

# SACRED MOUNT

Words, sounds and images of the journey

**introduction by Vinicio Capossela**

GIOVANNANGELO DE GENNARO  
ENSEMBLE CALIXTINUS

editrice l'immagine

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Dear Frater Giovannangelo,

I recently had the fortunate experience of coming across Patrick Leigh Fermor's magnificent *Time of Gifts*, an account compiled many years after his first journey. A crossing of Europe on foot from London to Istanbul, which took place between 1933 and 1934, when at 17 years of age, as a pilgrim and a wandering cleric he decided that the only sensible thing to do was to set out walking, rejecting any mechanical means of transport, cared for by the God of encounters. Reading Fermor puts one in the mood to accept a gift. The time for gifts is the time when we are able to welcome the Gift. These are slow-release gifts, reconsidered through writing, which in turn becomes a gift in itself. This account reminded me of you, dear frater, your way of walking, as a spiritual experience rather than an athletic one (for that matter, you never wear technical clothing).

This season of spring when the brother birds make their song heard, brings to my mind the singing of your instruments, so close to the cycle of nature. The vielle, the aulophones, the bagpipe, the voice itself are archaic instruments that more than any other preserve the most intimate relationship with nature, with the plant world, with trees, with light. This is one of the gifts you bring to the world, dear frater, and I am grateful to that God of encounters for being a friend to us and for having been able to break both material and spiritual bread with you, as *cumpanis*, fellow travelers who share bread, do.

Walking is the oldest thing in the world, and nomadism, increasingly opposed by a world that has taken on the rigidity of physical sedentariness, in which everyone moves around but very few travel, has acquired revolutionary new meanings. It is an act of affirmation of the human as we increasingly lose our relationship with the materiality of the world. Your music and vision gathered in these written thoughts are a gift to help us become aware of our upright position. So thank you for this gift, indeed, "grace" as the great Psarantonis, one of your teachers, wanted to say in a mock linguistic error. He knew, as a confidant of Zeus, or thias, the God, the deity, that "grace" is the condition in which there is no longer separation. And that the sacred is everywhere, for sacred is the world and its inhabitants and especially the host. So, may "grace" be with us. I take my leave with those lines of a Turkish poet whose name I cannot remember that read "Walker, where does your path lead? I do not know, the wind will know, and I stand before the breeze."

Once again, I bid a good journey, to you, and to those who will have enough heart to follow you.

Frater Vinicio

Montecanto, May 2022

*The heretic is he who sets himself in contrast to the world, because he swims the current, goes where others do not go, toils while everyone else enjoys the wind in their favor.  
The heretic is a kind of martyr.  
He offers himself freely, even defying death.*

*Giovannangelo*

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The lyrics of “The Spirit of the Journey,” “The Fire,” “Letter to Anger,” “Microcosm and Macrocosm,” “The Fellow Traveler,” “Valle Baracca,” “Cloister,” and “The Return” are taken from “The Road to Nowhere,” messages from Giovannangelo de Gennaro’s solitary journey, a Radio Dòsti column edited by Michele Lobaccaro.

Thank you.

*Little drops of water make a mighty ocean.*

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## • St. Nicholas

From the island we can catch a glimpse of the sacred mountain of the Gargano. It is the island of St. Nicholas, the saint associated with songs in different languages. From distant places come choirs of pilgrims. Each step corresponds to a litany as they invoke his grace. They enter barefoot and on their knees, they carve crosses on stone and draw boats. They leave without turning their backs to the altar, to Our Lady Queen of the Seas and Winds. Their invocations are interrupted by weeping and they leave notes saying “for the grace received” or “waiting for grace.” With the boat of knowledge we set sail eastward, in the direction of the rising sun. It is dawn in Bari, and next to the road worker’s house is a sign: “Chapel of Saint Mary of the Good Road.” They call this place “the gate of Bari.” Under our breath we sing songs and prayers, some ask forgiveness from the crucifix, friend of the journey along with the pilgrim’s staff. The sun rises. We continue through the deafening traffic of cars. Exhaust fumes incense the path to the saint’s relics. And we have arrived.

*Ex eius tumba marmorea sacrum resudat oleum quo liniti sanatur ceci, surdis auditus redditur et debilis quisque sospes regreditur. V. Catervatim ruunt populi cernere cupientes que per eum fiunt mirabilia. Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen. (Ex eius tumba).*

Before entering the Basilica, at each step of the church porch, we proclaim its holiness. Once inside, we bathe some parts of our bodies with holy water and in procession, some on their knees, some barefoot, we approach the statue. Our eyes are filled with wonder. The ritual of our steps continues, punctuated by the solemn tolling of the Basilica bells. We descend into the crypt. We touch our fingers to the stoup again and then the marble crucifix above it. The women rotate around the miraculous column, touch the other columns and move to the marble ex eius tumba. We slip our hands intertwined with rosaries into the lattice of the balustrade that separates us. Cards, photographs, coins cascade across the tomb. We remain motionless, suspended in our own subjective time. Incense perfumes the crypt of the Orthodox, candles perfume the crypt of the Catholics. The sacred of the invisibilium is visible. We continue on our way through the deafening traffic of cars. Exhaust fumes still incense us. Now we are blessed with objective time.

## • Sirio

Antonio looks at me and says, “All right, all right, let’s do as you say.” In his opinion, I’m not sure of the route. I do my calculations, follow my intuition for a while, then compare my route with the one described in the guidebook. I take a good look around myself, checking ahead, to the rear and into the distance, to see if we are wasting time or if my intuition has completely failed me. The right path for the traveler is not only the one on the maps, but also the one that instinct leads you to. The primordial instinct awakens and rises to the needs of the moment.

I read the road sign “Punta Apani,” and follow the guidebook directions. I tell myself that we are on the right trail and have one less problem to think about. There are signs from other travelers on the road: notes, fish painted red, stickers that say “Jerusalem Way,” a Carabinieri with a red, blue and yellow backpack, graffiti of sailboats with lateen and ancient Turkish sails etched on church facades and chapels. When your gaze is measured by footsteps it is able to analyze the layering of passages. Confident, we advance toward the entrance to Brindisi skirting the sea, the same sea that so long ago welcomed the fishing boats of the Molfettese fleet.

There were many, many of them.

Memories from near and far come to mind: our mother driving the Mini Minor towards Brindisi, my brothers happy to travel the road parallel to our father’s fishing boat, Sirio. Only one point in common: the harbor.

I retrace my steps. I see the horizon to the left out of the corner of my eye. Antonio is to my right and the protracted shadows to the east cut across the asphalt in the piece of road in front of us. We stop for a rest, the usual sandwich that reenergizes us. In silence, in our own way, we watch and observe each other in that instant, as if it were a living freeze-frame. We set out again with the wind against us and the sun in our favor, the happiness of having nothing that overpowers us and justifies our effort.

Almost 40 km into this leg of our journey and we are looking forward to the concert in the crypt of the church of Santa Lucia.

We pass Torre Testa and begin to see the first buildings of a rich past, now totally abandoned by civilization, left to the devil of neglect, and time that is unforgiving. No, it does not forgive.

Roberto calls me on the phone, “Hello, where are you? I’ll catch up with you! See you at the little coffee bar up ahead.”

Partly out of habit and partly out of ritual, I leave my cane outside the entrance to the coffee bar. I unhook the strap of my backpack. Roberto joins us, waving with his right hand and making little videos with his left. Happy and cheered up by this welcome to the Brindisi territory, we order a beer and a coffee. I place my walking guide on the counter. The bartender smiles, “eh...many pass by here...”

I continue sipping my beer. Antonio nods his head. Yes, we are making our way on foot to Santa Maria di Leuca. The bartender asks permission to leaf through the guidebook, I can guess why. He wanted to see whether his bar was marked among the places of refreshment. He finds nothing and disappointedly comments aloud, “eh, everyone has to pass by this road anyway, even though further on the road names to enter Brindisi no longer match those in this book!”

