

Pilar Londoño-Kent

I started in Loyola on May 13, 2019, on the day of my 30th wedding anniversary. I could not have found a better way to celebrate except, of course, to have had my husband Paul join me on this adventure. We were married in the St. Ignatius Basilica in Bogota, Colombia, in 1989, by Fr. Samuel Botero, S.J., a dear Jesuit friend; however, my Ignatian Way actually began in 1982, when I did the complete Ignatian Exercises with Fr. Javier Osuna, S.J. Years of friendship with these two Jesuits, observing their examples, listening to their advice, benefitting from their senses of humor, their generosity with their time, talent and treasure, were the best introduction to Ignatian Spirituality. I treasure the books they gave me, such as *San Ignacio de Loyola* by P. Ignacio Casanovas, S.J., second edition, 1953 and *Friends in the Lord* by Fr. Javier Osuna, S.J. What you read influences what you think and truly changes your life. St. Ignatius has become not only my favorite saint but also my good friend. Under his protection, I have received spiritual and practical direction through dear Jesuits in Colombia, England, Europe, and United States.

In 2011, the Pastoral Director of Ignatian Spirituality at Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown, DC. asked me to prepare a slide show of St. Ignatius' life for "Principium", a class given to the leaders of HT Parish. I followed St. Ignatius' biography, mapping his internal and external journey and wondered if it were possible to follow his footsteps from Loyola to Manresa. My family name Londoño comes from Viscaya and from there it passed to Santander, Valencia and Antioquia (Colombia). I checked the internet about the possibilities of doing the Camino Ignaciano. The reviews of existing options were very poor; and at the time, our daughter was still in high school, and my career as a consultant in international trade and transportation was very demanding. So I decided to wait for a more opportune time. Last Summer I discovered the Camino Ignaciano website and ordered the book by Josep Lluís Iriberrí, S.J. and Chris Lowney titled: *El Camino Ignaciano, Un Camino de Sanación Hacia la Libertad (The Ignatian Way, A Way of Healing Towards Freedom)*. I contacted the Camino office in Barcelona in the Fall, and Fr. Josep Lluís confirmed in January 2019 that he would be leading a group of 12 to travel the Camino in May. Fr. Josep Lluís, as an experienced Spanish Jesuit, pilgrim, historian and guide, has an outstanding ministry, leading groups throughout the Spring and Fall each year. As he told me during our journey, his superior had asked him in 2011 to take care of "preparing the

Camino Ignaciano” for 2022, to celebrate the 500th anniversary since Ignatius started his pilgrimage from Loyola to the Holy Land. Since then, Fr. Josep Lluís has been marking the way, painting arrows from town to town, following the steps of St. Ignatius; defining the logistics (finding hotels, restaurants, transportation); designing websites and icons; and writing manuals for the Camino Ignaciano. These guides explain the history, geography, and spirituality of St. Ignatius, giving concrete information about the daily physical and spiritual exercises that participants could expect. The guides have also been made available to groups who follow the Camino on their own.

FRIENDS IN THE LORD

I arrived at Hotel Arrupe, Loyola on May 13 with Maria Isabel, a good friend from Colombia since our high school years. Fr. Josep Lluís welcomed us at the hotel lobby and invited us to the evening meeting, where he introduced the group of 12 pilgrims from Australia, Colombia, Denmark, Germany, Singapore and the United States. He gave us the guide that pointed out the most prominent places along the Camino Ignaciano; practical advice and tips for the inner and outer journey; and a pilgrim passport to be stamped in each place we visited. From the introduction, it was clear to me that we had an eclectic and interesting group. That was a very good start.

The first two nights we stayed in Loyola, visiting Ignatius’ family home, his Parish and Our Lady of Olatz, a precious Romanesque image of the Virgin Mary to whom Ignatius prayed while he recuperated from his leg injury caused by a cannon ball fired during battle in Pamplona, ending his military career. He was 26 years old at that time.

