

# Theology of the Body

TRAVELING WITH CHRISTOPHER WEST



In 1995, deep in his study of Pope Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body, Christopher West went on Pilgrimage to Rome, during which Cardinal William H. Keeler had arranged a private audience with Pope himself. This experience galvanized Christopher's mission and his life's work.

Christopher's ministry grew, but his media director at Theology of the Body Institute, Bill Howard, who had organized several pilgrimages for Colorado Springs Bishop Michael Sheridan, thought that this experience was an important next step and began encouraging him to lead one. It took a few years to convince Christopher that this was the right move.

"I was not looking for more ways to spend time away from my family," says Christopher, "I was reluctant to the last minute." But stepping out in faith, Christopher led his first pilgrimage to Poland with Select International Tours in 2015, and it reaffirmed Bill's insight.

Throughout the pilgrimage, Christopher had spoken of the Theology of the Body and referenced the significance of how the Pope's own blood had been spilt during the 1981 assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square. Then, quite unexpectedly while exploring the John Paul II Center in Krakow, the group came upon the very blood-soaked cassock the Pope was wearing on that day. Christopher was unaware that it was on display and the weight of the moment brought him to the floor in prayer. Moments like these, Christopher says, have led to, "...new levels of ministry and context."

Since Poland, Christopher and his team have led pilgrimages to Mexico City (2016), Ireland (2017) and Italy (2018), the last of which featured an almost unheard-of opportunity arranged by Select to give a reflection in the Sistine Chapel, which St. John Paul II once called "the shrine to the Theology of the Body."

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"The first thing I tell the pilgrims is that the pilgrimages have changed," he continued. "Two-hundred years ago, pilgrims weren't flying on planes or riding in air-conditioned buses. The sacrifices are different, but the suffering is still real."

Jet lag, bus rides, time away from family, and long days take a toll on pilgrims. But these physical and emotional sacrifices open the pilgrim's soul to a deep sense of communion. The pilgrims suffer together, and they are rewarded together; building bonds that last for eternity.

A pilgrimage with Christopher West is a unique opportunity to look at your faith through the lens of Pope Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body, which Christopher describes as "a bold, biblical vision of love and sexuality that takes us to the heart of what it means to be human." By literally putting your feet on the ground and making the physical and emotional sacrifices of pilgrimage, you will open up your soul in new and exciting ways.



## How should one approach the act of pilgrimage?

**Christopher has some suggestions:**

- 1 Travel Lightly:** Take fewer clothes than you think you will need. By taking less, you not only make the logistics of air and bus travel easier, you "...open yourself to unexpected providence."
- 2 Go with an Open Heart:** focus on what God is trying to show you instead of what you are missing or where you are going next.
- 3 Expect the Unexpected:** Delays, missed connections, and changes in itinerary can happen, but these—along with the sacrifices discussed above—can often lead to divine providence and unexpected moments of deep spiritual renewal and confirmation. Expect the unexpected and expect that it is in God's plan.