



## Introduction: A Silent Visit That Changed the Course of Faith

When we think of Marian apparitions, places like Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, or La Salette often come to mind. These are locations that, centuries after the birth of the Church, became epicenters of faith, conversion, and miracles. But few know that **the first Marian apparition in Christendom happened just a few years after Christ's Ascension**, and not in the Holy Land, but in what is now **Zaragoza, Spain**. This apparition is unique—not only because of its antiquity but because **it took place while the Virgin Mary was still alive**, before her Assumption.

The Church recognizes it under the title of **Our Lady of the Pillar**, and its testimony has accompanied the faith of millions over two millennia. This apparition is not just cloaked in deep symbolism—it also offers us a powerful spiritual and pastoral guide for our times, marked by individualism, doubt, and the loss of missionary fervor.

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## I. History and Context: What Happened in Zaragoza in 40 A.D.?

### A Discouraged Apostle, a Mother Who Consoles

Saint James the Greater, the brother of Saint John the Evangelist and son of Zebedee, was one of Christ's closest disciples. After Pentecost, he undertook the evangelization of the Iberian Peninsula. However, **the hardness of heart of the Hispanic peoples and the scarce fruits of his preaching** led him to discouragement. He was in Zaragoza—then Caesaraugusta—with only a small number of converts when the unexpected happened.

### The Apparition: Mary Appears in Her Earthly Body

According to tradition, transmitted over centuries and preserved by the Church, **the Virgin Mary appeared to James** standing on a pillar of jasper, accompanied by angels, to **encourage him to persevere in his evangelizing mission**. What is most astonishing is that **Mary was still living in Ephesus** at the time, according to various patristic and apocryphal sources. This was not a spiritual apparition after her Assumption, but a **miraculous bilocation**, anticipating the glorious power she would later fully enjoy in Heaven.



She gave him the **pillar**—a symbol of faith and steadfastness—and asked him to **build a chapel in her honor** at that site, prophesying that the place would never be destroyed. Thus began the **first Marian shrine in the world**, whose devotion remains alive today: the **Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar**.

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## II. Historical Sources and Ecclesial Tradition

### Ancient Testimonies

Although the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles do not recount this apparition (as they focus on Christ's life and the immediate expansion of Christianity), there are very ancient sources that support this event:

- The **Roman Breviary** from the 12th century mentions the apparition as a tradition venerated since early times.
- The **Roman Martyrology**, approved by the Holy See, commemorates October 12 as the date of the apparition.
- Writings from authors such as **Blessed Juan de Mariana, Fr. Mariana S.J.**, and numerous Spanish ecclesiastical historians from the 16th and 17th centuries record the testimony of this tradition.
- Additionally, there are inscriptions in the temple itself dating back to the 9th century that confirm the uninterrupted presence of this devotion since the 1st century.

### Ecclesial Approval

The Holy See **officially recognizes the apparition**, especially through the liturgical celebration of Our Lady of the Pillar, and has **granted indulgences** to those who venerate her. The Basilica of Zaragoza has been elevated to the status of a **minor basilica**, and devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar is one of the oldest and most widespread in the Spanish-speaking world.

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### III. Theological Relevance: What Does This Apparition Teach Us?

#### 1. Mary, Model and Mother of Missionaries

The Virgin did not wait until she was in Heaven to assist the apostles. She came in body and soul—as intercessor and mother—to **strengthen the faith of one who was carrying the Gospel to new peoples**. This reveals a deeply missionary dimension of Mary. She is **not a passive or merely contemplative figure**—she is active, present, alive.

As the Gospel says:

*“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mt 28:20)*

*These words of the Lord are made real in His Mother, who shares in His mission.*

#### 2. The Pillar as an Ecclesiological Symbol

The pillar given by the Virgin represents the **firmness of faith**, as Saint Paul wrote:

*“The Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (1 Tim 3:15)*

Mary did not merely encourage James; she gave him a concrete, visible sign that endures. This column became a **symbol of fidelity, perseverance, and doctrinal purity**—three virtues especially needed in times of confusion and relativism.

#### 3. Mary and the Unity of the Apostolic Body

Though she was in Ephesus, Mary was not distant from the struggles of the other apostles. Her supernatural intervention **united the distant ends of the early Christian world** and anticipated her role as **Mother of the Universal Church**.



## IV. Spiritual and Pastoral Applications Today

### How Can the Apparition of the Pillar Help Us Today?

We live in times of **spiritual decay, doctrinal confusion, and apostolic discouragement**. Many feel that evangelizing is useless, that faith is dying out, that speaking of Christ is a lost cause.

In response, **Our Lady of the Pillar offers us four essential lessons:**

#### 1. Perseverance in Mission

Even if you see no results, **God sees your effort**. Mary did not come to convert hearts for James but to **encourage him to keep sowing**.

#### 2. Faith as Firm as the Pillar

Our faith should not be emotional but **solid conviction**, like a column that doesn't sway with the winds of fashion or error.

#### 3. Constant Marian Presence

Mary **never abandons her children**, neither in the 1st century nor in the 21st. She is present in moments of trial, even if we don't feel her. We should **invoke her daily**, as the early Christians did.

#### 4. The Power of the Small

James had no crowds or institutions. He had faith, a few disciples... and a visit from Heaven. **God works with the small when they are faithful.**

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## V. Practical Guide: Living Today Under the Shelter of



## the Pillar

Here's a pastoral and theological guide to help you integrate this apparition into your daily life:

### 1. Consecration to Our Lady of the Pillar

Offer a daily prayer to Mary under this title. You can say:

*"O Mary of the Pillar, strengthen my faith, sustain my hope, and do not let me falter in the path Christ has entrusted to me."*

### 2. Pray the Rosary with Missionary Intentions

Imitate James. In each mystery, pray for a soul that does not yet know Christ.

### 3. Read the Acts of the Apostles

Especially chapters 1-12, where the apostolic zeal of James is evident. Practice a weekly lectio divina and apply his example to your surroundings: family, work, friendships.

### 4. Celebrate October 12 with Spiritual Meaning

Beyond civil festivities, make this day **a moment of renewal in your Christian commitment**. Attend Mass, pray the Rosary, and fast if you can.

### 5. Place a Small "Pillar" in Your Home

It can be a candle, a small image, or a column with the Virgin of the Pillar. Let it remind you daily: "Be firm in the faith!"

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## Conclusion: A Mother Who Never Forgets Her Children

The first Marian apparition was not a meaningless extraordinary gesture. It was **a loving intervention by a Mother who saw her son in distress and came to his aid**. That is Our Lady of the Pillar: firm, constant, present, consoling.



## She Came Before All: The First Marian Apparition in Christendom That Changed History | 6

Today, as then, **evangelization is difficult, faith is under attack, hearts seem hardened**. But even now, Mary comes to us with the same tenderness, with the same Pillar, to support us.

As Pope Benedict XVI said:

*“Faith needs the support of visible signs. But the strongest visible signs of God are the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary.”*

You are not alone. James wasn't. And with Our Lady of the Pillar, **neither is the Church in these difficult times**.