

Walking with Ignatius, from Spain to Italy!

At the end of the pilgrimage... once back home... a grateful look, back to the pilgrimage (April 2025):



"I have done several Caminos (Saint James and Ignatian) and retreats and would say that this is the best I have done so far. Everything about this pilgrimage was beautiful and perfect. My fellow pilgrims - with all our quirks, habits, cultures and background, united in our struggles with St Ignatius as we search for God. The food, the accommodation, the weather, the walks, and all the aches and pains, were just the way it was meant to be. When the love we give and receive is rooted in Christ, we feel His presence. And that was how I felt about this pilgrimage. His presence through our every experience, the good and the ones we thought were not good. This pilgrimage has brought me closer to Christ, to learn to see Him in the people I meet and in the encounters I have every day. If you have a prompting to embark on this pilgrimage, hesitate no more. Take the first step and He will do the rest."

God bless, Mary-Ann

I started the Camino with an uncertain feeling of what I would get out of this pilgrimage. To my surprise, it turned out to be the most impactful retreat for me to date.

I always found it difficult to express or articulate the spiritual fruits I gained, or what are the defining experiences that made this pilgrimage different for me. To such a question, I'd say that it was the combination of things: the rigor of the walk, the solitude in reflection and contemplation during long walks, the beauty of nature, the scorching sun, the chilling breeze, the exhaustions, the rests, the thirsts, the quenching drinks, the climbs, the descents, the simple meals, the simple beds and accommodation, the "brotherly connection" with the other pilgrims, the laughs, the spiritual talks, the prayers, the churches and holy places, the mass — these are all points of encountering God in each respective unique way. In other words — it's finding Him in all things, in accordance with St Ignatius' teaching.

Towards the end of the Camino, I somewhat felt that I was emptied out of myself, but fulfilled with something new, refreshing, fundamentally changing me in the deep. For example, during one of the walks, I at once felt the total freedom and the deepest joy that came with it, the sense of being delivered from all worries, fear and burdens of the regular life I have been living. In another, there was a sense of being prepared by God for the next mission He has in store for me.

All in all, my mind may or may not understand the individual experiences, but my heart remembers of all their goodness, like muscle memory that won't ever forget. In the months after the Camino and in dealing with challenges as I return to my regular life, I often resort to the remembrance of all these graces that I have received during the pilgrimage, that God is always with me.

Charly Kojongian

Wow... but... what happened on this pilgrimage Verdú-Rome 2025?

Hello pilgrims! Here we are, at the beginning of our Ignatius 1523, from Bellpuig (Catalunya, Spain) to Rome (Italy). Nine pilgrims that have done already the Ignatian Way in past years and gather together to walk again the connection Spain-Italy, following the path that Ignatius started in 1523 in his way to Jerusalem. We are going to post some experiences and pictures along the Way.



"Why to start in Bellpuig? I was really curious! Why not in Loyola? Am I cheating? Shouldn't I start in Euskadi-Azpeitia? But from the very first moment, arriving to Verdú and recognizing the places that I walked years ago, I realized that this time my goal was not "to start" something but that everything was about "ending" the story with Ignatius in Rome."

This Spring is just perfect! Cold at the very first moment of the day (3 and 5 degrees in Tarrega or Cervera) but then going to 16 and 18 degrees during the day. Strong cold wind on the very first day, but fine afterwards. Beautiful flowers and snow in the mountains. Walking slow (the oldest of the group 72) but enjoying every step. New

places to eat in Verdú, like Cal Bruno or breakfast in Magic's. The hostel for pilgrims, always warm and clean. 😊😄



On the Way, again: from Verdú, passing Tarrega and to Cervera. We stop to visit the parish churches and contemplate the religious art that comes from the experience of the people in town. Centuries of faith. And the landscape helps us to meditate: the snow on the horizon, the flowers of canola, the soft green of the wheat and the blue of the sky.

"The beauty of Spring is amazing! The wheat is growing showing a generous life in its veins. The rain came last month after more than three years of severe drought. Everything is so gorgeous! I'm learning to free myself to the path of life. You can see that Providence is everywhere here and Life lies everywhere. We must trust the Way of Life. It takes care of you!"

We went to visit our lady of Dawn in Tarrega and our lady of Sabines (Juniper) in Cervera and hear all the mysterious traditions about stolen relics and miracles from the XVI century. Good welcome from Miquel and Conchi at the pilgrims' shelter of Sagrada Familia.



