

Camino Ignaciano is a spiritual trekking!

After a year when I did the Camino Ignaciano in September/October 2014, I always thank God. The graces I got from walking the Camino has been strengthening my way long enough up to now. It was not only a moment of “trekking”, but for me it was a moment of changing in my spiritual understanding about life.



I continued to accompany groups in doing a retreat, after going back from the Camino. During those retreats with fellow Jesuits and other religious groups, I can only share what I know. *Nemo dat quod non habet*. No one can give what he/she doesn't have. To the retreatants, who were doing the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, I shared what I was personally confirmed, that God indeed promised to all of us a good life. At the bottom line, God wants us all to learn to love as He has loved us, to learn to love as He loves.

In my reflection after the Camino, I learned how to see my life in a bigger picture. The whole picture is a kind of a

landscape. God has created that landscape uniquely for me. It is not a smooth surface at all. It is a beautiful up and down surface, full of hills and valleys. We can be stupidly tricked and we get a wrong understanding if we perceive a part of the landscape as if it represents the whole picture of our life. We can find ourselves many times up high, like above the beautiful mountainous route of the Camino in the Basque country. Everything seems to be perfect. It could be however a time, when we find ourselves in the dark and deep valley. It is a time when we feel everything is not okay for me. Both those high points and the low points in our walking are only a part of the whole Camino. Without any ups and downs, without any deviations to rights and lefts, our trekking way will not be challenging and interesting. How to perceive those ups and downs will define our way of understanding our life. If we take one part as if it replaces the whole, we are wrong. That explains how we have to embrace our desolations and consolations as well, as contributive for the development of our life.

I remember the owner of a small hotel in Fuentes de Ebro, said: “I appreciate this Camino Ignaciano as still having the nature of a pilgrimage, not only a tourism”. What he said is true. The Camino Ignaciano was a real pilgrimage for me, through some stages until the end point in Manresa. I found the “Ignatian Tips” on the website was helpful in finding the daily material for reflection. The four weeks of the spiritual exercises is clearly presented. In my own words, to make it simple, I use my own experiences in four phrases to explain those four weeks of spiritual exercises. The first week is “I don't know, I don't want to”, the second week is “I want to know more”, the third week is “I am ready to take the risk”, the fourth week is “I am happy to do this”. Those four stages tell the story of my experiences in doing the Camino Ignaciano. It ends with a phrase that “I am happy”, though I started the walking without knowing much about the way, the people, the language, the country. But I want to know more, and I am willing to learn. After walking for some days, I was slowly and step by step gaining the courage to take any risk, when I had to sleep under the star at night, totally alone, in the “Desierto de los Monegros”. No I was not alone I was with God. Just imagine there are four weeks in the ignatian Spiritual Exercises similar to those stages. The first week is the reflecting our frailty and weaknesses.

The second week is answering “yes” to the calling. The third week is walking on Jesus’ way of the cross. The fourth week is contemplating the love of God.

Now, I believe, that every one of us in our specific walk of life, in some ways has also experiences, which shows that four similar stages. We can easily point out that we have started something, which ended in a happy or successful moment. Every one of us wants to achieve a happy point in life. That shows that we have deep in our heart, aside from a faith, “a hope”. We hope that we can reach our goal in life, and being fulfilled. You see there are already two stages, one is the start and the other one is the end. We see there are two other stages. After we start something, leaving our fear, or surpassing our shortcomings, we enter the second stage of “wanting to know more”. The third stage is precisely before the successful ending or the fourth stage. It is the stage of “taking the risk”. Without the courage of entering the unknown and risky zone, without crossing to the frontier, it will be unlikely we come to the point of destination, the point of understanding the will of God in life.



From the experience of the Camino, I understood in my own way, the four weeks, or the four steps of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

The last stage or the end, which we want to achieve in doing the Spiritual Exercises, is to be happy being with God, who teaches us how to love. We learn to love as God loves. With that way of loving we want to develop and to order our life. If we eventually love our life, and in our life we grow in love and to love, I guess we understand in some degree what Ignatius has done during his pilgrimage in the past.

To understand these four stages can easily help us to accept and to draw meaning from any experience of our life. It is like doing a walk. We can never reach the end, if we don’t start. We can never reach the end, if we stop. We can never get the happiness in reaching our goal, if we don’t want to take the risk. And why we want to enter the risky zone in life? It is because we want to know more, to listen to the calling inside our heart.

So, it is very likely that we are always walking into the stage of “starting though with shortcoming”, then the stage of “willing to know more”, then the stage of “entering the risk” and eventually the stage of “ending our walk in love”. The Camino Ignaciano has showed me clearly the stages, which I have to put into practice in my every day life. It is the stages, which lead me to know God’s love more, which invited me to love God more, by loving my life and by loving others.

Camino Ignaciano is not only a beautiful trekking way through the beautiful Spain, but it is a spiritual journey, being guided by God to understand His way to love.

RB. Riyo Mursanto, SJ

