

## Pilgrimage The Ignatian Way Article Published in Itaici Magazine 126

**By Helen Novaes**

Pilgrim of the Ignatian Way helencpaiva@gmail.com

*"Whoever travels this path must be in a continuous search for God, with a heart that does not settle and is never satisfied. This is a beautiful and holy restlessness."*

Pope Francis, during the act of Plenary Indulgence to the pilgrims who visited the Shrines of Loyola and Manresa in Spain during the Jubilee Year of the Ignatian Way in 2015.



Stage 19 Ignatian Way - Bujaraloz - Photo Helen Novaes

### **How is the desire make a pilgrimage born?**

It is born together with the desire to make changes and find answers. Change of direction, change of mentality (*metanoia*) as well as a desire for encounter. An encounter capable of responding in some to our sense of existence.

Despite the different motivations that each pilgrim carries, and independent of the belief, culture and time in which they live, what seems common to all is **the** ever-present human experience of *setting out on foot*.

To walk to where? What for?

Towards an encounter, but an encounter with what? Or with whom?  
Encounter with oneself and with one's own history and with an "Other" who comes forward and comes to meet us also as a pilgrim.

Pilgrimage is also the desire to give an answer. A response to an inner voice that asks for space, that begs to expand our awareness and capacity to perceive a greater presence that fills our existence with meaning.

To go on pilgrimage is a deliberate openness to welcome the new, a gesture of willingness and availability to live trust and surrender. It is an openness to the future by remembering what has already been lived while being totally attentive to the present.

A road with no end in sight. A road that opens before us as far as the eyes can no longer reach, is permanently configured as a metaphor of life. As a journey of our own existence on earth. Therefore, to go on pilgrimage is to give external form to the journey that is already being made inside.

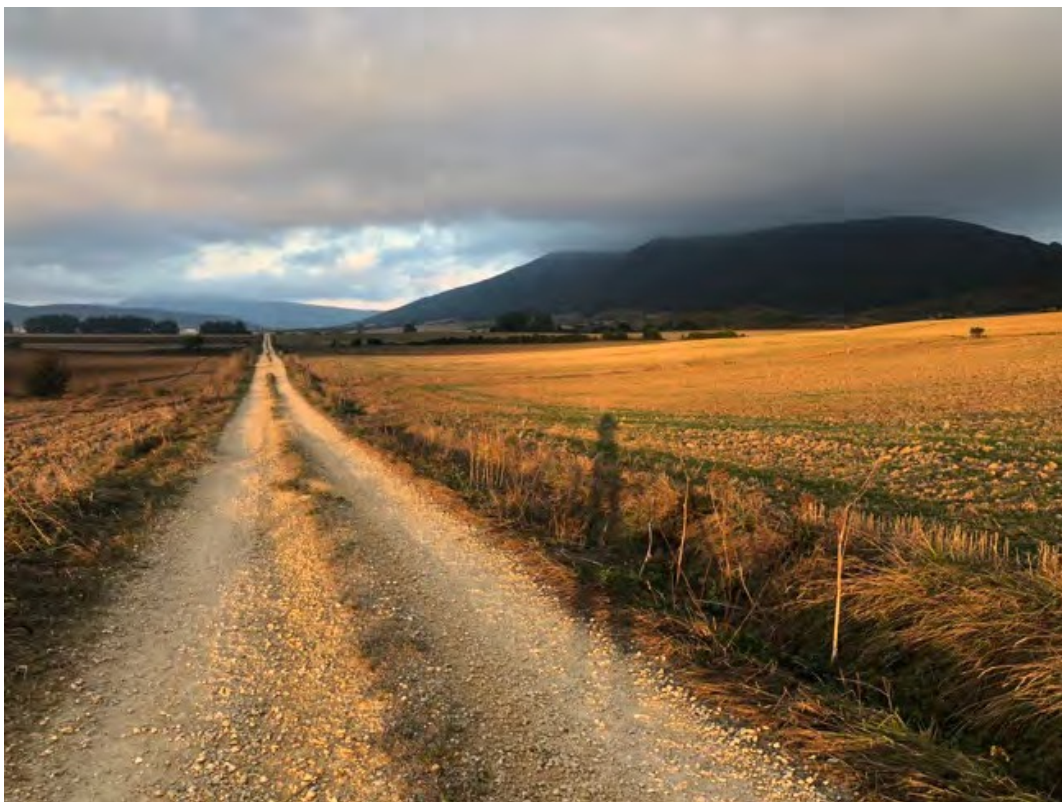


Photo Helen Novaes - Stage 5 Ignatian Way - Arana Valley

## **Pilgrimage with Ignatius of Loyola.**

In 2018 on foot, alone and celebrating my 50th birthday, my pilgrim heart finally found the time, the place and the ideal companion on the road: Ignatius of Loyola.