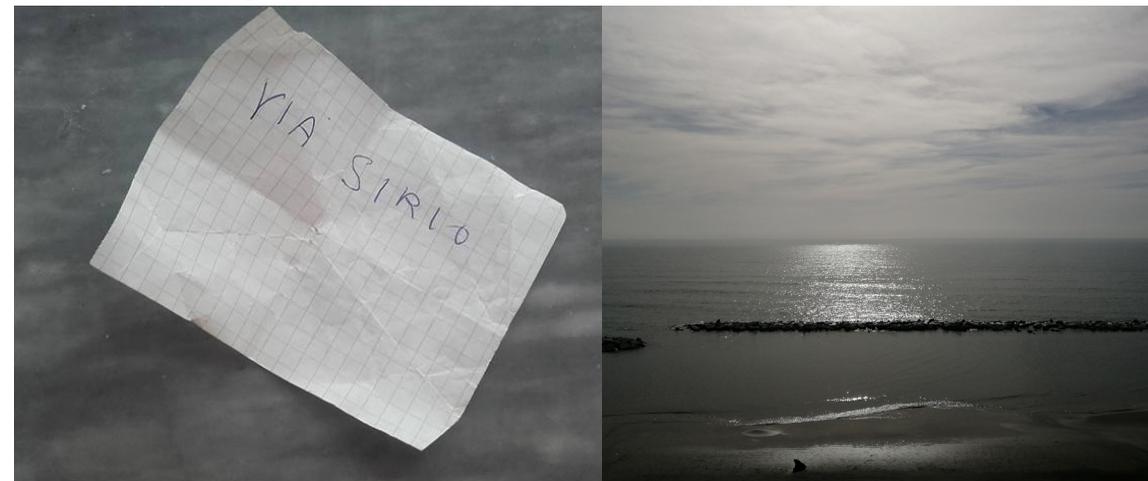
He shakes the guidebook up and down and puts it back on the counter. He tells us that they have changed the entire toponymy of the neighborhood.

“Excuse me, which street should we take? It says Trieste Street here.”

“You have to take...I can’t remember the new street name.”

“All right,” I tell him.

We say goodbye to Roberto and the bartender and agree to meet in the crypt. The sea is still to my left and Antonio to my right. Suddenly, I hear the sound of quick footsteps behind me and I turn around. I see Roberto running with a note in his hand, “Giovannangelo, this is the new name



of the road to enter the city!” Without breaking the pace of the march, I retrieve the piece of paper and thank him. A few steps further on I open the note and read, “Via Sirio.” I close it again and hand it to Antony, who serenely says, “You know, in Buddhism they say that the dead can manifest under special circumstances.” We arrive in Brindisi, very tired and late. In the crypt, the audience is seated and ready to listen to the concert. The rhythms are different, between us and them. We take off our shoes and begin to hear the breath of the earth. With our eyes closed, the long sound enters our souls.

### • From the Otranto Canal

From the Otranto Channel to the first Greek island, Corfu, then on to the others, Kefalonia, Zakynthos, Ithaca. On these islands we meet other travelers returning from the Aegean. They tell us about Mount Athos, the holy place of the Orthodox. We make our way there and land in a small cove, near the hieratic Pantokrator monastery, overhanging the sea. Outside, a monk waves us in for the liturgy. Sacred chants, candles and incense intoxicate us.

Time stands still here. There are other pilgrims in the cloister of the monastery, travelers like us. In the evening, silence unites us. In the darkness of the night the monks seem like solid shadows.



### • Monastery of Iviron

It is 3:30 p.m. and the monastery is about to close its doors, we have to ask for hospitality!

We get off the minibus, to our left is the sea. A concrete footbridge is used to moor the fishing monks' boats. To the right, a large carpenter's shop and a tower, perhaps a lookout. At the top, a large stone and wood building with gray and dark red facades and windows carefully painted white. A narrow dirt road winds ahead of us to the monastery. Two monks talk to each other; they seem to be waiting. I ask them for access to the monastery, they make a fleeting sign with their arm and barely look at us. I begin to understand that there is no glue between the Orthodox and the Catholics. I make my way to the monastery with the sun warming my neck and, to the rhythm of my footsteps, I repeat under my breath, “Let's hope for the best, let's hope for the best, let's hope for the best.” I am here as a pilgrim, I can't make reservations or phone ahead and reserve a bed as if it were a hotel.

*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Matteo 7, 7-14)*

Shortly afterwards I find out instead that it is very important to make reservations as it helps with the organization of the hospitality. Some monasteries can accommodate up to 150 pilgrims a day! Huge kitchens with 100-liter pots, refectories with 50 or 60 tables, some made of marble dating back to the 4th century A.D., others of wood built by the monks themselves. I reach the monastery first. Edouard is still below, no doubt taking photographs or contemplating the wonder around him. At the entrance, to the right, is a store selling sacred objects. I enter and say hello. I see the tall silhouette of a monk, bent over his desk, reading. I ask him for hospitality for two people. He asks me for a reservation, which I do not have. He continues the questioning.

“Where are you from? Are you Orthodox?” Precise questions to which one is obliged to answer truthfully.

“I am Italian, from Bari, and we have St. Nicholas!”

In a low voice, I say that I am baptized in the Catholic rite and hope that the pill will be sweet enough to swallow and that I will finally receive a

meal and a bed for the night. The monk signals me to go to the monastery guest quarters to wait. At the entrance is a desk with a register and a glass jar containing a pen and pencil; it looks like my elementary school teacher's desk. Next to it are some benches, a small table set with Turkish Delight, water and anise liquor. I sit and wait for the response, graciously. Let's hope for the best, let's hope for the best.

An imprecise amount of time elapses and finally the austere monk enters with a firm step and motions me to approach the pulpit. He asks me what work I do.

"I am a musician."

"What kind of music do you play?"

"Medieval and Gregorian chant."

He nods his head without looking at me. After a few moments, Edouard enters the guest quarters. We look at each other smiling as I receive a room key. Second floor, the first room on the left. The monk informs us that vespers begins at 3:30 pm. We finally have a place to spend the night. Actually, the night is the day and the day is penance, that's what they call the work. In the room are two single beds, a table, a chair, an empty glass bottle and glass, a built-in cabinet and two pairs of slippers placed under the respective beds.

We leave our backpacks and head toward the church, trying to slip in unnoticed. We sit in the backbench and vespers begins with psalmodic singing in alternatim between two choirs, one opposite the other. A monk handles the candles lit by the faithful near the main icon as the sun slowly begins to set and the natural light cuts diagonally across the iconostases, the frescoes and the faces of some of the officiants. It looks like a metamorphosis of bodies that begin as shadows and then become invisible entities in the night.

After vespers we return to the cell. I pull a piece of sausage and some taralli out of the bag. Hunger begins to set in and we don't know anything about dinner. Perhaps they will ring the bell or simandron to warn us. Unconvinced by the silence that had already fallen before night, we descend into the cloister to see where all the other pilgrims and monks were. I look out the window of a central building and see everyone arranged for dinner.

Us, the last two pilgrims. How embarrassing! We enter the refectory with our heads down and sit in the last seats at the table. Two metal bowls, a glass of wine, a tomato, some cheese and a boiled egg. This is our holy dinner. The pilgrim across from us looks at us and points out our tardiness.

The silence of the refectory is interrupted only by the clatter of cutlery and the perpetual chanting of the lectio read aloud by the monk on duty. When the reading is finished, the igumen rises and everyone follows, concluding the ritual gesture with the sign of the cross. As if in a procession, the monks leave the refectory followed by us pilgrims.

We leave and it is already late at night. The doors of the monastery are closed and the windows are illuminated with a dim light.

It is midnight in the monastery of Iviron. Outside, however, it is about 7 p.m.

