

History of the Way

The Paths of pilgrims, coming and going in different directions

During much of his pilgrim journey, Ignatius would have passed many pilgrims who were travelling in the opposite direction. He was heading south toward Montserrat and, thereafter, to ports where he could sail to the Holy Land. Most other pilgrims on these roads would have been travelling the opposite direction to Ignatius, heading along the famous Camino Santiago toward the town of Santiago de Compostela, where according to Christian tradition, the relics of St. James the apostle are revered.

So, more than once during his long and sometimes lonely journey, Ignatius must have felt he was swimming “upstream” as he crossed paths with so many pilgrims flowing in the opposite direction. But we can think of this as a metaphor for one for a very characteristic feature of Ignatius’s spirituality: each of us must discern God’s particular call to us, that is, the way in which God is leading us to walk for “his greater glory,” to use a common Jesuit phrase. And we must be attentive to God’s call, even when it feels to lead us “against the current” of popular opinion and fashion.

Modern pilgrims on the Camino Ignaciano will experience the same phenomenon as Ignatius. As you walk toward Manresa, you will pass many pilgrims heading the opposite direction, toward Santiago. Often you will see the distinctive yellow arrows of the Camino Santiago along the side of the road; the arrows will be pointing in the opposite way of your own journey toward Manresa. Ignatius was seeking another horizon than they, and perhaps you will likewise be called to do so.

Ignatius spent many months in Manresa, often living in primitive natural caves along the riverside, today commemorated in a chapel known as La Cueva (the cove). He wrote in his Autobiography about the many insights he gleaned about spirituality in Manresa, that God seemed to be teaching him there in the way that a patient teacher schools a little child. Perhaps you will find similar enlightenment in Manresa or along the way.

Ignatius left Manresa, ultimately destined for Jerusalem. But his pilgrimage, ultimately, was less about a geographical place than about developing a personal relationship with Jesus, and feeling the call to serve Jesus.

Pilgrims are fond of repeating an old saying: “Everyone has something to learn on the camino.” No one can predict what you yourself will gain from your pilgrimage, but this much is certain. If you journey with an open and generous spirit, you will also receive generously.

Good luck!

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