

## **The Ignatian Way: Fr. Provincial of Spain on Radio Estel, Catalonia.**

The Ignatian way, the protagonist of our connections today, goes from the birthplace of Ignatius of Loyola, a tower palace in Azpeitia in the Basque Country, to what is known as the cave of St. Ignatius, “la Cova de Sant Ignasi”, in the Catalan city of Manresa, very close to the monastery of Montserrat. After his spiritual conversion in Loyola, Ignatius felt the burning desire to follow Jesus Christ, as many others had already done, and abandoned the life he had led until then as the son of a noble family. Ignatius decided to go against the current and set out for Jerusalem, following the so-called Camino Real, which would take him to Barcelona.

From there he planned to leave by ship to continue his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We spoke for a few minutes with Enric Puiggros, Provincial of the Spanish Province of the Society of Jesus, about these and many other aspects of the life of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Father Enric Puiggros, hello and welcome.

**How would you define the Ignatian way?** Well, the Ignatian way is a way of pilgrimages, like so many others. We have the reference of the Way of St. James, for example.

It is a pilgrimage, but unlike others that go to specific places, what characterizes the Ignatian way is a pilgrimage that, more than going to a sacred place, reproduces a path made by someone who was in contact with the sacred, who was St. Ignatius of Loyola. The Ignatian Way follows a 500-year history, which updates what St. Ignatius did, and pilgrims walk this way remembering the itinerary of Ignatius of Loyola.

**How did this route begin to take shape and become officially defined?** The first idea was in 2010. The then provincial of the Jesuits in Catalonia, Father Lluís Magriñà, when we were preparing the coming of Pope Benedict for World Youth Day, which was to be a year later, thought it was a good time to take advantage of the creation of a pilgrimage route that would take the figure of Ignatius and his itinerary and his spirituality as its center. And that is why he commissioned Father Josep Lluís Iriberry, who has been the director of the Pilgrim's Office since then, to define the whole path, which was designed also following the inspiration of the spiritual exercises, in an itinerary that goes from Loyola-Azpeitia, Basque Country, to Manresa, Catalonia, in an itinerary of approximately thirty days, and thus also follow the itinerary of exercises that the pilgrim could do. From the beginning, Father Iriberry structured all this on a website, which is now available in seven different languages.

It was in March 2012 when there was a first presentation to the Spanish Episcopal Conference. In other words, it was in the 2011-2012 academic year when this structuring and this initiative began, this apostolic work of the Society of Jesus, which, as you can see, is still twelve years old, which is very little in a journey of these characteristics.

**What sense do those who walk the Ignatian Way see in this itinerary, following in the footsteps of that man who exchanged arms for the cross of Christ?** Well, it is a path, as happens in all pilgrimages, which is a path of external stripping, also for a simple life, for a life, therefore, of contact with nature. In this case, the Ignatian Way seeks to relive the story of Ignatius of Loyola, but in one's own life. That is why the experience of the spiritual exercises is also proposed as something that can structure the whole physical and pilgrimage itinerary.

For those who have done it and who are knowledgeable about Ignatian spirituality, they define it as putting flesh on what is the structure, the bones, which would be like the basic concepts of Ignatian spirituality, which theoretically we know, but through this pilgrimage you give them content and incarnate them. Because by being in contact with the places where Ignatius was in this journey, the whole process and the path that Ignatius took also becomes concrete, palpable. We must add to all this that the pilgrims experience what is proper to a person who puts himself on pilgrimage, who opens himself to transformation, to the constant search, to put himself on the way.

We walked with St. Ignatius in 1522, at that time the young Inigo, accompanying him in his dream and his intimate desire, which was to go on pilgrimage and to be in the Holy Land. Obviously, the desires of the walkers today will be different, but it is also good that they can connect with their deepest desires, accompanied by Ignatius.