From Cervera to Jorba is our longest step. It is cold, 5 degrees, but the sun is going to warm up the pilgrims and soon the short sleeves come out. Many small towns break the rhythm of the pilgrims. Many sources of water to fill the bottles. It is an easy walk going to La Panadella and after that, it is mostly way down. At Sant Antoli we couldn't get the coffee promised by Fr. Iriberri sj because the Bar Amistad (Friendship) is closed: it seems that a new owner will take the bar one day... but not today! Pity!

"Today we lost our way just after Cervera. But feeling lost was not that bad. I had to think about being aware of the orange arrows. In my life so many times I walk without taking care of the signs. They are on my way but if I lose my "presence" then I go just on automatic and I can easily be lost. Today I saw my life in a metaphor. Awareness is essential."



The pilgrims' hostel of Saint James in Jorba is always a very good option, although the new hostel in Igualada is a huge temptation... but we must say that Enric, the priest in charge of the Jorba hostel, takes care of us so good that we cannot fail meeting him when we walk the Ignatian Way. And we end our day celebrating the mass at the chapel of Saint James and Saint Ignatius. Buen Camino! 😊





From Jorba, we keep walking, but first with the help of public transportation, that makes our step a little bit shorter. With the 7:25AM bus from Jorba we go to Castellolí and start walking from that tiny town. Going up to Montserrat is quite affordable: not a long distance, not that much elevation. We have known worse! But... not every pilgrim thinks the same.

"I must confess that I didn't have any time to do some training before coming, and I thought that our step to Jorba would be really awful, but it went really well. Going to Montserrat... that was hard! It was a long walk, not in distance, but we went crossing the

mountain path and that was too long in time. To be present at every step, watching the stones and trying not to fall. It was challenging. But I'm learning that if I focus, I can overcome the obstacle that I feel is even too big for me. I'm comforted now once in the monastery and I think that my body knows that there is nothing to fear in this Ignatian way, which is like my own way in daily life as well."





To be true, we must recognize that the mountain path going from Can Maçana to Santa Cecilia is not in good shape. The heavy rain in March and the presence of wild pigs have transformed the usually difficult path into a quite impressive path (say dangerous?). But with great patience, all the pilgrims arrived safe and sound. 😊

We spent a full day in Montserrat. The 1000-year celebration of the foundation of the monastery is something to remember. A video mapping inside of the Basilica, the monks mass praying for us pilgrims, the museum with the special exhibition of the 1000 years of history... everything was glorious... even the rain that didn't stop for the whole day! We were planning to stay that day in Montserrat... and the rain decided to help us to rest in the pilgrim's shelter! We had time to pray, to be together walking the Way of the Cross with Mary of Montserrat, to share our experience, etc.

"In Montserrat I got a revelation: I'm not a mother myself but praying with Mary I felt such grief for her holding her son in his lap that I truly believe that I have to be close to all the mothers that suffer in that way, that they could have lost their daughters or sons. I felt the call to pray for them,

to sense their distress and bring their own life of suffering to God with Mary."

The holy mountain was a place to find some peace and strength to keep walking the Way of Ignatius. We enjoyed the meals at Hotel Abad Cisneros and the buffet of the Apostles. Little by little our pilgrimage is growing in us. The contrast with the many tourists we encounter is neat.



"Ja a primera vista, la seva estranya silueta promet alguna cosa d'extraordinari, i des de

com una mena de bosc petrificat; o més aviat com les ruïnes imponents d'algun immens edifici, obra de venerable antigor."

On the following day, going down to Manresa, we felt the Joy of the Spirit that took Ignatius himself on his first day of walking. The joy of starting a new life; the joy to feel the freedom to decide the life we want to live; the joy of feeling the presence of God as a guide in this Way to the Kingdom. The rain stopped and we could live the full experience of Spring all along the way. Nature, with its blossoming life, was encouraging all along the 25 km we walked. As it is kind of compulsory, we stop at Bar Montserrat in Castellgalí, on the same road to Manresa, to have a generous sandwich and a beer. Conchi, the owner, stamped our pilgrim's credentials. Finally, the city of Manresa, the city of Ignatius, welcomed us.