*Amen*



## • The spirit of the journey

I proceed toward Monte Sacro, the sacred mount. It is not my destination, because I would like to continue onward. When asked this afternoon, “What is your path?”, I replied that I didn’t know. What is certain is that I am going toward the Gargano, a place that has always fascinated me. A good friend of mine says there is a magnet here and I have always been attracted to this place, to this set of places: Monte Sant’Angelo, the Hermitages of Pulsano, the ancient farmhouses, Monte Sacro, the grottoes of Vignanotica, the mule tracks. In short, the Gargano calls me and always says, “I am here, I am waiting for you.” I keep listening to this call and going toward the destination that is not just a place but is this very journey, there are many places and encounters that, in their own way, also represent small destinations. People you already know, friends, who give you a chance to rest, to refill your water bottle, these are not casual encounters but always have a very strong, very deep meaning. That’s what the spirit of the journey is all about, when you say “you are on the journey,” the people who are around you and help you are part of it, so “we are on the journey.”

*Verità sei tu  
occhi miei, occhi tuoi  
passi miei  
nei passi tuoi.  
Trova silenzio, suono sospeso.  
Notte d’inverno  
aprirà il mio cuore  
aprirai i miei occhi.  
L’acqua è specchio  
stagno che  
attraverso senza te.  
Tra le foglie  
vedo te, vedo in me.  
Aprirà il mio cuore  
aprirai i miei occhi.  
Solo il fiore*

*svelerà la via  
che conduce a te.  
Nel tuo nome c’è il segreto.  
Loto d’amore  
aprirà il mio cuore  
aprirai i miei occhi.  
(Sayyid)*



Today I had the opportunity to stay at a friend's house in Barletta, but I felt I should continue the journey and I arrived here at the gates of Zapponeta. I am the guest of two actors, beautiful people who are somehow connected to my past. I think it is an important encounter, and that is why I wanted to accept the invitation to stay in the countryside of Zapponeta to dig into, to delve into my doubts, my perplexities, my artificial thoughts. I am benefiting from it, because expecting something eventually redirects you and gives you the answer, and the answer is just what you don't expect.

On this beautiful day I took care of my dog, Pietra. I stayed close to her because it was very hot. She didn't want to walk anymore and I took care of her, who said with her eyes, "it's time to stop now." I did. If someone asks you to stop, it is right to take a break, because it is another point of view and maybe a point of view untainted by your thoughts is pure.

When I'm traveling solo at sunset, especially when I have a tent and I need to find the ideal place and in the dark set it up and sleep in it... that's where my brain, my thoughts, and my imagination, start moving at 300 kilometers per hour. I am in a kind of womb and can't see anything outside, however, I listen and this gives me a series of inputs that can also alter my perception. When I hear a sound, I imagine everything and eventually discover that it is nothing and in the meantime I fall asleep.

I try to do this through breathing, relaxing my mind, and slowly the darkness passes and a new day arrives.

## • The theft of the Icon

I strongly believe in observing.

A few years ago I decided to embark on the walk to Monte Sant'Angelo. I told this to a person who thought he was my friend, but whom I trusted little. I had always kept a certain distance from this person, because of his ambiguous way of interacting. He asked if he could come with me, I looked at him and, finally, said yes. I had decided to understand his essence more deeply. Walking is synonymous with truth. I watched his movements, listened to his words and even the conversations he had on the phone before going to sleep. Listening to him was unavoidable.

*Gaudens in domino in hoc sollempnio  
Letetur omnium turba fidelium  
Ymnis et organis ad laudem presulis  
Cuius miracula colit ecclesia  
Qui ab infantia divina gratia  
Servivit domino devoto animo  
Et tu progredere o lector incipe  
In primo carmine dic iube domine.  
(Gaudens in domino)*

Upon arriving at the Hermitages along a beautiful path, perhaps the most beautiful in Puglia, we asked the monks for hospitality, for asylum for one night. I had known them for some time; it was not the first time I had headed toward the Lombard path. Always helpful and with immense love, they said yes to us. With one of them, of Syrian origin, we talked about Arabic, Syrian and Coptic liturgical chants. It is often thought that Middle Eastern music and Arabic chant is only Muslim, instead there is an incredible heritage of Christian chants in Eastern languages, older than our Western ones. The discussion lasted a long time, and the weariness of my feet was anesthetized by the eagerness to learn from that gentleman dressed in white in a room with a window, from which a curved line over the sea could be glimpsed. I froze for a few seconds and he said, yes, that's Molfetta there.



Meanwhile, I did not let my acquaintance out of my sight. He would occasionally say standard phrases he had heard or read here and there, intending to break the musical understanding between the monk and me. Impossible, we were in our musical “hermitage.” Our conversation was slowed down by the tolling of the bells; the ninth hour was being rung. After the short prayer, the Syrian-born father invited us to his scriptorium. It was the most beautiful place in the whole Abbey where the colors, the smells of seasoned wood, the gold laminated leaves illuminated the room as if it were a living icon. We were in the workshop intended for icon making, a meditative monastic practice that originated in the fifth century AD. My pseudo-friend, blinded by the golden color that coated the contours of a beautiful image of the Virgin, asked how much it cost. Three hundred and fifty euros was too much, he said, and I began to worry. An uncomfortable feeling rose up inside me, starting in my stomach. It was a feeling of deep shame at what was about to happen. I distracted myself by looking at Molfetta through the window, looking for the beauty of the city from afar because my Molfetta travelling companion, at that moment, felt ugly. He asked the monk if he could buy the icon, although he had no money on him. The monk told not to worry about it, to take it and that he could pay for it once he got home, with a bank transfer. He put the icon in his backpack and we headed for the Shrine of Monte Sant’Angelo. I returned to Molfetta with a feeling of spiritual indigestion. I didn’t understand exactly why. I didn’t feel well and couldn’t understand why. Some time passed, months, seasons, and I again felt the need to return to that path. I returned to the monks, who welcomed me with some distrust; their attitude was typical of Christian forgiveness. I did not understand why they had that air of forgiveness with me. I thought that my music, cultural, artistic interest and spiritual quest could not be misunderstood. I was me, no more and no less, but it was not enough to overcome their distrust. No. It was not enough.

I felt this in the air and decided not to seek asylum for the night. I greeted the father superior, and he smiled and said, “What about the icon? Didn’t you pay for it after all?” I understood immediately. With a deep anger

stirring inside, tamed by a hundred lions, I tried to answer in a calm tone though I felt anything but calm. The father replied that my friend had told them that I had bought the icon! I closed the door of the monastery and walked toward The Shrine of St. Michael. I felt like a thief, as if I had actually stolen the icon. I was sad, deeply sad.

I went back to Molfetta, I wanted to meet that person to express my anger with him, but, as chance would have it, I didn’t see him again for years. Now he has a beautiful house by the sea in the center of town and every time I pass by there I imagine where the icon he stole from the monks might be.

There is no moral to this story because my journey of observation is still full of unanswered questions.

The destination is still far away, one day I will reach it and my heart will pulsate with true joy.



## • The fire

I feel like I have a fire inside me. A fire that sometimes warms me, but sometimes burns me, that is difficult to extinguish. There have been times when it was about to be extinguished but I wouldn't let the flames die down, I did everything I could to feed it. I feel it next to my heart, in the center, and it is always burning. It is a wonderful feeling because I can feel its warmth. Sometimes, however, it burns brightly and can even sear me. Right now, I am in a remote place on the Gargano and in front of me there is a real fire. I watch it, imagine shapes, it seems to dance and sing. I would like my inner fire to reach a lower temperature, a temperature that doesn't cause damage inside me. So, every now and then, I have to douse it with some water, to calm it down.