To unite simultaneously the geographical itinerary that Ignatius traveled in 1522 and the dynamics of the 30-day Spiritual Exercises was challenging, but it brought me the possibility of living two different eras: the present and the one in which Ignatius lived. It was possible to dialogue with the past and the present and to discover how the world was transforming in a clear analogy, to observe the transformations that also occurred in me throughout my own existence.



It is common that very old memories, apparently forgotten, come to surface along the way. I was surprised to remember some youthful dreams, impulses and aspirations that I cultivated for a while, but that at a certain stage of my life were abandoned, forgotten or denied. In the rhythm of the footsteps that sound along the way, the memories of the past, the present reality and the expectations of the future, seem to meet in a single moment: it is "Kairos". The chronological illusion that we have of life is broken and a new dimension is unveiled where in the same space of time we manage to gather everything we were, are and want to be. It is common that this sudden clarity visits us while we are walking.

Undoubtedly, in addition to this clarity, one of most precious gifts that a pilgrimage offers us is the possibility of living and savoring two of the scarcest goods of today: Time and Silence.

To walk alone, but not in solitude. To go on pilgrimage is to enjoy a solitude populated by presences and St. Ignatius is one of these presences that accompanies us as a guide and also the author of the way, however, as in the EEs, he serves us only as an itinerary, a reference for us to make our own way. The experience of Ignatius is unrepeatable, but it opens the possibility for us to make our own experience of God. In this sense, the road he traveled is only the support, the path that functions as a mediator for an ever new and personal experience of God.

### The External and Internal Geographic Itinerary.



Photo Helen Novaes Stage 2 - Mount Arriurdin (1,273 m)

The Ignatian Way has approximately 650 kilometers and was recreated around 2010 by a group of lay people and Jesuits encouraged by the Society of Jesus with the aim of promoting the commemoration of the fifth centenary of Ignatius in 2022. It begins in the palace house of the Loyolas in Azpeitia in the Basque Country, where the saint still known as Iñigo López de Loyola, after a long convalescence from a serious war wound, decided to change the direction of his personal journey, leaving behind old dreams and setting out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

To use the words of another pilgrim, walking the **Ignatian Way** is like putting "*flesh on the spirit*", or rather, it is experiencing Ignatian spirituality in physical form, through an encounter with history and places significant to that spirituality.

The first stages of the Camino begin in the wide spaces and horizons of the mountains of Euskadi (Basque Country), but the final stage ends in the tiny cave located in the city of Manresa (Catalonia) where Ignatius stayed for 11 months, beginning the texts of the EEs.

The adventure along the path of Ignatius takes us both metaphorically and physically from a movement of expansion and amplitude, to another of deepening and diving into the hidden recesses of our interiority. This movement is very well described in the Latin key so often used to illustrate the dynamics of the EEs: *"Non coerceri a máximo, contineri tamen a mínimo, divinus est"*. Which means: "The divine is not to be limited by the greater, but also to be contained in the lesser".



Stage 2 - View of Mount Arriurdim (1,273 m) - Basque Country



Ignatius Cave Chapel - Manresa- Photo Helen Novaes

***"Ignatius followed the Spirit, he did not go ahead of Him. In this way, he was serenely led where he did not know. After a few moments, the way opened up for him and he traveled it, wisely ignorant, simply placing his heart in Christ" (Nadal, Dialogues No. 1).***

As I traveled the same geographic itinerary that saw the passage of that claudicant pilgrim, grew in awe and admiration at the radical change that occurred in that man who was born to be a knight of royalty and who ended up becoming a saint whose legacy continues to this day 500 years after his death.

When he traveled this road, Ignatius was still Iñigo. His heart, newly in love with Christ, was on a path full of questions, following the arrows of his own intuition. He was getting rid of the images he carried of himself, of the roles he had played until then, he was leaving the old Loyola and his old relationships and configuring a new man and also a new relationship with God and with the world. Like Iñigo, we are also called to leave behind our little "Loyola".

The castle house of the Loyolas is the starting point of the Pilgrimage, it already helps us to reflect on how difficult it is to leave the security of our inner castle. Leaving behind the walls that surround us and keep us safe to venture on an uncertain path not easy. It is only possible if we really decide to listen to that inner voice that asks us to widen spaces. Leaving is always more decision than security.

Many pilgrims say that we begin to walk the Camino when we begin to dream about it. I cannot disagree with this. The lessons we learn from a long pilgrimage like this one begin as soon as the desire to realize it is born. Any desire, dream, vocation or project can only become a reality if we put the means to make it happen. And so it was that seven months before my departure to Spain, I had the impetus to get out of bed, put on my sneakers and without any certainty of what exactly I was going to do, I began to leave my "Loyola" and went to walk the first 3 km of my pilgrimage.

***"If anyone wants to change the world he must first begin by changing himself" Ignatius of Loyola.***

## **The Way and the Spiritual Exercises.**



Stage 17 - Los Monegros / Pina de Ebro.