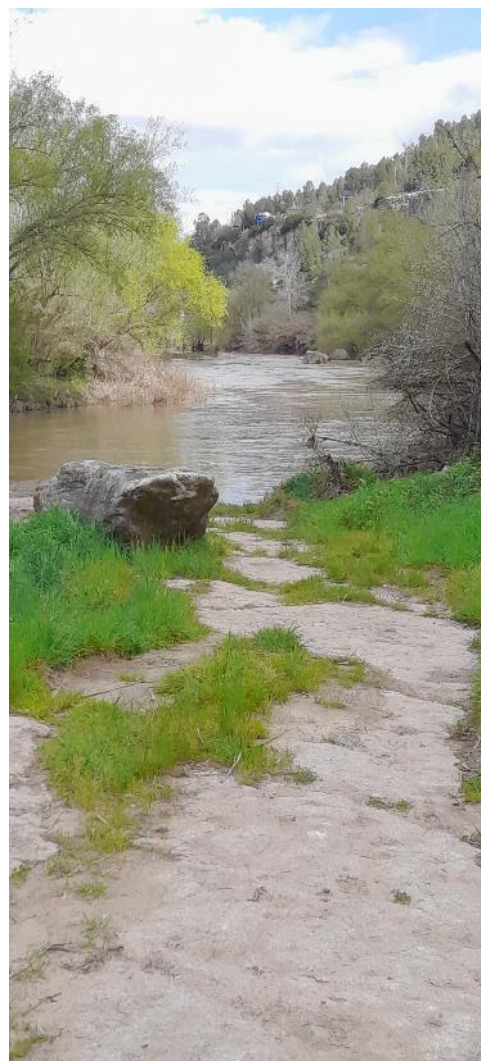


Let's keep track in our Way to Rome with Ignatius. We spent one day in Manresa, visiting the Ignatian sites: the well of light, the basilica of la Seu, the chapel of Saint Ignatius sick, the chapel of the rapture of Saint Ignatius... and we walked the "Way of the Íñigas" to the hermitage of Saint Paul, at only one kilometer from the Cave of Saint Ignatius. One day to experience the feeling of the Ignatian Manresa and get ready for the next three days that will bring us to Barcelona.

Next step: from Manresa to Castellbell i El Vilar. We are following the steps of the Ignatian Way: www.caminoignaciano.org It is a nice step: most of the time flat and close to the Llobregat river, although at the beginning we must go down from Manresa to Pont de Vilomara. Dirt roads that bring us to the shrine of Our Lady of the good health, in Viladordis,

where Ignatius fainted and almost died. Walking through the forest we arrived at the bridge from where Ignatius said goodbye to his friends, after almost a year living in Manresa. Easy walk going down with a beautiful surprise on the “stone bridge”, a marvel of the nature a bit hidden but right on the Way.

Something that we were discussing about being lost in the Way: “In my first Camino Ignaciano I lost the way many times and so this time walking with you I’m trying to see where and why I missed the orange arrows. Now it is clear to me that I was not doing the right thing when I decided to walk even when the night was coming. I must do the right discernment in life. How many times I’m going back again because I’ve lost my way for lack of discernment. Although it is a grace to be lost because it is then when you can find your own being. You become more aware of yourself and your own ways. It is good to feel “lost and found”.



A new sunny day, cold at the beginning (6 degrees) but warming up very fast. Today we took the train from Manresa to Castellbell i el Vilar to get back to the place we ended yesterday. It is a pity that there is no place to stay in Castellbell. We are back to the Llobregat river, walking alongside and approaching Montserrat. It is a wonderful view of the mountain that we know so well. The full step is almost only dirt roads and mountain path, which is very attractive for us pilgrims. But we cannot avoid some parts of the asphalt road. At Monistrol town we stopped for a coffee and then we started to go up and progressively far from the mountain. The path is well marked, and we don't get lost at any moment walking to the big city of Terrassa. In many moments we cross the train track and at least three train stations... going to our destination... which is a temptation! But we are pilgrims, and we must keep in our path with determination 😊😊

“I started this Camino with huge fear because 6 months ago I was close to death, loosing a lot of blood. I didn't know if I had to cancel my pilgrimage, but I trusted God and now I'm here so happy! I think I'm aware that I cannot control my life, and the meaning of life is to be free in the hands of God, to let go all my physical fears, let my body

talk along this pilgrimage and showing me that my strength is not only coming from my weak body cells but from my Being.”