There is an incredible feeling of peace here, I feel like I belong here. One thing struck me today: greetings, handshakes. How many times have I shaken hands without looking into a person's eyes or felt from the handshake what could be shared with someone: sometimes firmness, presence, or instead, superficiality. In addition to handshakes, I have thought a lot about a person's gaze, whether they look at me when greeting me. Greeting without looking, greeting with a furtive glance. I am wary of people who do not look at the person in front of them, because I feel that there is no truth, no mutual exchange, no honesty. Greetings are important, a greeting can be a way to say farewell, or to say goodbye. Unto God, let us rely on God.

These small gestures are fundamental to being able to relate honestly without having to hide behind something. Greetings are a form of presence. I even like to greet people I don't know on when on a journey. I have observed pilgrims who often do not greet those they meet or vice versa, there have been times when I have presented myself in an attitude of presence, offering a greeting and the other person has seemed a bit intimidated. The elderly are wonderful because greetings are part of the moment, the work they are doing, for example, in the countryside or with animals. So, I think that communication between wayfarers as they pass each other along the path, between people who meet, is important. Maybe one is continuing on his way, while the other is on his way back to the office. A greeting is an extra spark to keep the fire burning inside, and if

this fire burns higher because you expected to receive something in return, it is better to douse it with some water and calm the high flame. Also because the fewer flames there are, the more embers there are.

I think of these little gestures, these little jewels that are part of our essence, and I like to keep them safeguarded inside my heart, close to my heart, so that the temperature is always constant. It is like love which can be extinguished, you have to feed it otherwise the fire no longer heats the heart, which becomes cold. So, I believe that in these gestures there is also a form of love, by which I do not mean just falling in love with someone. Falling in love is also about keeping this fire burning all the time because it is part of us and then, who knows, it might be like what happens to a moth near a candle. Attracted by the fire, by the light, we might dissolve.



## • Pilgrim, pilgrim!

On a late December night my first pilgrimage begins.

It is four o'clock in the morning, I head for the station: Rome, Ventimiglia, Bayonne, then a regional train to Saint Jean Pied de Port. Everything proceeds as I imagined, reconstructed from Paolo Coelho's book. The train trip takes a day and a half. I do the Ventimiglia-Bayonne leg at night on a regional train that picks up young people headed to the festivals heralding the new year.

I get comfortable and survey the small universe I will carry on my shoulders. Tired from the long journey, I fall asleep on my backpack. I am awakened by the screams of a man whose bag has been stolen. There is the smell of wine in the train. I, drunk with sleep, continue drowsing under the influence of exhaustion to a background of techno and house music. The crazy train is about to reach its destination, for some profane, for me sacred. Some are headed to Bilbao, others to Santiago. The beginning of my first journey. I have nothing but I know I can find everything. Yes, everything I need is already in that place, where the boundaries are so narrow that one can get lost; on the contrary, I am finding myself.

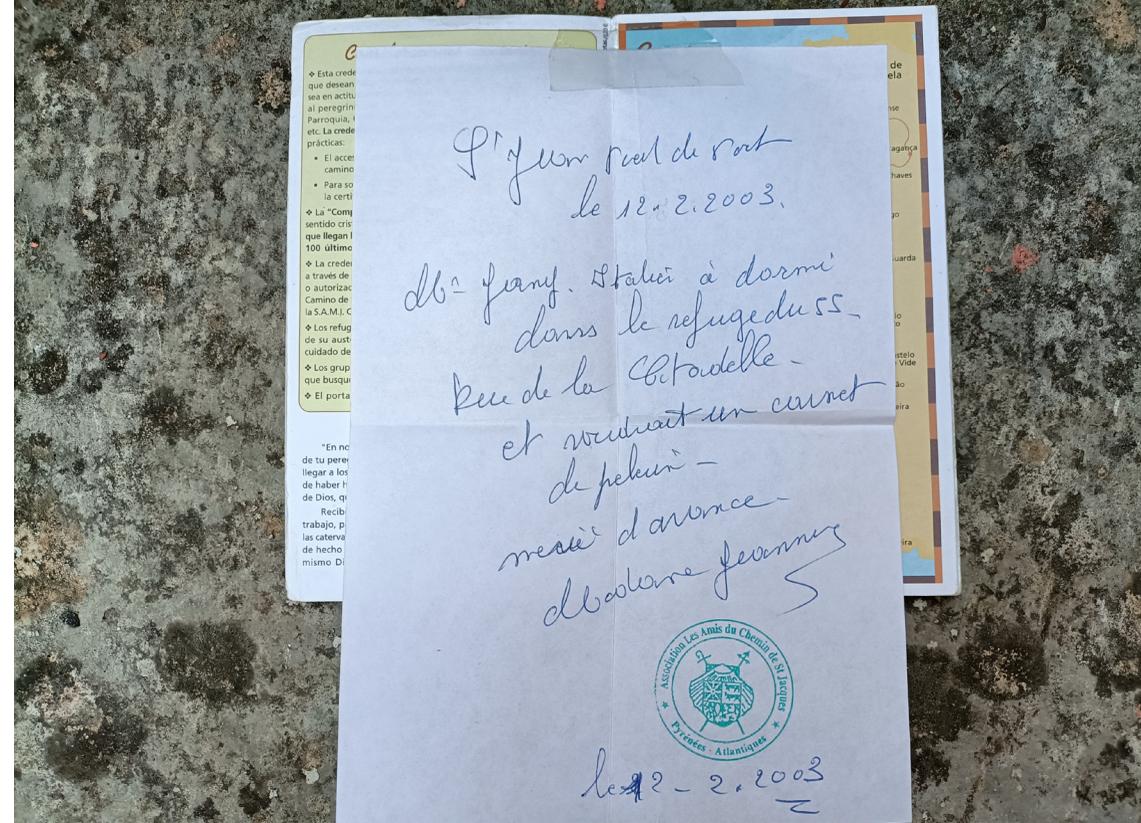
Madame Janette welcomes me to the Alberge du Pelerin. I ring the bell, she opens the door, and her good-natured smile draws me in. I show her the letter from the parish priest which I need to get the pilgrim's credential. I try to make myself understood with my Esperanto. She understands and, with a smile, this time reassuring, writes on a piece of paper the recommendation for the parish priest of the collegiate church of Roncesvalles. I take the piece of paper and place it in a bag that I stow, along with the letter and an image of Our Lady of the Martyrs, across my chest, between my heart and my mind. I spend the whole night half-awake.

I am about to set out alone, accompanied only by my brother Antonio's Timberland boots, a backpack borrowed from Antonietta, and the small blanket that Sally gave me. Wrapped in a black cape and wearing a fur hat. My cape is my sleeping bag, my emptiness guarded by its warm black. Outside, the white snow envelops nature.

"Madame, c'est bon si je prends le chemin de Napoléon?"

"Oui oui, sans problème!", she responds.

"Buen Camino!"



I cross the main street lined with red houses with sloping roofs. At the end, a bridge. Along the way I pass souvenir stores, also selling the famous pilgrim's staff. Should I buy one? No, I tell myself, I will find one along the way. I recognize the first lesson of the walk: attachment. I turn left and take a small road uphill. Behind me the past, the darkness lightens thanks to the snow on the mountains and the green meadows in the valley. The climb is interminable. I stop near a spring and feel as if I have reached the first stage. The level of my fatigue dictates that I have reached the first stage. Up ahead, a sign alerts me that I have covered 5 km, I still have 21 more to go to Roncesvalles.

I sit down to catch my breath and eat some bread with a piece of sausage. I see three people in the distance, maybe they are pilgrims: two adults and a child. They look confident, they know where they are going. "Pilgrims?" No. They continue at a confident, well-measured pace, passing me. One of them turns back, "sparadrap?" he asks me, signaling his feet. I intuit that he wants a band-aid. "Sparadrak" in Molfettese dialect means band-aid. Yes, I answer him. I hand one to him and he places it on the sole of the child's foot. They thank me with a smile and continue walking.

