

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH CHRIST

Walking El Camino Ignaciano—September 22, 2016--October 21, 2016



I find myself in Spain walking the 640 km from Loyola to Manresa. I was eager to discern what God was calling me to do on this part of my life's journey. I joined Josep Lluís Iriberry, SJ (Director of the Oficina del Peregrino del Camino Ignaciano) in Loyola with all the anticipation and joy of one ready to have this special time with Christ. Having met all my fellow pilgrims, the journey began.

For a person who is seldom sick and in good health, I hit a

brick wall the first day out. Not realizing I had some kind of “bug,” I questioned my sanity for traveling from Kentucky to Loyola to walk the Way. I kept one foot in front of the other with encouragement from Fr. Josep and my fellow pilgrims. My parish priest had given me a crucifix from the Holy Land to carry on my journey. My mental and physical state being in question, I retrieved the crucifix from my backpack to ask God to get me to the next stop. Well, without holding back, Christ and I discussed my situation in depth. The conversation was not pleasant. But as I expected, Christ just listened as I complained about the rough terrain, what a time to “let” me get sick, and the long-legged Jesuit who kept the pace regardless! I can't say by the end of my journey the terrain was easy, but I knew I would make it....and Fr. Josep was safe for now.



I had completed the 19th Annotation many years ago, but always thought a 30-day retreat would further center me in the Exercises. So, I left Kentucky, headed to Spain specifically to discern my future. What direction was God steering me toward? I felt the changes in my life were creating chaos in my soul. I needed to break from my everyday routine. Having been inspired in the Jesuit Spirituality and having prayed the Spiritual Exercises, given the opportunity to walk the Way of Ignatius, I seized it.

Following the Way, walking his path, stopping at churches, castles, or sitting on a stone at the top of a mountain, I began to feel the chaotic energy in me find a positive focus. As Ronald Rolheiser in the Holy Longing suggested—to find the glue that holds me together. I have the desire to serve God but how was I to pull the energy together and have a healthy spirituality?



About five days on the Way, Fr. Josep provided all pilgrims an opportunity to share. Having always used these prayer-sharing groups to be honest with myself, I-- without hesitation—stated “I don’t think I belong here.” I was very tired—the physical journey was very difficult and exhausting. I was on El Camino to discern and pray. I was just too tired at the end of the day to even eat. (However, I quickly learned that our fearless leader had no intention of me lagging behind. So, he made no exceptions to showing up for dinner and kept an eye on my plate, insisting I eat everything from every course. Spanish dinners are delicious feasts with more

food than I normally eat in one day. I tried pushing the food around the plate to look as if I had eaten, but Fr. Josep was not to be fooled!)

But what is the real purpose of this journey? How was I going to leave with some clarity about my life? I learned from our director that the journey through Spain included the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. All parts would need to come together to find the space for discernment. Spiritually I was ready, and I believe emotionally. However, the physical endurance walking some days 7-8 hours up mountain paths was strenuous. Until all four elements were in sync, I was just going to have to enjoy the journey. But my focus was discernment! So, I learned to let go, enjoying the beautiful countryside of Spain and to listen for God. My conversations with Jesus were not so contentious, becoming peaceful. I quit trying and let life happen.



In a very small way, I had a sense of Ignatius’ struggles as he made his journey to Manresa. By the time we paused at the very crossroad where Ignatius was chasing the Moor and let his mule decide which direction to take, I realized I had reached a place on the journey where the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual had come together.

I did not know exactly what God had in mind for my journey, but I did know I had found freedom. Freedom from the people and things that were holding me back from being free to serve God. Peace and Joy entered.

Every day will be a new challenge. Remembering my fellow pilgrims and the challenges we faced together as true companions in Christ will keep me focused. An addition to the meaning of being a companion on the Way is best said by Maya Angelou in her book Letter to My Daughter: “Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud.” My companions were for me. I hope I was for them.

A pilgrim on the journey. Donna Garnett Pfeufer
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