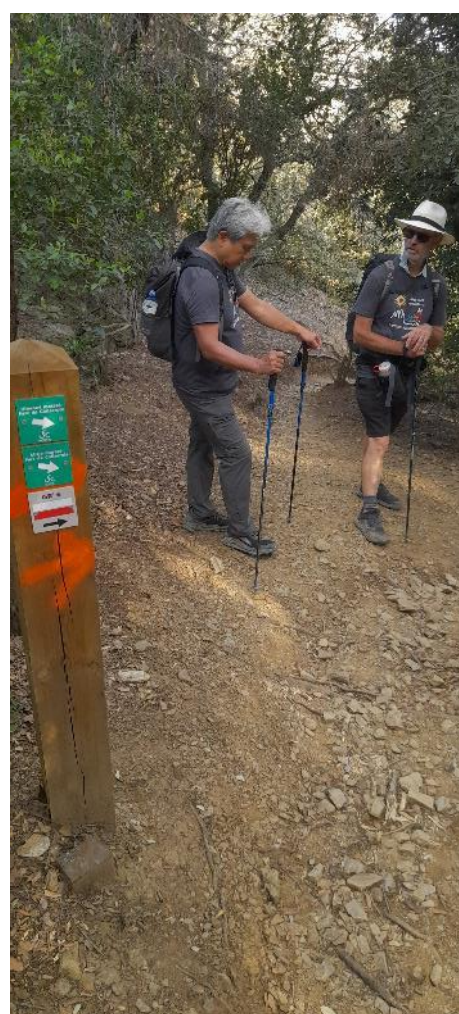
The walk was long and strenuous, difficult for our legs and feet... but at the end of the day we got a wonderful shower and dinner at the pilgrims’ n shelter in Terrassa, close to the ancient church of Egara, the first one build as a diocese here, already in the V century.





Last step in Spain before leaving for Italy: from Terrassa to Barcelona. It is a long walk that ends in Barcelona, indeed, but not before going up to the Tibidabo mountain and down in a very steep descent. We all finished tired. Perhaps the feeling that we were arriving at one end of this pilgrimage played against us, but we can say that this day was really difficult. But we did it! And the view of the city from the mountains is gorgeous.





“I feel I meant to be here in this jubilar year to Rome following Ignatius. God wanted me to be here. I want to develop a deep desire of trusting God. I did my first Ignatian Way 13 years ago and I’m so grateful to be here experiencing myself so differently, so full of the Spirit. This is a pure, pure gift. I must say that after these days, even though they have been hard for me, I’m just full of joy.”

We started our walk going to pay a visit to the cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Terrassa. We were surprised to find there one statue of Saint Ignatius lying as we saw him at the chapel of the rapture in Manresa. We stopped to have lunch at a Viena restaurant in the city of Saint Cugat. We couldn’t visit the church and the cloister of the



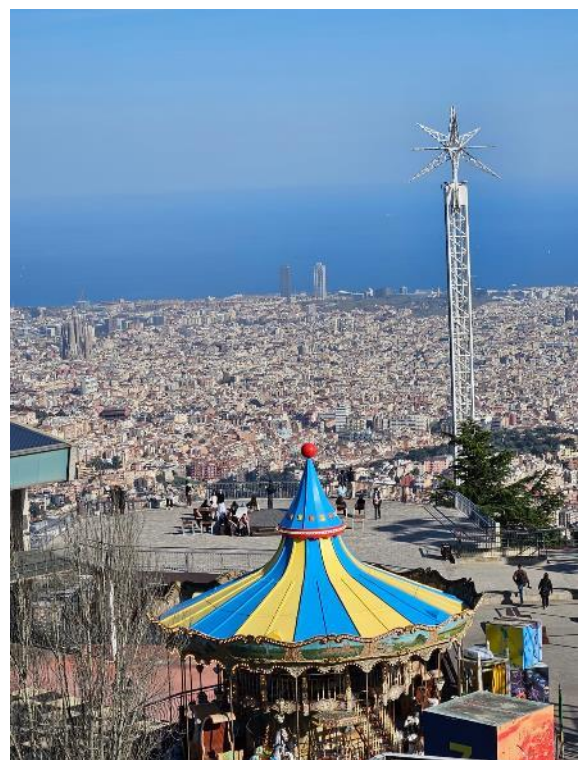
former Benedictine monastery of Sain Cugat because they close at midday. Only from outside could we have a look inside.



We follow our Ignatian Pilgrimage from Spain, Verdú, to Italy, Rome, 2025.

After the stressing step from Terrassa to Barcelona (going up to the Tibidabo mountain, step 29: <https://caminoignaciano.org/en/29-30/>) we enjoyed a free day in Barcelona city, visiting the Sagrada Familia, the Ignatian Barcelona and even some of the pilgrims took the train to the top of the Tibidabo, in order to visit the shrine and pray over the city.