**We spoke with Enric Puiggrós, provincial of the Society of Jesus in Spain. For this route from Loyola to Catalonia, how important was the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Ignatius' arrival in Manresa in 2022?** Of course, that celebration was very important, because it meant a very large increase in visitors,

calculating in numbers that, within what is the youth of this route, are modest figures, but they are a remarkable increase in the number of pilgrims. From 350 people in 2019 went to 850 people in 2022, but in addition to these, more than 1,200 people were counted at the tourist office. From the beginning of the Camino until December 23, that is, in these first eleven or twelve years, the number of pilgrims who have come to Manresa and that we have registered are 3,600 pilgrims.

Of these, 88% are international, which shows the internationality and the international projection that the route of St. Ignatius of Loyola has. Specifically, during the year 22, which was when the 500th anniversary of the presence of Ignatius in Manresa was celebrated, the city council was also very intensely involved in the organization of many cultural activities. We are talking about more than 200 cultural, festive and religious events during that year, and that is also thanks to the high involvement of the city of Manresa for that year, because Ignatius is a clearly representative character of the city, worldwide.

**On the other hand, how are the pilgrimages usually organized for the whole route or just to walk it partially?**

We are talking about a route open to everyone, as long as you know what it means to walk for several days in a row. This means that the pilgrims, the vast majority, do not organize among themselves, but take their backpacks or bicycles and set out on the road. There is an official guide of the Ignatian Way that can be found on the website, which is [www.caminoignaciano.org](http://www.caminoignaciano.org). Here everything is updated and there are proposals not only of materials, but also practical guides of maps, routes, etc.

On the other hand, the Pilgrim's Office of the Ignatian Way, which is an apostolic work of the Province of Spain, offers to organize groups of Jesuit institutions, whether parishes, schools, universities, Christian communities that wish to make the experience. In other words, they can make a more organized experience, tutored or guided by someone from the office, and thus make their pilgrimage tailored to their needs. Our recommendation is that you can always do the Camino in the correct order, that is, starting in Loyola and ending in Manresa, so that you can reproduce the vital journey that St. Ignatius made from the month of February 1522, when he left Loyola and arrived on March 25, 1522 in Manresa.

Along the Way he passed through different places and locations, until in Manresa he was also able to make that spiritual itinerary of 11 months, where he was able to deepen his experience of God and later transcribe it in what we would later call spiritual exercises. But if you do not have 30 days to do all the stages, you can do only some stages, or taking public means, transport, to do some faster layer, or make sections, and every year you do a section.

**And finally, Father Enric Puiggrós, what future do you see in this living memory of St. Ignatius, which is the path he walked, with the idea of reaching Jerusalem?** Yes, the idea, the intuition that the Provincial of the Jesuits, Father Magriñà, had at the time, is that the experience of pilgrimage and of being a pilgrim was an experience profoundly for the future.

Future generations can live this path of stripping away, of searching, of desiring a different life, of finding how to incarnate one's own life project on the Camino, so this is something that can have a great projection in the future. At the end of the 20th century we have recovered the spirit of the pilgrimages. The Way of Ignatius is but a small example of all this, we have the example of other pilgrimages, such as the revival of what has happened on the Camino de Santiago, and there are other roads, other ways, the Via Francigena, the Cross of Caravaca, or Santo Toribio de Liebana... These are some examples that the spirit of pilgrimage is something very valid and very present, very current and of the future.

Therefore, within the characteristics of our times, very threatened by hyper connectivity, and also perhaps a too sedentary life, something to recover is also that contact with nature, that detachment that prevents us from unbridled consumption and technification in our lives. Living in contact with nature, from listening, and so on. At the moment we are starting and we hope that all the public administrations that are involved in this will join in, acting in the same way as when the Junta de Galicia got behind the Jacobean Way on the Way of St. James. We hope that we can give more strength to this path together.

We also hope that the local administrations will be welcoming a network of shelters and places to stay overnight, which are always necessary on a route and on a pilgrimage itinerary such as the one we are proposing.

**Thank you very much, Father Enric Puiggrós, Provincial of the Jesuits in Spain, may it go well. Happy journey to all those who follow you physically and also those who follow the Ignatian spirituality.** Farewell, all the best. Thank you very much and see you soon.

Conexiones Program, with Paula Moreno in the technical control, David García in the production, and the journalist of Radio Estel, Ignasi Miranda.