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Home and Away

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On Pilgrimage in France

Paul McAuley CSSp



Top: Eiffel Tower at night
Left and Below: The pilgrimage group in front of Notre Dame church in Pinterville, Normandy.

Last Fall, a small band of pilgrims set out from St Joseph's church in Scarborough – off to France for a two-week pilgrimage. The pilgrimage brought us first to the south of France with two wonderful days in Lourdes, its life-size stations of the cross, Mass and a candlelight rosary procession. From Lourdes, we travelled to the magnificent Chartres cathedral. We then spent a few days in the Loire valley at Tours getting to know the famous St Martin of Tours. The next stop was the palace of Versailles just outside Paris.

From Paris, we embarked on a four-day river cruise down the Seine to Normandy. We visited Notre Dame church in the small village of Pinterville. It was this church to which our very own Spiritan, Blessed Fr Jacques Laval, was first assigned after his ordination in 1838. He later travelled to the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean and spent the rest of his life ministering to the people there. Fr Laval was the first person beatified by John Paul II.

Standing at the altar of the little old church in Pinterville celebrating Mass for our group, I could sense that Blessed Laval was praying with us.



Another moving experience came the next day when we visited Juno beach, the site of the Canadian landings long ago on D-Day. We remembered those who fought and fell that terrible day.

Back to Paris and many of its beautiful and sacred places: Sacré-Coeur de Montmartre, Madeleine church, Notre Dame of course, and the Convent of the Miraculous Medal.

The final leg of the pilgrimage brought us to Lisieux, the childhood home of St Thérèse.

As we flew back to Toronto, I was sure many in our little St Joseph's group were reflecting on the trip, its sacred spaces and places, our prayer and sharing and laughter and fun. We felt truly blessed. ■



Bunker on Juno beach



Sacré-Coeur de Montmartre, Paris



With the sisters of Montmartre – Pam Canham (right) tour organizer



Garden of the house of St Thérèse of Lisieux