“Visiting Tibidabo, looking at the statue of Jesus Christ with his arms stretched not on the Cross but reaching the whole city (the world), and feeling myself in his huge Hug to all humankind was really touching. Looking at the Mediterranean as a huge open space to us to feel the grandiosity of God’s love in Nature. It was just amazing feeling God as a Father who takes us in His Love. Deep sense of gratitude for this wonderful Camino to here.”



On the next day, we took a flight to Fiumicino where a minibus was waiting for us to drive the group to the city of Sutri in Viterbo, following the instructions in the web site: <https://caminoignaciano.org/en/30-31/>



Once more, we were lucky with the weather and we could visit the amphitheater and our Lady of Parto Church, which is amazing! So different from anything we saw up to now in our pilgrimage: a church carved inside of the stone! And they celebrated mass up to the moment of COVID, when everything was closed and they never started again. Pity. It must be something special to celebrate here. We stay in two houses: the Casa Salza and the Antico Forno, but on the web site, there are many more places to book in advance. In the main square in town, close to the Town Hall, the restaurant Sfera di Oro is a good place to have dinner (20 € pilgrim's menu).

So far so good... and tomorrow a new step, this time in Italy!



We start approaching Rome. We follow the Autobiography of Ignatius, as it is shown in the web site: <https://caminoignaciano.org/en/31-32/>

It seemed like we would have some rain, but it was not that big. Fr. Josep said that he has had always rain for the past four years... but we were lucky this time! Most of this step is on the asphalt road, so we only had to endure just a bit of mud in some parts of the Way. We follow the signals of the Via Francigena (red and white) because there are no signs of the Ignatian Way (orange arrows and the Sun). But you cannot get lost: although old (no refreshed arrows) you find everything you need to keep on the right path. And in the Ignatian Way web site you can download the GPS of the step, so... no problem at all!



The landscape is gorgeous, with green fields all around. The first 400m walk on the road was a bit difficult because of the heavy traffic (including trucks) but we walked together, and drivers respected our group of pilgrims. After that, the Way goes far from busy roads which is good. Hazelnut trees are everywhere. And a huge golf course.

“The pilgrimage has been, so far, a place of peace, clarity of mind and presence of God at every step. In the middle of my pain (of course! My feet are killing me!), when the path is just impossible for me, I feel that inner voice

saying, “I’m here, I’m here”. Even though the suffering, I’m enjoying so much this pilgrimage (my third Ignatian Camino pilgrimage!). I feel a clarity that brings peace and helps me to see God walking in front of me in all of you when I find myself at the back of the group. This feeling brings me confidence, peace and freedom for my future life at home. I’m not enjoying being the last, but this is my place until my feet and legs decide otherwise.”

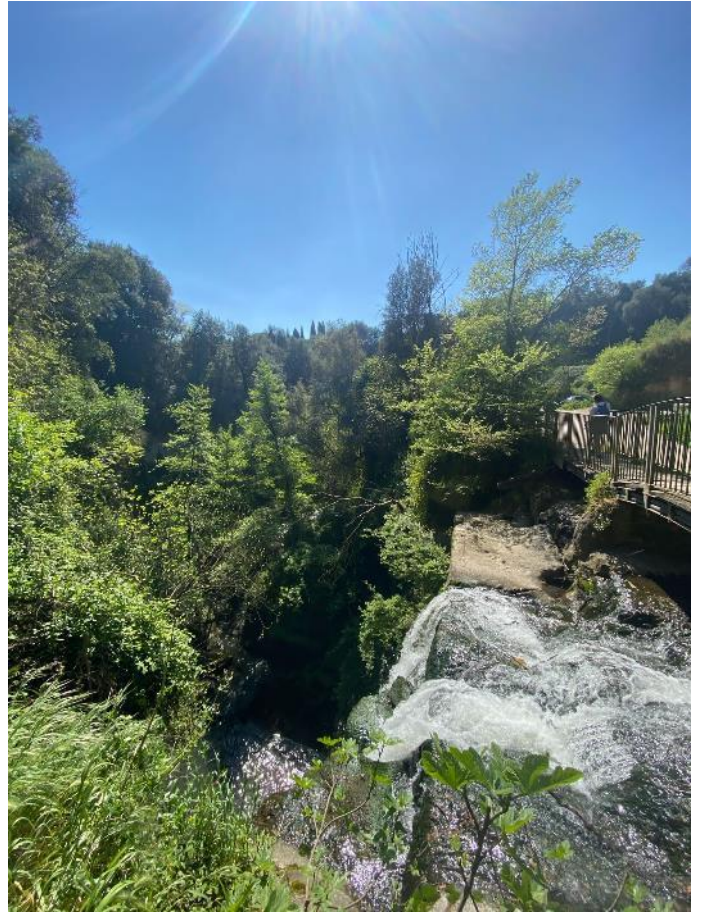
Only one town in the middle of the step, Montesori, but with a very welcoming Bar just at the entrance, where we find two more pilgrims from the Francigena Way. Although we are close to the end of the Francigena, there are only a few pilgrims walking: we encountered only 5 in different moments. Nothing to do with the Saint James Way in Spain. The waterfalls of Monte Gelato are a wonderful place to relax our feet. And finally, Campagnano... that welcomes us with a huge steep going up to heaven! It seems an eternity going up! We went to the parochial pilgrim’s shelter and Bar Mario in front of the shelter gave us a typical pasta and chicken with lemon sauce, with tiramisu and macchiato at the end (pilgrim’s menu 18 €). Going down the main road, taking right, a big COOP supermarket.



