

## **My Spain & Fatima Pilgrimage Experience**

By Gricel Comesanas

I'd like to begin by saying that I always had a special connection and great love to our blessed Mother Mary and when Father Owen announced he was going to lead a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2015, I was thrilled with anticipation. I always wanted to visit that Holy site where our Lady appeared to Bernadette. I've read of great miracles and healing through our Lady of Lourdes' intercession, and I wanted to take my daughter, Natalie, who has diabetes since the age of 8 years old, in addition to other auto immune disorders, there for healing. She came along, somehow reluctantly, because she was then 18 years old and our group of travelers were older. She ended up having a good time and though her physical illnesses remain, while at Lourdes, she received spiritual healing.

While at Lourdes I prayed intensely for her health, not knowing that I already had Stage 3 colon cancer. I was diagnosed 2 months after returning to the U.S. After hearing the diagnosis, all I could think of and remember was when I went to Our Lady of Lourdes and bathing in those miraculous waters. I prayed to her trustingly and put all my worries and fears in her Immaculate Heart. She led me to the right doctors. She guided them to do the best for me. I started a course of chemotherapy and radiation to shrink the tumor prior to the surgery, along with great dosages of prayers from family and friends. When the treatment ended, the doctors allowed me to rest before the surgery. When they checked again to see how much the tumor had shrunk, the tumor was no longer there! I was cured before the surgery through Mary's intercession! I still was advised to have the surgery in order to resect the area where the cancerous tumor had been in order to decrease the rate of recurrence and to send it to pathology for staging. The surgeon was marveled about the way the procedure went and how well everything looked. The only thing left was a scar where the tumor used to be. She was very happy and surprised that the pathology report came back as "Stage 0" - no cancerous cells! The oncologist admitted that they weren't sure how to proceed in cases like mine, but he advised to complete treatment for the initial diagnosis of Stage 3b. Every time I received Chemo, I prayed to Mary and Jesus to bless the medicines going into my body and to bless those administering it. I'm now cancer free and very grateful to our Lady of Lourdes' intercession. I have an opportunity to enjoy my daughters, family and friends longer and more time to know, love and serve God.

This year's Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and Fatima was my chance to thank our blessed Mother and God for all the graces and blessings granted. First visit was to Santiago where St. James is buried. I learned that the first Marian Apparition was to St. James while Mary was still alive living in Jerusalem and St. James was then Zaragoza, Spain evangelizing in the year 40. She appeared to him as Our Lady del Pilar. It was truly an amazing heavenly experience to be in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, his burial site, St. James' embrace, the beautiful mass at the cathedral and the Botafumeiro! We visited many churches and beautiful towns and villages on the way to Fatima. One of my favorite was the Church of Eucharistic Miracle in Santarem, Portugal. Father Owen celebrated Mass there and we were able to see the actual Bleeding Host. Fatima was the highlight. Our hotel was right across the street from the Basilica and Apparition Chapel. When we first went in, I saw the image of Our Lady of Fatima in a very simple place. I knelt down and I prayed and thanked her (not knowing yet that this was the actual site that Mary appeared to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco, but I felt her presence. I felt an immense flow of peace, love and mercy embracing me.

The spiritual experience in Fatima was amazing and not easy to describe. She touched my heart and soul in the most beautiful and profound way. I also liked the fact that the chapel is always opened so I was able to cross the street and visit Our Lady of Fatima even late at night when it was quiet. They also had Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration in the new basilica to visit, at any time, Jesus exposed in the Blessed Sacrament. The international rosary, the candlelight procession shared with thousands of people from so many different places, all united in the same faith and devotion to Mary, was something I will never forget.

My connection and love for Mary continues to grow more with each pilgrimage as I get to know her better. Since I visited Lourdes, I was consecrated to Mary. I pray the rosary every day. She brought me closer to her son, Jesus, in Eucharistic Adoration. I know that Mary, in her mother's love, wants the best for me. I put myself entirely and trusting in her hands; knowing that I may not get exactly what

I pray for, but I'm sure to obtain what's best for me and the graces that I need through her intercession.