

During his historic tour of Spain in November 1982, Pope John Paul II visited this ancient shrine of the Blessed Mother and later the same day recited the Rosary there during a worldwide radio broadcast.

**(excerpted from: Joan Carroll Cruz *Miraculous Images of Our Lady*)*

Homily during a pilgrimage to Zaragoza, Spain

By Fr. Tommy Lane

When Pope John Paul II came to this Shrine of Our Lady of El Pilar in Zaragoza on pilgrimage he called Our Lady of El Pilar the Mother of the Hispanic Peoples. We could say that for the Hispanic peoples the Shrine of El Pilar in Zaragoza holds a similar significance as Fatima to the Portuguese or Knock to the Irish.

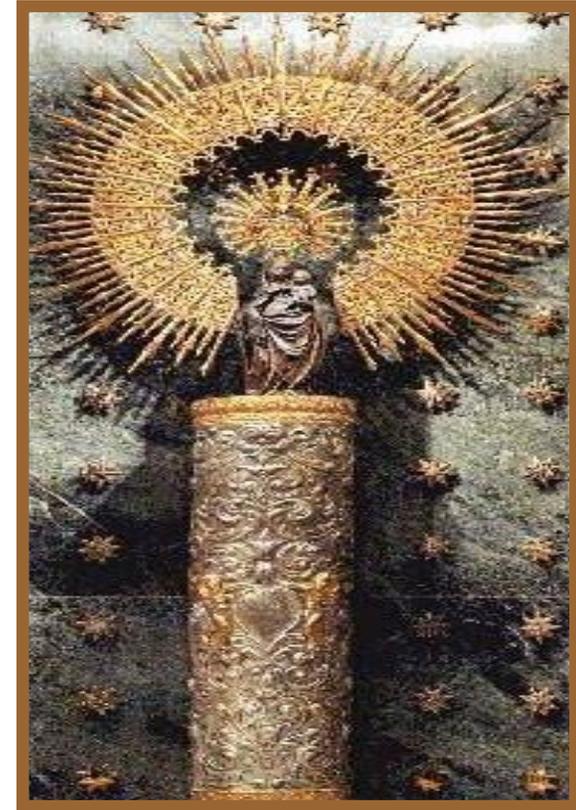
While Our Lady was in Ephesus before her Assumption, Jesus appeared to her and asked her to go with the angels to see St. James who was in Zaragoza at the time. She was to tell James that Jesus wished him to return to Jerusalem to be martyred. The tradition of the shrine of El Pilar, as the Spaniards call it, as given by Our Lady in an apparition to Sr. Mary Agreda and written about in *The City of God*, is that Our Lady was carried on a cloud by the angels to Zaragoza during the night. While they were traveling, the angels built a pillar of marble, and a miniature image of Our Lady. Our Lady gave the message to St. James and added that a church was to be built on the site where the apparition took place. The pillar and the image were to be part of the main altar. Special graces and protection would be granted to the people of Zaragoza in exchange for a pure devotion to Our Lord and Our Lady. People began to celebrate Mass at the little church and to venerate Our Lady through the image left there by her and the angels. For twelve years before Our Lady's Assumption into heaven the people of Spain were venerating Our Lady as Our Lady of the Pillar. According to Sr. Mary Agreda, Our Lady was 54 years of age and living in Ephesus when this happened and she was 67 years when she died. So her appearance in Zaragoza was twelve or thirteen years prior to her Assumption. This is the only apparition of Our Lady we have heard of taking place **prior** to her Assumption. The year when this apparition occurred was c 40 or 41AD.

PERSONAL NOTE: When on a pilgrimage, Nick and I were blessed to visit the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar. The day was clear and sunny, a group of children were receiving their First Holy Communion. What a blessing. As we approached the entrance of the Basilica, the crowds were huge, we did not think that we would get near the pillar of Our Lady. Our group was ready to leave and we had not seen the pillar...all of a sudden a lady in a long white dress gently touched my shoulder and directed me around a corner, and lo and behold there was the pillar. As we approached, the last person kneeling left and we were able to kneel and kiss the miraculous pillar. **Yes**, the scent of roses was all around us.

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Our Lady of the Pillar ***Our Lady's First Apparition***

Zaragoza, Spain
40 A.D.



**Oh Virgin of the Pillar,
Queen and Mother,
Spain and all Hispanic nations gratefully
acknowledge your constant protection and depend on it.
Obtain from your Son strength in faith,
surety in hope and constancy in love.
May we feel in every moment of our life
that you are our Mother.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

OUR LADY OF THE PILLAR

*Tradition tells us that St. James the Apostle journeyed to Spain to spread the Gospel and was already there in the year 40A.D. when he paused to pray beside the River Ebro with seven of his disciples. Our Lady, who was still living in Jerusalem, was at the same time praying for the success of his missionary endeavors when she appeared to St. James. He and his disciples all shared in the beautiful vision that was accompanied by celestial music and a radiant light. After words of encouragement and a request for a chapel, the Blessed Mother gave him the small jasper column on which she stood as evidence of her appearance.

Supported by the vision and the tangible evidence of its authenticity, St. James spread the Faith throughout Spain which is now at Santiago de Compostello, where his shrine attracted more pilgrimages by far than did those of the other Apostles.

The chapel that the Virgin requested was soon built over the place of the apparition but was eventually destroyed, as were several succeeding replacements. The pillar survived, as did the ancient statue that had been placed upon it. In fact, the statue survived the invasions of various conquerors: the Romans, Goths, Moors, Muslims and Vandals. It likewise witnessed the invasion of more peaceful throngs including prayerful pilgrims, all the kings of Spain, Queen Blanca de Navarra in 1433, and numerous Saints including St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The present church dates from the seventeenth century. In its chapel amid a splendid setting stands the statue, which seems quite diminutive by contrast. Measuring about 15 inches in height, it stands upon its jasper pillar that rises about 6 feet. The column is now covered with silver and bronze, but a small portion of the jasper has been left exposed. This section of the pillar is framed by a golden oval and, according to the custodians of the shrine, it is "worn out due to millions of kisses."

The wall directly behind the statue is of green marble and is studded with 148 stars, 80 of which are jeweled.

The wooden statue is a simple one of the Blessed Virgin, smiling pleasantly. The Christ Child, who holds a small bird, is supported by the Virgin's left hand; her right hand holds the mantle that drapes all about them. On certain days of the month the statue is dressed with a cape heavy with jewels and gold embroidery that partially conceals the pillar. Jeweled crowns are worn by both Virgin and Child, and a golden burst of an aureole is added to the jeweled halo that is affixed to the marble directly behind the head of the statue.

The Church of the Virgin of the Pillar, built over the place where St. James the Apostle prostrated before the Virgin's miraculous visit, was declared a national museum on May 22, 1904. An impressive crowning of the Virgin took place on May 20, 1905.

Persistent reports since ancient times have it that the pillar is occasionally surrounded by a fragrance of roses which is readily perceived. A spokesman for the shrine recently attributed the fragrance to the disinfectant that is used daily on the column to discourage the transmittal of disease due to the number of people who touch and kiss it. However, one might consider that the reports of the perfume were made consistently from ancient times when disinfectants were unknown—and perfumed samples awaited invention only in recent years.

The people of Zaragoza regard the statue as a legacy from their forefathers and demonstrate a tender devotion and a fierce loyalty to it. Since the original church of the Virgin of the Pillar was the first one raised in honor of the Blessed Mother, it is believed the present church will last as long as the Faith.