We started one more step with the deep feeling that we were heading towards a very important place for us, as Ignatian pilgrims: La Storta – Isola Farnese. Since we are following Ignatius from his very beginning in Barcelona, in 1523, and now going down to Rome following his steps from Venice in November 1537, reaching La Storta has been one of our goals. In this place Ignatius got the vision that confirmed that Jesus Christ will be with him in his endeavor in Rome, and he will find the welcome needed to follow his mission. Today the meditation and the whole walk was going to a sacred place for us. But before arriving, we stopped at the shrine of our Lady of Sorbo, a medieval place built to honor Mary. And it happened, like at other moments on our pilgrimage, that we found the door closed (surprise, surprise, because Fr. Josep said that it was always open!) ... so, once more, obstacles in our way... but just a few minutes later one monk arrived with the key to open. We have been so blessed at many moments on this pilgrimage!

“God is at work at every moment, and I can see that you too are feeling this pilgrimage as a gift. I’m enjoying so much living the walk as something natural, that flows, and it is on our faces. My prayer these days is always free, somewhat natural, flowing, spontaneous. On the Way, God walks with us, even in the tiredness of it.”

At the Storta chapel we prayed, and we celebrated the eucharist in the memorial of Ignatius. The keys of the chapel are at the sacristy of the parish church (yes, at the top of a long staircase, on the hill close by!). The way to La Storta – Isola Farnese is beautiful, like yesterday, with green fields, flowers (Spring!), blue sky (we are so blessed with the weather!) and up and down hills that help us to keep fit! The beautiful old town of Fornello (mid-way) gives us the opportunity to get water, cappuccinos and gelato. Before ending our day, we got a picture with one of the 20 plates that sign the Itinerari Ignaziani (the Ignatian Way in Rome). You must find them! We stayed at the religious house of Nostra Signora as it is in the Ignatian web site: <https://caminoignaciano.org/en/32-33/>



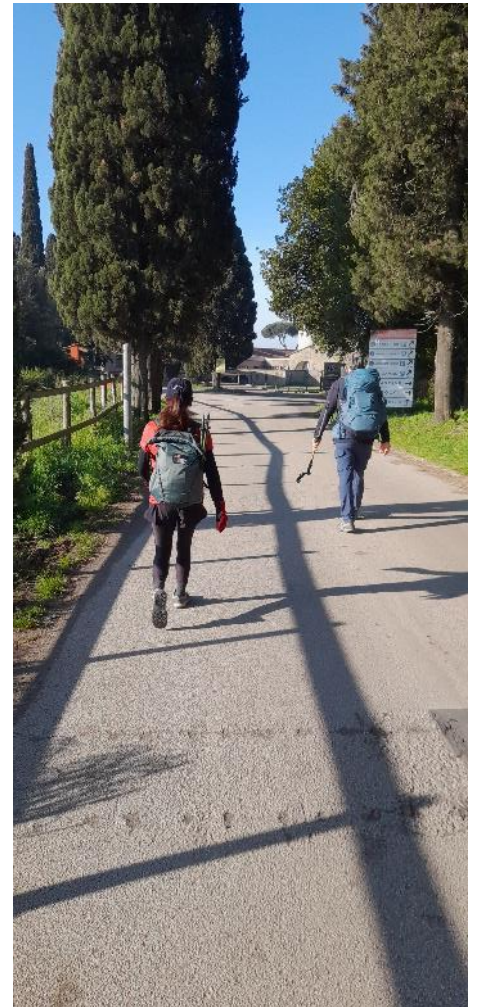


Let's go to Rome with Ignatius! <https://caminoignaciano.org/en/33-34/>

A new beginning, this time feeling that we are close to the end. Rome is not far, but we have still at least 5 or 6 hours of walk. We must follow the traditional Via Cassia, as this is the direct way to Rome, but we take as many side roads as possible, and we enter Rome through the park of Monte Mario. This park is being renovated, and it looks gorgeous. The signs of Via Francigena are clear.

