

Fr. Anthony is away walking the ancient pilgrimage route of the Camino in Spain.  
Below is his first report of his journeys.

### *Step by Step along The Way (Week 1)*

I have set out along the way. Well – almost. This weekend, all going well, I have landed in Paris and travelled with the troupe to Chartres Cathedral. A visit to Chartres Cathedral has been a hope of mine for some time. I didn't have the opportunity in the two and half years that I lived in Rome, but Chartres Cathedral is one of the great architectural achievements of human history. Even Stephen Fry, the noted atheist and UK comic, says that it is not possible to build "a humanist equivalent of Chartres Cathedral". That is to say, there is something of the transcendental spirit, of the world beyond this world, which inspires such work – like music, and art, and poetry. The cathedral is more or less unchanged since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and serves as the cathedral church of one of the most ancient dioceses in the world, dating back to the fourth century. About 80kms south-west of Paris, the cathedral is listed as an UNESCO heritage site.

According to tradition, the Cathedral houses the relic of the *Sancta Camisia*, the tunic worn by Mary during the birth of Christ. Whatever about that, my desire to visit the cathedral is based more on the architecture, sculptures, 13<sup>th</sup> century labyrinth and stained glass windows. Chartres Cathedral is one of the most complete examples of medieval art in the western world, and therefore, a set back into time and a snapshot of the Catholic tradition at certain point in time. But even stone, the Catholic tradition lives. There is an old saying: "Tradition is not the dead voice of the living, but the living voice of the dead." The reason why Chartres Cathedral remains not only a place of religious pilgrimage, but also a cultural asset, is that it continues to speak to faith today. It's architecture raises our spirits. That is the gift of grand and beauty sacred spaces. They direct our gaze to the life beyond, and help us step into the endless river of generations of faith.

This week also holds a visit to Lourdes, and later in the week a couple of days in Boudreaux. This is purely for reasons of preparation for the *Camino* – and to celebrate the birthdays of two of our troupe. On Friday, we will commence the way at *St Jean Pied de Port* and begin the trek over the Pyrenees in France. Like the *Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres*, this too, is an ancient pilgrimage track. Originally, it formed an important trade route of the Roman Empire, from Rome to the Atlantic coast in Spain. For this reason, the shell has become an important symbol of pilgrimage because of its connection to the coastline. It also signifies an openness of spirit that is at the heart of pilgrimage. Tradition holds that the tomb of St. James, brother of St. John, and one of the sons of Zebedee, is buried in the *Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela*, which lies at the end of the pilgrimage. I will carry the St. Agatha's community with me, as I will the Holy Spirit Seminary and Brisbane Catholic Education, both places of my other responsibilities, as I walk through the weeks ahead. I am hoping to write something every week, plus include other bits and pieces for our parish website and Facebook. May we feel the power of each other's prayers over the weeks ahead.

*Fr Anthony*