Fr. Josep Lluís celebrated Mass at the chapel in the Loyola house. We followed this pattern of walking; visiting the Romanesque towns and churches with their exquisite statues of the Virgin Mary, to whom St. Ignatius was devoted all his life; and celebrating Mass throughout our journey. Walking became a form of worship, a source of inspiration and a recognition that all things belong to God. The everyday routine was the same; however, every day was different which kept the walk fresh and exciting.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

We reviewed the guide individually every night, wrote the exam of the day, and read about the program for the next day. We prepared for one day at a time. We were expected to walk 20-25 kms/day, with some days over 30 kms and others less than 20. The routine was to leave town early in the morning after breakfast. The first two hours we had silent prayer. Then every hour we stopped to rest and wait for all the walkers to come together. Fr. Josep Lluís was vigilant about accommodating all walking styles and abilities in keeping the group together. We followed this process until we reached the day's final destination. Lunch was taken at a restaurant or cafe along the way or given to us in the hotel for those areas not having lunch options. Dinner was taken in a restaurant or at the hotel. Some evenings we had "the pilgrim circle", where we listened to delightful experiences and individual insights on the journey, if we wanted to share.

THE SUN ALWAYS WORKS

To be a pilgrim requires that you "leave home". On day three, blessed with splendid sunshine, we left Loyola en route to Legazpi. I can't think of a more beautiful context to do the Ignatian spiritual exercises: daily walks through the many winding roads with the fields filled with flowers; green valleys and rocky mountains with birds and cows following us in the sun - and sometimes in the rain. I learned that the sunflower represents the Ignatian Spirituality. How very appropriate, knowing that Ignatian spirituality "presupposes the benefit of the doubt", always looking toward the bright side, finding God in everything. We arrived to the hotel Mauleon, in Legazpi in the afternoon, a fresh sunflower arrangement in the reception was a gentle confirmation of the Ignatian spirit.

On the next morning we continued our journey, climbing mountains and at times facing sharp descents, being very careful with each step. Those challenges produced the prayer of the day -- not to break a leg! We reached Arantzazu, where Fr. Josep Lluís celebrated mass in the Chapel of Reconciliation, and we visited the beautiful Madonna of Arantzazu.

GREATER CHALLENGES

Rain started to fall that night and continued through the next day non-stop. We walked straight for six hours through cold winds and hail, crossing creeks and slippery mountains. This landscape led us into our own inner landscape, where we faced our worries. It was truly uncomfortable. It seemed as though we were in the wilderness rather than civilization. But the presence of the group reminded me there is no need

to be afraid. We sang the pilgrims song “We are pilgrims on a journey. We are companions on the road. We are here to help each other, walk the mile and share the load”. At the end of the day, the sun always comes out. Saint Ignatius found the same on his camino. Joyfully, we found a cafe in Aaria, where the manager very kindly served us coffee and cakes -- and offered to dry my pilgrimage passport on the espresso machine!

From Aria, in Euskadi, we took a private bus to Navarrete in the La Rioja region where we stayed at the Posada Ignatius, the same place where Ignatius visited the Duke of Najera. The following day we walked through fields of grapevines and almond and olive trees to Logroño, in La Rioja, where we took a private bus to Javier, in Navarra. We stayed at the splendid Javier Retreat House and visited the castle of the family of St. Francis Xavier, one of Ignatius’ “Friends in the Lord” and first Jesuits. He volunteered to go on Mission to India and Japan, eventually dying on Sancian Island without being able to enter into mainland China. We then took a private bus from Javier, crossing Aragon to Palau de A’nglesola in Cataluña. It rained all the way.

LOOKING FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SUN

The walk from Palau de A’nglesola to Verdu, a small villa where St. Peter Claver was born, was delightful. The day was sunny and warm, the landscape rich in spring colors, fruit trees and flowers. It brought to heart and mind the treasured memories of my days in Cartagena, Colombia, collaborating with the Mission St. Pedro Claver. The mission was created by Fr. Enrique Giraldo, S.J. to attend to the needs of the slaves who escaped Cartagena in an effort to avoid the slave market. With a group of friends, we completed a census; organized and executed a vaccination program; and wrote a report on the need for international funding for water supply. I’ve returned to the mission many times. St. Peter Claver is, for me, not only a great saint; but he was ahead of his time, attending lovingly to the needs of slaves in 17th Century Cartagena, when even the Church had not recognized the dignity of these people as human beings. In Verdu, we visited the church of Santa Maria, where St. Peter Claver was baptized, and then spent the night at the Pilgrims’ Shelter, organized by the Association de Amigos of St. Peter Claver. The sunflower tiles that mark most of the Camino Ignaciano are made in Verdu.