"I'm happy today feeling that we are taking the last step to Rome. Now I feel truly like a pilgrim. Looking back, for me it was really tough the walk to Terrassa: I didn't take enough water, and I was feeling miserable. I was complaining to God all the time. I remember wondering if I could take nothing from this pilgrimage, feeling so bad. But I remember that on the next day I was feeling like today: happy and certain that God is the one who gives me the strength to walk fast and glad to be here. Again, then and now, God heard my prayer. I'm more and more conscious that I'm "a work in progress". We are pilgrims! This is the only meaning of keep walking every day, in our life here and at home."

Walking through Rome, we finally arrive to the top of Monte Ciocchi, from which we can see the dome of the Vatican. Going down we stop at La Siciliana restaurant to have lunch, and we keep walking until the entrance of the Vatican, where we got our pilgrim's certificate and the last stamp in our pilgrim's credential. After that, we went to the basilica of Saint Peter's, we stayed for the pilgrim's mass (every day at 6 PM) and



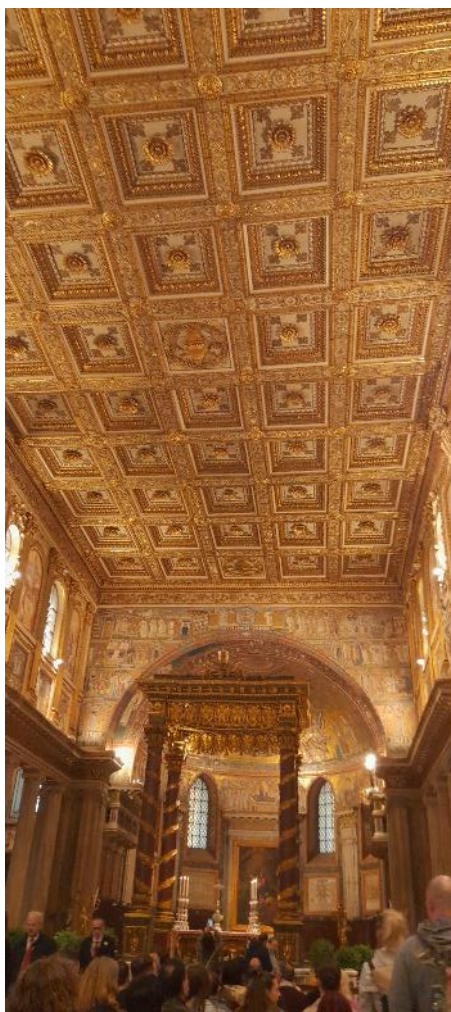
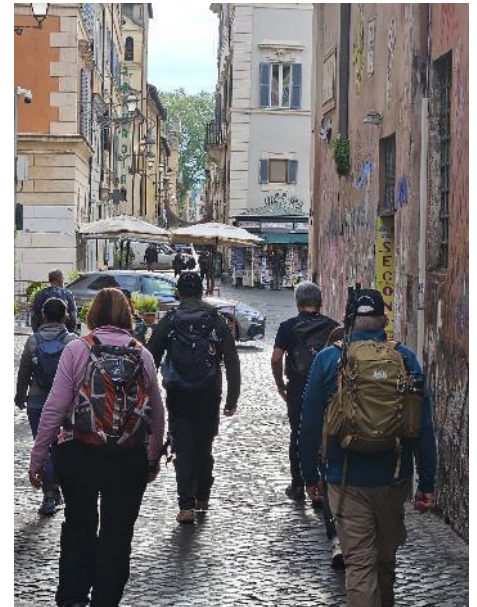
took the traditional picture with the statue of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Tomorrow... more!



Our last day of pilgrimage: the 7 Churches Pilgrimage inside Rome.