Backpack on my shoulders, I start walking again. I reach the top of the mountain, about 1,500 meters. The clouds change direction, I seem to lose gravitational pull. The wind starts blowing in my face, my cape tightens around my throat, the clouds become fog, the fog becomes snow. In front of me the path is all white, the yellow arrows are covered by snow. I don't know where to go, I worry because darkness begins to fall. I keep walking and see arrows etched in the snow indicating the direction. Slowly I reach Rolando's spring. The water is frozen. The only liquid I have with me is the walnut liqueur I brought from home: 25 cl in one gulp. It feels like oil flowing down my throat from my mouth. I am cold and cannot stop for long. I think about Madame Jeanette, "Yes, yes, you can go through Napoleon's pass." There is no time to waste, not even to think about what I left behind. Now I just have to follow the arrows in the snow before they are covered by the blizzard. I descend toward the valley through the trees of a dense forest. I follow a dirt path marked by logging equipment. Total darkness, it is night. In front of me the walls of the collegiate church, it

looks like a castle, a fortress enclosing the church and bell tower. No one is there. Destroyed by fatigue I head toward the light of a window. The sacred silence of the place is interrupted by my shouts, "pilgrim, pilgrim!"

I enter a kind of apartment on the ground floor, at the back an elderly gentleman with a hat and a cane is sitting by the fireplace. He senses my presence but does not turn around; he signals me with his arm to go toward the church. I am totally drenched. I am not cold, but as I pass I leave a small, irregularly shaped lake around me. I enter the church, lit by dim light from candles and a few spotlights. The bell rings and the mass begins. I take a seat in the pews. I am alone with two priests: one celebrates and the other plays the harmonium. I participate in the mass in pain. My knees are aching and shaking like leaves. At the end of the celebration they call me to the altar, ask me to hold baby Jesus in my hands. Then the artificial light is turned off and the church remains lit by candles. Mass is over and I go to sleep, giving thanks for all that has happened. I wrap myself in my blanket and fall asleep.



## • Your steps together with mine

“Andrea, you go ahead and lead the donkey.”

I felt that moment should belong only to him. It seemed to me that there was an intimate and private dialogue between the pilgrim and Archangel Michael. Before descending from the Coppa degli Angeli, Feliciano brought us the plumes. We put them on our staffs and on Alicante.

The silence was still heavy, our glances were fleeting, our eyes didn't meet. An invisible veil hid our Achilles' heel. The arrival at Monte Sant'Angelo was a procession.

We were all silent, only the wind sang and dried our tears. Darkness. The bells rang and the donkey's bells responded. My legs were shaking, with each step up the staircase I lost my sense of balance more. I felt small, as if the end of the path was the beginning of a new life. I was about to be re-born after a gestation in flux. Perhaps the rite of incubatio was this kind of passage?

I entered the Sacred Cave of the Angel, and sat in the back. I wanted to listen to the silence of those stones. I couldn't, the sound of my heartbeat was louder.

*Difendimi dalle forze contrarie,  
la notte, nel sonno, quando non sono cosciente.  
Quando il mio percorso si fa incerto  
e non abbandonarmi mai,  
non mi abbandonare mai.  
Riportami nelle zone più alte,  
in uno dei tuoi regni di quiete.  
È tempo di lasciare questo ciclo di vite  
e non abbandonarmi mai,  
non mi abbandonare mai.  
Perché le gioie del più profondo affetto  
o dei più lievi aneliti del cuore  
sono solo l'ombra della luce.  
Ricordami come sono infelice  
lontano dalle tue leggi.  
Come non sprecare il tempo che mi rimane*

*e non abbandonarmi mai,  
non mi abbandonare mai.  
Perché la pace che ho sentito in certi monasteri  
o la vibrante intesa di tutti i sensi in festa  
sono solo l'ombra della luce.*

*(L'ombra della luce)*



## • Letter to Anger

I have known you for a long time and you are ever present in my daily life. You show up when there is difficulty, effort, sadness, pain, hate. You are always here beside me and sometimes you are good at transforming yourself. Sometimes you even manage to make yourself loved, often I would say. You grow in a place where there are no plants, where the soil is dry, and you grow well. The less water there is, the stronger you are. You are an accomplice of he who would like to confront you. You become a lover of he who would like to annihilate you, but he wants to do away with you, he wants to destroy you. Well then, my friend. You will always be there, you will keep coming up at the least opportune times, and that is precisely why I call you friend, because I understand what you are like and I am also close to you. Because, I repeat, you are always with me. And so, I am writing to you, because I am sure that one day this sign will be erased by water and that natural fluid that is calmness. I write to you to try to keep you meek, to live with you. Dear anger, though you will continue to emerge, I will increasingly distance myself. Then one day that water will heal the scar and everything will become easier, you will disappear and when you reappear I will continue to distance myself from you because I know you, I know you very well. You need to be fed and I don't want to feed you on this pilgrimage. That is why I turn away from you and that is why I ask the waves to disperse you.



## • Microcosm and macrocosm

I have always thought about man's relationship with the earth, with creation, with the macrocosm. Hildegard von Bingen emphasizes a strong relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Man in medicine, in literature, in music, in nature, represents the microcosm, and there is a meeting point with that which is the macrocosm and, therefore, with the natural elements. Looking at the Posidonia I collected, I thought about the relationship between the individual and the collective. Actually what I need is harmony in diversity. The totality of individual ideological and cultural differences can contribute to making it possible for me to live in the system, in the macrocosm. I always think about the tendency to identify with a dominant ideology while forgetting what is behind it. So, what is behind it? There are the humans, the hearts, the bodies, the minds that need to be supported by the macrocosm, hence the collectivity that connects to the natural elements as well.

*Create breeze, dear mountains, create breeze.*

*Cure my agony.*

*The mountains do not create the breeze*

*That can cure my agony.*

*O clouds, clouds, bring coolness.*

*Make it rain, create the sea.*

*A good day for a bad man.*

*Place him under the dark soil.*

*Create breeze, dear clouds, create breeze.*

*Cure my agony.*

*Clouds do not generate the wind*

*That can cure my agony.*

*Mountains, ravines, fields, waters*

*Slowly flowing spring waters*

*Do not be indifferent*

*Look upon the pains of my heart.*

*(Hov arek)*

I observe the geometry of this Posidonia, against the background of the currents, the winds, the fluidity of the sea, the waves. On its sphere are small insects working in a singular way. There are different types and each performs a task not only for its own benefit. It also performs it for the care of the whole, the collective.

The experience of the pilgrimage during the pandemic made me think a lot about regeneration, contact with nature, with the elements, with the macrocosm, with all that surrounds us; it made me realize how important it is to be united together and not separate chapters of a single book. I imagine that harmony can be achieved with a round form of expression like this Posidonia, where the system is at the center and we, like the insects, work around it so that we can give nourishment to and manage the beauty of this form together.

I hope that on this pilgrimage I can find the right key to being in harmony with others, part of the system, to be able to relate to a plant, an animal, a person, through action and listening, a safe harbor and shore on which to land.



## • Sayyid

“Sayyid, today I want to go to pray with you. Take me to the mosque!”

“Sure, let’s go together.”

“But I have never prayed in a mosque, I don’t know what the rituals are...”

“Don’t worry, just do what I do, come with me.”

In a workshop, a cobbler was arranging his babouches and children were playing marbles in the street. I could smell the raw earth from which the houses had been built. Around us, only the silence of the early afternoon, the sound of the Mediterranean made of heat, light, and geometric shadows reflected on the white walls of houses with green wooden shutters. We entered a white mosque. The first thing Sayyid made me do was take off my shoes. Then we headed to a corner where there were fountains and he motioned for me to wash, repeatedly: first my left hand to wash my right and then my mouth, nose, face, arms, hair, ears, right foot and left foot.

