Avalon. Glastonbury was a major pilgrimage centre until it suffered the fate of all the English shrines at the hands of Henry VIII and was subsequently obliterated at the time of Cromwell.

Pilgrimage was constantly renewed by the addition of new centers, Assisi for St Francis and St Claire and Siena for St Catherine, Padua for St Anthony. In the 16th century the Reformation curtailed it in all the Protestant countries but in Italy and Spain pilgrimages were instituted to the shrines of new saints like Theresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola and Charles Borromeo and in 18th century Bavaria new churches were created on the sites of abbeys and shrines destroyed in the Thirty Years War. In 1858 the Church recognized Bernadette and Lourdes became, and remains a pilgrim destination. The site of a vision of the Virgin at Fatima near Batalha in Portugal was recognized in 1917, Knock in Ireland, Czestochowa in Poland and Liseux in Northern France all attracts huge followings. More recently (2002) the shrine of Padre Pio in Gargana has become the focus of international pilgrimage.