<https://caminoignaciano.org/en/34-35/>

This is a traditional pilgrimage from the 7th century. It goes around Rome, visiting the 7 big basilicas of Rome. In the web site of the Ignatian Way we can read all the information and follow the inner path of this ancient pilgrimage. It is a bit long, again, but it is feasible. The only thing is to keep in mind that the last basilica, Santa Maria la Maggiore, closes at 6 PM... so better start earlier than later. Santa Croce opens at 1:30 PM and Saint Lorenzo at 4 PM. We bought some lunch at Saint Paul Basilica and stopped to eat at the park of the Catacombs of Saint Calixto (closed on Wednesday), which has a beautiful open space for visitors. The pilgrimage was something special for the first Jesuits and Ignatius himself who did it perhaps more than once. At least, for sure, on April 22, 1540, when all the first companions gathered at the basilica of Saint Paul and profess together their vows to be Jesuits.



“Last day. I woke up with an unusual sense of joy. I am so grateful for everything. I sense my Lord walking with me, behind me, pushing me when needed. Deep gratitude to God and to the group of pilgrims. I feel that the gift received along this pilgrimage is “trust”, to have faith in me, in God, in the world. Now I realize that “trust” and “joy” have been the words for my Camino Ignaciano, and I’m going to bring that home. For me, going up to Tibidabo and arriving to the top and the wonderful view of the city, it was like free myself. I want to trust. I don’t want to worry anymore.”



Last day in Rome: the presence of Ignatius in Rome.

<https://caminoignaciano.org/en/35-36/>

Today is the farewell of the pilgrimage, the closure of the experience. We walk just for one hour or so, and we end in the very place where Ignatius died and went to heaven. We visit some places in Rome that are referential for us, Ignatian Pilgrims. The entrance door of Rome, the houses that hosted Ignatius and the first companions, the social work Ignatius developed in Rome, the church of Saint Ignatius, the church of Gesù and the rooms (Camerette) of Saint Ignatius, where he lived and died... or the place of his second birth!

We celebrated mass together for the last time and shared our experiences. From that room of Ignatius, we said goodbye to each other and started a new pilgrimage home, closing the experience of the Camino Ignaciano.



Some comments:

“All along this pilgrimage I’ve been learning about discernment. I saw God in that man on the road saying to us “Go back to Monte Mario; it is not closed. Believe me”. So many encounters that were God’s Presence and how difficult is to see that in my daily life! This Camino has been a place to learn how to discern in life, because God is there!”

“At the end of this pilgrimage, my feeling is of amazement. I feel free. I’m so grateful to all of you, my companions, for helping me to walk with my pain. I learned so much from you. Pain cannot stop me now. Thank you for setting up the whole Camino Ignaciano as a school of life. I feel full of grace. Nothing can prevent me to follow Jesus.”

“I feel blessed by this pilgrimage. I cannot express myself. I was looking to find God and I feel that I found Him. I’m truly blessed. I take with me the message we read in one wall entering Rome: “If you want to keep your balance, you must keep walking” ... so... let’s go and keep walking!”

“I remember going to the airport with my doubts still about if I had to come or just stop it. But my family said: “you should go, and you will find the reason for being there”. Now I feel fulfilled. I can say that I know the origine of my fears, and I know that I have the strength to wake up and walk my life. Now, at the end of this experience, I know that I have things that I must let go of. The brotherhood, the connection that we have experienced here, brought me the feeling of the first Jesuits companions, loving each other and wishing to be together, but they (and we now) were sent to different corners of the planet to serve Jesus. I’m grateful to all of you, dear pilgrims, and I will bring you with me to my mission home. A new future is unfolding now for all of us, and we will be together in our places of mission.”

“The whole Camino has been full of the grace of the guidance of God. I feel like a fulfillment of a dream, after a long track following Ignatius from my first Ignatian Camino. It is like bringing a closing for me.

“This pilgrimage has been my line of life. I learned so much about my past life. I could see now my ups and downs, and it is a pity I had not done this before in my life.”

“Persistence is the word that comes to me. Jesus is saying I will be with you always. I came here as an invitation: I didn’t expect to come here, back to the Camino Ignaciano after more than 10 years, but I accepted the invitation. Our Mont Mario experience, when we didn’t believe Lily like the apostles didn’t believe Mary Magdalene, was a truly experience of discernment and I’m so grateful that we could live and learn from that experience! At the mass at La Storta Thomas, the apostle, said “Lord, we don’t know the Way!” and this is true: we don’t know the way and we must keep close to Jesus, our guide. He is the Way. We must listen the voice of Jesús in the community, in our hearts, in the signs all around us.”

“I truly believe that we must learn how to travel light.”

Blessed be God! And always, Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam!