It was Friday, and the thing that struck me in the mosque was the presence of a partition: there was the area designated for men and the area separated by the grid, for women and children. In the center stood a kind of tomb, that of a saint, perhaps. The Imam, seated before us and dressed in white, was praying in silence. I could only catch a glimpse of his lips moving. There was a clean silence, full of light.

I knelt down, lightly touching the carpet with my face, several times. Sayyid was looking at me but he was engrossed in his prayer, and I was also trying to pray. One God. Finally, he introduced me to the Imam and told him I was a Christian. He smiled at me, exclaiming “Allah akbar,” and I immediately grasped the welcome and generosity, the brotherhood between men of different faiths, with different theological cues. Faith is one, in the end.

I also remember that near us there was another Imam intent on talking to some boys from Indonesia, all dressed in white. An elder was explaining to them the meaning of the sūra or other passages of the Qur’ān. I was struck by the harmony in that temple of God. Outside, the call to prayer intersected with church bells.

Together they were sisters, brothers, as indeed inside the mosque. Me a Christian and the others Muslims.

We came out of the mosque and one of the young men sitting there said to me, "Hello brother, where are you from?" Upon hearing that I was Italian, he replied, "I know Rome, Florence, Venice, Italy is a nice country." There, he looked at me and repeated, "I'll see you again!" We exchanged phone numbers and that has led to us still being connected from time to time. Perhaps he is convinced that I am a Muslim, it matters little.

That does not preclude the fact that we are brothers. So we said our goodbyes outside the mosque and Sayyid and I continued our journey toward the mountain.



## • The fellow traveler

Why do we travel on foot? Why make a pilgrimage? I don't know, I still can't find the reason that drives me to do it. Certainly, I hear a call and during the journey I experience a feeling of freedom, lightness and ease in reaching my self. That is enough for me.

One of the travel companions of the walker is that part that keeps coming up in a cadenced manner when he or she would rather it didn't, a part that hides behind, or rather, beside oneself. This friend is mean-spirited, it takes on many forms and is contextualized in the thinking of the traveler. We actually carry it with us from the beginning of the pilgrimage and it is that beast that creeps in and makes us see fog where there is light. It is part of us and it would like to have every certainty, every confirmation. On the journey, however, we learn not to have expectations.

When I am tired and look at the horizon, I see the sky, the sea, the sun and the clouds. Thought is totally obliterated and only the experience remains. Through this way of interacting with the pilgrimage, my traveling companion is always present.

What I am doing now is trying to recognize it.

## • Valle Baracca

For a wayfarer there is no conclusion, no end to a journey, because when he reaches his destination he knows that a new passage is about to begin. What I feel like saying at this time is that the journey for me is part of everyday life. At various times of the day, when I am not travelling, images or moments from my journeys come to mind and it is natural for me to compare them to what I am experiencing in the everyday.

For example, if I encounter a difficulty or am in an unusual situation, I naturally make a comparison with the experience of the pilgrimage and this comparison suggests to me what to do in my so-called "normality."

The main difference between the everyday and a pilgrimage, apart from immersing oneself in nature and the new, is the conception of time. During a pilgrimage time is not punctuated and packaged by numbers,

instead in our everyday life there is a precise time-keeping, the hands on the clock mark exactly what you are going through.

On a pilgrimage, there is no such rational organization, established for reasons including social organization.

What I feel like sharing and recounting about a journey on foot are the encounters, which are never random. They are the hands, the numbers, that mark time: at each stop, at each encounter, time passes and these encounters, I repeat, are not random. In a way they are unexpected, but their meaning is not. I would like to recount two examples that confirm this idea of mine. I was standing still after a fairly complicated trail through the Umbra Forest, complicated not because of the difficulty but because of the beauty and the realization that you have when you walk through a forest with 20- to 30-meter trees, beech forests, and you feel like a gnat. With each step I thanked the trees because I felt these were special encounters that gave me the opportunity to walk, to continue my journey.

Pietra, my dog, was a little tired. She had a certain age so I had to respect her, although when she spent time in nature she was transformed, she became part of a place, as if she had been going there for a very long time. We continued walking down to the valley, where the path stops because it joins the provincial road leading to Vieste. Right at the bend, it was about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, we stopped to rest on a dry stone wall. I could sense that Pietra was really tired. A few minutes passed and she heard the sound of motorcycles approaching. There were three motorcyclists and one of them stopped without my beckoning him. He took off his helmet and it was a friend of mine, a great musician who knew about my travels. He invited me to jump on the motorcycle because Vieste was still 10 km away, which was too much for Pietra. We got on the motorcycle, arrived in Vieste and said goodbye.

This experience got me thinking about non-random encounters, because this person was from Monte Sant'Angelo and previously, on the way up from Scannamugliera, I had thought about contacting him. This was during the Covid emergency period and I had decided it was best not to bother him. I had said to myself, "If it's meant to be, we'll meet somewhere," and, in fact, we met after two days as he happened to be

passing by on his motorcycle and gave us this rather wild ride.

Still on the subject of meetings, another episode happened at Monte Sacro. I was about to set out when I met two young people who were taking pictures and as good travelers and nature lovers we exchanged a few words. I told of my intention to continue on to Carpino and my desire to visit Masseria Facenna, because I had heard so much about a young man who unfortunately had lost his earthly life in an accident. Antonio Facenna, a young man who had dedicated his life to animals and his land. One of the photographers exclaimed, "You know, Antonio is my cousin!" This confirmed that I had to go to that place.

All this makes me think about the things that happen not so much because of fate, understood as that divine plan that is described to us. In the Spanish language destiny means "arrival." For me, destiny is the arrival point of a journey, of a pilgrimage, and I like to hold onto this meaning of the word. Destiny toward a place that in some way has been planned for me. I walk very slowly by choice and I hope that my destiny is still full of encounters.

From the experiences I have had, I have learned that somehow we are connected by a star. I like to imagine the Milky Way as a trail of many lights, of many encounters going westward, following destiny, to the place where the sun sets.



