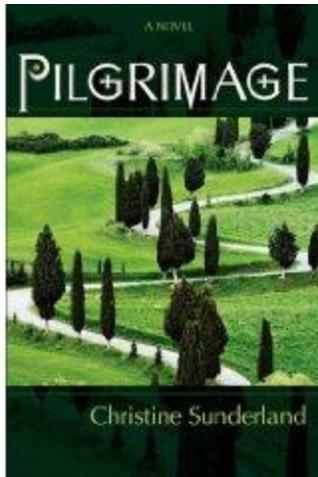


[Pilgrimage by Christine Sunderland](#)

Nov 23rd, 2009 by [Debra Murphy](#)



Life is a pilgrimage to God in God.
—St. Benedict

When a minor incident summons renewed guilt and nightmares over the accidental drowning of her eight-month-old child twenty years before, Madeleine Seymour, an erstwhile history professor, finally turns to her pastor, Fr. Rinaldi. “I killed her, Father,” she tells him. “I left her alone in a wading pool. I killed her.”

Without diminishing Maddie’s responsibility, Fr. Rinaldi, once a Roman Catholic now an Anglican priest, gives the suffering woman good counsel about God’s mercy and a seemingly strange penance: to go on a pilgrimage to Italy and its churches. “Sometimes,” Fr. Rinaldi says, “when the body is involved, it takes a physical act of penance to erase the guilt, ease the grief from the body’s own judgment court, as it were. It’s sacramental. Our spirits affect our bodies and vice versa.”

Accompanied by her loving and capable (but not particularly pious) husband, Jack, and carrying with her what she believes may be a saint’s relic (the final disposition of which plays a small but important role in the novel) Maddie sets out for Italy with Fr. Rinaldi’s list of historic churches, from Santa Maria Maggiore and San Pietro in Rome to San Marco in Venice. In the course of her journey, Maddie discovers not only a good deal about her own spiritual life, but also about the surprising life and work of Fr. Rinaldi.

Simply and lyrically told by CatholicFiction.net reviewer [Christine Sunderland](#), *Pilgrimage*, though it contains elements of intrigue and mystery, is not a high-action “beach read” with a murder every other chapter, but a lovely meditation in story form on the journey of a soul through a dark time, accompanied by a patient husband and, sometimes unknowingly, a loving God. I found it especially appropriate for a quiet evening read, almost as spiritual reading. Too, as someone who herself made a pilgrimage to Rome many years ago, but who hasn’t been able to afford it since, *Pilgrimage* was a lovely reminder of the wonder one experiences upon visiting

Italy's beautiful and historic churches. If I ever have the opportunity of making such a pilgrimage again, Sunderland's book will go with me as a more spiritual supplement to Fodor's!

Too, in the context of the Church's recent overture to traditional Anglicans, the Catholic reader will be reminded of our common spiritual heritage, as well as the universal Christian need for awareness that our earthly journey is a pilgrimage towards greater unity with God—which means an increase in our capacity for mutual (and self-) forgiveness.

Pilgrimage is the first in a trilogy of books by [Christine Sunderland](#) which follow the lives and travels of Madeleine and Jack Seymour. The second and third books, *Offerings* and *Inheritance*, were published in 2009 by OakTara and will no doubt be reviewed in future posts.