THE DISCERNING MULE ON THE WAY TO MONSERRAT

We continued to Cervera, an important town during the time of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela. Along the way, we visited the beautiful Our Lady of Down and Our Lady of Sabinas. On the next day, we continued to Igualada, a picturesque town where St. Ignatius bought his “pilgrim’s outfit”. He did not carry anything else. We thankfully had the luxury of having our small luggage carried from place to place, so we walked only with a light backpack for water, sun screen, and snacks to provide energy. The group started to reflect on all that we “carry” with us in our daily lives. What are we going to leave to our Lady of Montserrat? St. Ignatius left Loyola on a donkey given to him by his family...a famous “ass”, as the story is told by James Martin in his book “The Jesuit Guide to almost Everything”. “On the way to Montserrat, Ignatius met a man traveling along the road, who insults the Virgin Mary. Ignatius is furious and begins to decide whether or not to kill him. He comes to a fork in the road and lets his mule decide which way to go. Thanks to everyone involved, the mule picks the other road.” When telling the story to a group of young Jesuits, one provincial drew laughs by saying: “And ever since then, asses have been making decisions in the Society of Jesus”.

St. Ignatius’ mule and the laughter in response to the provincial’s story accompanied us all the way to Barcelona. So we continued our journey to Jorva, and Sant Pau de la Guardia, located 11 kms. from Montserrat. Early on a rainy morning on May 24th, we ascended to Montserrat, a place recognized by many as a site of great spiritual presence. The goal was to be there in time to change clothes and to participate in the 11a.m. mass in the church of Our Lady of Montserrat. It was to be celebrated by many Benedictine priests and Fr. Josep Lluís. The place was packed with people from all over the world, both pilgrims and tourists. This day was the Feast of Our Lady of the Way, one of St. Ignatius devotions. So, yet again, I knew I was in very good company and protected by Our Lady of the Way, Our Lady of Olatz, Our Lady of the Dawn, Our Lady of the Sabinas, and now Our Lady of Montserrat. While he was in Montserrat, St. Ignatius left behind his mule, along with his sword and his old ways. I left a donation for the celebration of a number of masses, giving thanks for the intentions of family and friends. There is no better gift than this!

IT FEELS SO GOOD TO REACH THE GOAL. THE LORD ALWAYS WAITS THERE

We left Montserrat early in the morning, no breakfast, no coffee...that was a real penance for me! During the second hour break, Fr. Josep Lluís

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surprised us with “coca bread”, a sweet bread and chocolate. As we descended Montserrat towards Manresa the clouds started to disappear and the sun came out. My inner joy and gratitude grew with each step. As we approached Manresa, we stopped to contemplate the city that Ignatius called “his primitive church”. I had visited Manresa with my husband Paul in 2014. On that occasion, we reached Manresa from Barcelona by train and entered the city through the main road. This time, we crossed the rail station and headed towards the old bridge, the same bridge over the Cardoner River that St. Ignatius crossed many times during his 10 months in this city.

We reached the Ignatian Spiritual Center where we stayed for two days, visiting the Ignatian Manresa. We received the Certificates of Ignatian Pilgrims; celebrated mass in the Cave chapel; and enjoyed the marvelous Ignatian hospitality. On day 14, we arrived in Barcelona on a private bus. Fr. Josep Lluís, a native of Barcelona, gave us the tour of Ignatian Barcelona, including the beautiful Catedral del Mar, where we took the last picture of the group next to a statue of the Pilgrim Inigo.

Walking the Camino Ignaciano was an absolutely incredible experience, and I feel I grow in joy and gratitude as time passes. I am grateful for the prayers and generosity of my family, parish and friends. They were beyond fruitful along the way.

Our Lady of Olatz



Camino Ignaciano

Loyola - Legazpi - Aranzazu - Aaria - Navarrete - Logroño - Javier - Palau d'Anglesola - Verdu - Monserrat
Manresa - Barcelona