## • Devils and Saints

*Mc 1, 21-28*

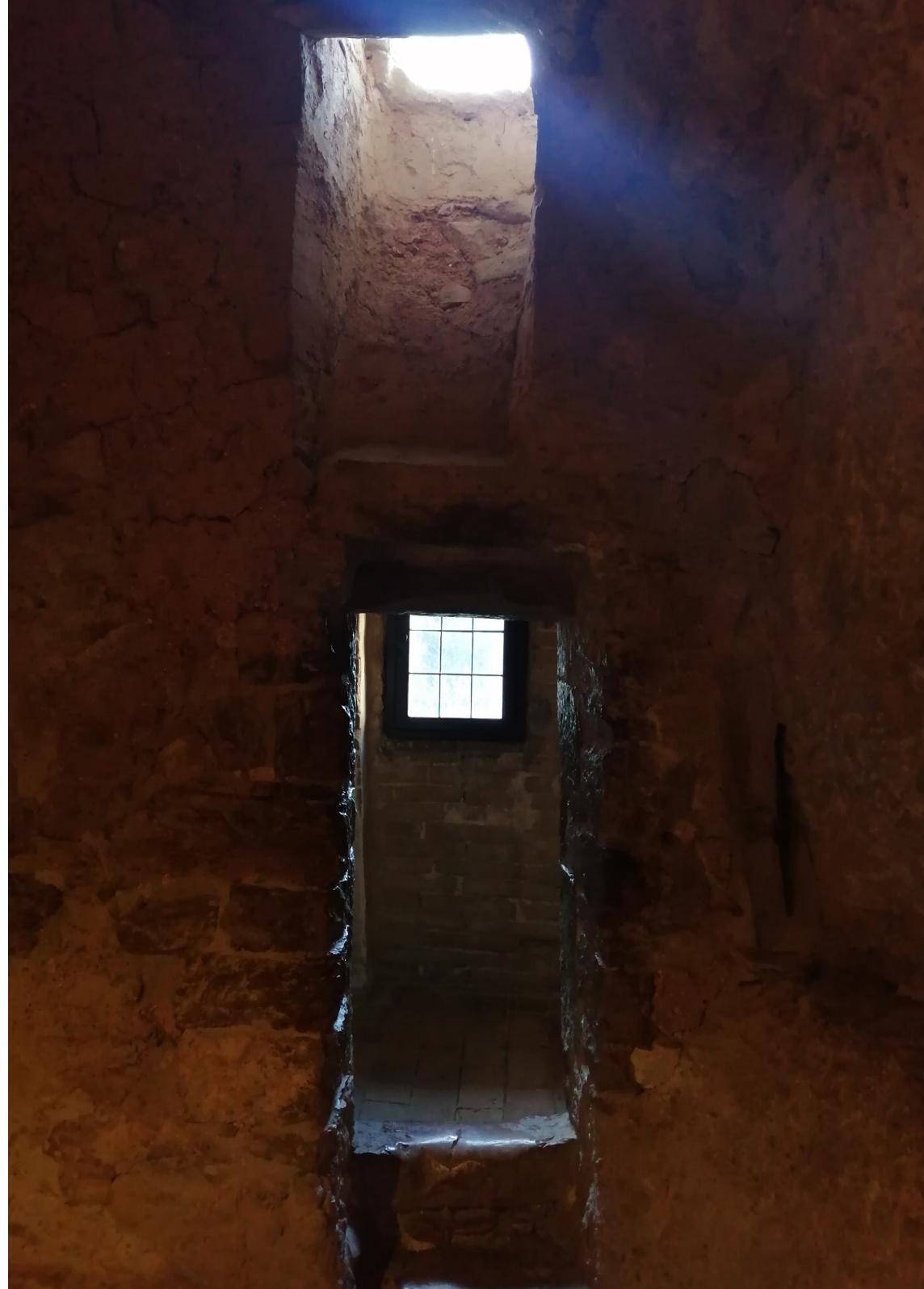
*From the Gospel according to Mark. At that time Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, [at Capernaum] and taught. And they were amazed at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

*And behold, in their synagogue was a man possessed with an unclean spirit, and he began to cry out, saying, "What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to ruin us? I know who you are: the saint of God!" And Jesus sternly commanded him, "Be silent; come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, wrenching and shouting loudly, came out of him. Everyone was seized with fear, so much so that they asked each other, "What on earth is this? A new teaching, given with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him!". His fame immediately spread everywhere, throughout the whole region of Galilee.*

"You will find refuge! There will be a monk who will take you in; he is kind!"

The climb I was moving up became lighter and lighter at the thought of receiving a safe reception. It was Sunday and so there was a chance to take part in the Mass. This celebration had become a kind of addiction, I had to finish my daily journey with the nourishment of my soul: the Eucharist. Being in church, collecting my thoughts and thanking God for what He had placed on my path. Reflecting on the difficulties encountered and turning them into tasks to be solved, or at least becoming aware of my weaknesses.

I continued to climb toward the convent and it was very cold; snow was beginning to fall accompanied by a gust of wind without gravity. I reached the entrance to the church, confident of finding welcome. I felt fatigued, but lightened by the mere thought of being sheltered in that sacred place that had been recommended to me. The village was perched on a hill. More and more convinced that the road was the right one, I arrived at the entrance of the church to the sound of bells. Often, I hear them at the end or beginning of the day - I don't pay attention anymore - an orphaned sound in our daily lives. They are like a cell phone, communicating a



presence. Bells for the call to faith, cowbells for the call to devotion, the cell phone for human distance.

I entered the church: a few faithful were scattered among the pews and there was a statue of Our Lady of Fatima on the right that looked new, just placed there. The mass began; I was cold. I noticed that my pants were damp with snow. With my eyes wide open I followed the celebration, listened to the Gospel and the friar's homily, "...one should not be afraid of strangers! In this difficult time, when the pandemic is putting us to the test, we must keep our doors open. Learn to listen to and welcome strangers, because Jesus is able to deliver us from impurities and unclean spirits." Inside I was smiling with joy. I felt that I was that stranger who seeks welcome. I was a pilgrim, nothing more. I also took part in the blessing of the statue of Our Lady. I really felt connected. On the way there I had punctuated my steps with the rosary and at that moment I found myself witnessing the blessing of Our Lady of Fatima.

"How beautiful, I am safe here," I repeated to myself.

"The mass is over, go in peace."

I approached the friar and shyly, and with a sincere heart, asked him for hospitality for the night. He looked at me and said, "that's not possible." I smiled at him and replied that I could even sleep in the church. He repeated that it was not possible because of the pandemic. I started to get upset. "What! You said during the homily to accept strangers, not to be afraid of the impure because Jesus is able to deliver!" Inside myself I felt angry, but mostly afraid of the possibility of having to sleep outside in the snow. "I must not be angry. I chose to set out on this pilgrimage and so I will take responsibility, accepting what divine providence offers me," I repeated to myself. I turned around and from deep within I exclaimed, "Thank you! This is perfect 'letizia'! Everything is connected." I had said these same words to Vinicio a few years earlier, "is the flute okay in the piece? Should I do the first or second melody, frater? Yes, I think the flute is right." We were recording "Perfect Letizia," and the prophet of the song proved to be visionary in being true to his art.

It was dark and I had to find a place to sleep. Up ahead there was an open coffee bar, "Excuse me, is there a place to sleep?" "Yes, try asking at

the inn up ahead." I walked through the old town. The shadows of the houses were taking over: it was night. The inn was open.

"Hi, a hot tea please. Can I sleep here?"

"Yes, sure."

"How much is it?"

"40 euros."

"What? I read in the guidebook that you have hostel-type dorms where it costs half as much."

"No. They are closed and the heaters are off."

"Look I have a minus zero sleeping bag."

"Sorry, we can only offer you the B&B room."

I had no choice and accepted. I asked him for something to eat, and ate what was available, a Margherita pizza and a small beer. I returned to the room, showered and went to bed. It was about 9:30 p.m. I woke up after a fairly sleepless night. I still remember very well the dream that disturbed me, leaving me with a feeling of both inner and physical discomfort. It was one of those nights that the pilgrim on his timeless journey can encounter. In the dream I was being beaten by a group of priests. They were tossing me from side to side, dragging me on the ground. At one point I was experiencing difficulty speaking and breathing. I could see that a piece of flesh had grown in my mouth, attached to my tongue. This prevented me from shouting at the priests. Suddenly, the piece of flesh was sticking out of my mouth.

I spit it out on the ground and noticed that it was shaped like a squashed ball. In the morning my body felt more tired than it had during the previous day's hike. I was full of doubts. I tried to clarify my thoughts. I called my friend, the monk of the pilgrimage, and told him everything. Displeased with my misadventure, I asked him, "what is perfect letizia?" He told me, "the meaning of the word letizia comes from 'laetare,' to fertilize. Behold, from manure come flowers, fertility, joy, gladness. You have encountered true perfect joy."

I started my pilgrimage that day thinking of the miracle that happened in the Middle Ages in O Cebreiro, a village in Galicia on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

The story tells of a priest who did not believe in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. During the mass, despite the intense cold, a peasant came to the church. The priest did not appreciate the man's sacrifice. Suddenly, during communion, the host turned into a piece of meat and the wine into blood that spilled from the chalice. I saw myself again outside and inside, in a clear past-present. A time that does not exist except in the movements of the sun, the moon and the earth that moves with its stories.

*Jocundetur  
Et letetur,  
Augmentetur  
Fidelium concio;  
Solemnizet,  
Modulizet,  
Organizet,  
Spirituali gaudio.*

*In hac die,  
In qua pie  
Melodie  
Reddunt laudes debitas;  
Celebretur,  
Decantetur,  
Sublimetur,  
Iacobi festivitas.*

*Psallat fretus  
Celi cetus,  
Orbis letus,  
Plaudat nostra concio;  
et cantantis,  
Auscultantis,  
Et letantis  
Pura sit devocio.*

*Promat melos,  
Pandant celos,  
Tangant theos  
Cum sonoris vocibus;  
Terra sonet  
Grates donet  
Celum tonet  
Et resultet laudibus.*

*(Jocundetur)*





## • Cloister

Along the way, it may happen that we are faced with a geometric figure: a labyrinth drawn within our self in which the different personalities, our characters, find their own home, thus the way to express themselves. This labyrinth contains a set of moments in which uncertainty and insecurity manifest themselves.

Right now I am walking around a block and I imagine it as a labyrinth. However, it also occurs to me to imagine it as a cloister where monks pray. This similarity is interesting, the consonance between these two places: the cloister with its definite design and the labyrinth that disorients you and leads you to different exit solutions. Onto these figures are projected the various selves, that walk and continue to seek their way. Sometimes they brush against each other, sometimes they bump into each other, and sometimes they are forced to overpower each other in order to move forward and continue the journey.

I find this very interesting. It often comes naturally to us to overpower others to make room for ourselves, annihilating the person who is close to us, our brother or sister. I think of the two biblical brothers Cain and Abel before God, one killing the other.

What I try to do when I find myself in these moments is to find my breath, because when you encounter a labyrinth it is difficult to get out unless you have the ability to reach deep down and then slowly, with awareness, find your way out. Only with the breath is there a way out, the air is released from the mouth. It is the word, which can be used for good and for bad.

There is a passage in which St. Paul says that we should be concerned about what comes out of our mouths and not what goes in. Words are weapons that can hurt more than a punch, or a slap. Words remain, etched just like the pattern of a labyrinth. The only way out is to listen to the heart which is the strongest part of the body and actualize ourselves through it and not through the mind which can be vulnerable to attack.

There is always space in the mind in which to insert a message. In the heart no, the heart acts directly and so one must listen to it in order to get out of the labyrinth. It lies next to the lungs and so through sound and breath, the word consecrated to the heart, there is a way out.

Today as I was climbing the Scannamugliera trail I started to worry a little about the heat and I told myself to go through Macchia. This beautiful trail leads up to Monte Sant'Angelo, three and a half kilometers of mule tracks where you can still place your feet in the footprints of the pilgrims of the past. I wanted to walk in those footprints, those footprints left by mules, by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who continue to this day to climb upward, to look for the Archangel, to find Michael. I said to myself, "I can't do it fast, I have to slow down as much as I can because I have to enjoy everything around me, listen to the sounds carefully," and I have to say that as I was going up I felt as if I were going down.

I experienced a feeling of lightness, beauty and energy: instead of tiring, I relaxed, enjoyed the climb, and I finished the three and a half kilometers in three hours. A pilgrimage cannot be a sum of numbers, it cannot be just getting there without being present along the way, without fully experiencing every detail of the journey.

It was a wonderful day.

I keep walking through the streets of Monte Sant'Angelo as if they were the cloister of a Benedictine monastery, and the silence here makes reminds me of the moment of listening to one's soul. It happens when you are in a monastery, where peace is perceptible, you can touch it. What I would like to do right now is to maintain this awareness and then try to carry it with me, as much as possible, until the end of the journey.

Today people were talking about the difference between being a believer, being secular, or pretending to be a believer. They told me, look, it's better to have a clear position than to pretend to be a believer, in this case a Christian. Then they told me that God has always manifested himself to those most humble, to simple people, to peasants.

I thought about it and actually yes, if we make a list we notice that Padre Pio, the shepherd children of Fatima, and Bernadette were all humble people. God does not manifest Himself to people who are mentally too busy, because there is no space for Him. He looks for space, the place to manifest Himself where there is no structure that occupies a person's mind, a person's heart.

This has nothing to do with popular piety or the argument that sees the Church wanting to capture attention through ignorance. It is simply that God manifests Himself where there is space, this phrase struck a strong chord with me. If He does not manifest, it means there is no space, no place. I would like to turn back at this moment with this beautiful image I have inside, of the labyrinth, the slowness, the breath that helps me find my way out and thus to free oneself to make room for God.



## • The return

I am returning from an experience that has allowed me to grasp the essence of the answer to the question I was asking myself - and being asked - at the beginning of the journey, "Why do you walk?" I have the answer; it is not definitive, but it helps me to move forward and start again.

Returning is not easy because I realize that I am going back to what I left behind, to what I encounter every day in my usual life. For example, after so much beauty, I must once again see the garbage left on the side of the roads; I must return to the fast pace, that timeclock that we are so attached to. We speed everything up and this leads us to be disconnected from our surroundings.

However, we also have to come to terms with this reality, to be able to know and recognize all that may hinder our inner and outer journey on the way home. During the journey this is learned. One learns both how beautiful we can be and feels sorrow for what we cannot bring with us from the journey.

What can you do when you return home? For a walker, another journey begins with different, cleaner eyes and ears. You are more careful with words. I want to keep this attentiveness in my "normalcy" because through it we can be good.

It is sad to return after days in which encounters, nature, and beauty filled my heart. I am now like a jar, an amphora filled to the brim, and perhaps overflowing, with water. I can't wait to tell friends, relatives and other walkers about this experience as if, with the water coming out of the amphora, I can quench their desire to travel, trying to communicate that travel is important because through it we have the opportunity to caress the earth, the soil.

At the same time, we also caress our heart. In a sense it is like going back into a cave, the cave of non-knowledge. It is like re-entering the darkness; there is all the apprenticeship that has to come from the journey, experienced by the heart and also with rationality. Rationality is also important in a journey because when there are difficulties it helps you find the right solution. So, I start to re-enter the cave, but this cave of mine has a beautiful view on a new world, a regeneration.

It's like a little road that ends in the sea, there is an opening. I am now

facing the sea before arriving in Molfetta, the city which I departed from 12 days ago. Even the scents have changed. Thinking about the quarantine we went through I have some nostalgia because we have returned to what we were before it. This is not pessimism, but this return to before, as Gibran says, is a return to dead habits. I don't want to go back to dead habits on this pilgrimage.

I want to go back to the beginning with another book, without chapters, with a unique narrative in which essence is the most precious jewel. When you feel part of a whole, of a macrocosm, you realize that you are indispensable to the process of evolution. I cannot withdraw, I cannot continue to be the way I was.

I have to find new solutions, otherwise the miles I have walked will have had no meaning. Walking is not hedonism, a material form to which man is attached. Walking is soul searching.

*I am a tombstone, an image.  
Sicilus placed me here  
as a long-lasting sign  
of deathless remembrance  
While you live, shine  
have no grief at all  
life exists only for a short while  
and time demands its toll.  
(Epitaph of Sicilus)*

As I come to the conclusion, I try to come prepared as well as I can because the destination prepares us for a new journey. Now I want to start a new journey, I have not yet decided my path.

To begin a new journey, we must follow the path home and prepare ourselves, begin to meditate on the path that will lead us to a new sunset, a new dawn, new encounters.



**Sacred Mount** is a sound journey, a coming and going between West and East in search of the sacred. Throughout this itinerary, which touches the sacred mountain of the Gargano as well as the Armenian land, the echoes of ancient cantillations and the reverberation of remote sounds can be heard. A record “made on foot,” since the territories touched by the music were actually walked by Giovannangelo de Gennaro, who accompanies the disk with a series of stories, reflections and travel notes. In fact, over the past 20 years, the musician-wanderer has collected his impressions and offers them to the listener/reader in the form of short texts that capture essential moments of this long journey. One is thus transported from Mount Athos to the Greece of the Epitaph of Sicilus, from the Tremiti Islands to the Basilica of St. Nicholas in the territory of Bari, from Istanbul to the Armenia of Father Komitas and beyond, in a succession of real and imaginary sound images in which the true guide is the voice of one’s personal inner traveling companion.