The spiritual exercises, divided into "four weeks", correspond more or less to the stages of the Ignatian Way, which is divided into 27 parts. The first week from Loyola to Navarrete; the second from Navarrete to Zaragoza; the third from Zaragoza to Lleida and the fourth from Lleida to Manresa. The entire route passes through five provinces of Spain: Euskadi, Navarra, La Rioja, Aragon and Catalonia.

The hardness of the road in Euskadi (Basque Country), with its steep and difficult landscapes, reminds us of the challenge to seek the will of God in our personal history, often blocked in our disordered affections. The plains of the Ebro valley and its green banks lead us to the happiness of those who walk beside the Master, in constant learning.

Once again, the ascent to the arid and desert-like highlands of Monegros invites us to enter into the difficulties of following a horizon marked by the Cross that we cannot avoid.

Finally, returning to the fertile lands bathed by the river Segre, we find that resurrected presence that invites us to go to meet the Master once again in Galilee.



During the whole journey we do not lack moments to understand and experience the "*discernment of the spirits*", the inner movements and states of mind, as well as the challenge of *Overcoming oneself*. The desired discipline of "*Ignatian Indifference*" is experienced in the face of inclement weather and unforeseen events that cause us to literally tread on the unfruitful ground of the Spiritual Exercises.



Stage 14 - Sunrise in Alcalá de Ebro - Photo Helen Novaes

It is true that the union between physical and spiritual effort makes the experience of the Spiritual Exercises even more demanding from the emotional point of view; but a soul filled with "*courage and generosity*" (EE 5) easily overcomes these obstacles and "*can restfully bear it*" (EE 18). The fruits harvested from this union of the Exercises and Pilgrimage deepen the learning and remain sounding and being savored internally for all eternity.

### Some lessons from the Camino for life.

***"Walker, there is no path. The path is made by walking"* Antonio Machado - 1939**



The arrows on the road are like clues. Discreet signs that lead to unknown places. They do not bring security. In reality, each arrow brings a new question about where we are going to get to.

All along the way there is a particular dynamic in the search and finding of each arrow.

Especially in the early stages, each encounter with the orange arrows is almost like receiving the embrace of a good friend who gently blows in our ears that we are not alone and not lost.

This is the dynamic of trust that is established during the journey, until we perceive that, although full of arrows, the road is totally unknown to us.

The precious pedagogy of the road makes us understand what the poet meant with the phrase: "*Wayfarer, there is no road, the road is made by walking...*".

Ignatius' path was made by questions that he asked God who *"patiently taught him as a teacher teaches his pupil"*. In my turn, I came to understand that the arrows of the road are like the existential search that always moves us in an eternal learning process.

The first lesson of the journey was to understand that what moves me is not the answers I seek, but the questions I ask.

### **The discovery of the Extraordinary.**

The Way places us in the perspective of total attention. It brings the discovery that living in the "now" is the only truth that is within our reach, as well as the certainty of our finitude. That makes that small details happen to reveal the extraordinary that is hidden in the ordinary of our life. All senses are opened. The eyes begin to see the miracle of lights and different colors that make up the dawn on the road, the sweet aroma of grapes ready for harvest in the immense vineyards of La Rioja reaches the sense of smell as an unexpected visit, the silence constantly sings to the ears a music marked by the rhythm of the steps, the wind and the sun embrace the whole body and cover us in an enveloping dance. We finally understand what *it is to feel and savor* the gift of life.

Little by little, the ever-present and never-ending search for meaning, purpose and reassuring ends to our existential anxieties and dramas is giving way to the gentle freedom of abandonment and trust in divine providence. In all the things around us we perceive the infinity of miracles that surround us. What is there to fear before a God who tirelessly takes care of every detail and performs those countless miracles at every moment? A God who allowed us to live and overcome many obstacles up to this point? The gift of life is what is most extraordinary and how good it is to enjoy this gift.

### **Take the first step.**

Many have the impression that when talking about a pilgrimage, the important thing is the distance or many kilometers traveled. But the meaning of a pilgrimage is not to walk and do as many distances as possible. That would be a physical competition. Paraphrasing our teacher: *"It is not what **we walk** that satisfies, but the feeling and savoring internally each **step** taken..."* (EE2).

The outer physical path is but a means to open the door to the "inner path" that leads the human being to discover himself as a being deeply and profoundly loved by the Creator of all things. The desire to walk the long distances of a pilgrimage is simply a form of physical representation that carries the full extent of this enormous desire to encounter the infinite capable of filling us.

To take the first step it is necessary to understand that we will never be fully prepared for anything in life. Nor will we have all the certainties we need. There will never be a perfect moment for us to realize our heart's desire. Everything involves some risk. Failure is possible. But nothing will happen unless we try, and every worthwhile dream comes with difficulties. So take the first step. Get going. And don't give up.

### **Learning with our state of mind:**

Learning to be aware of our own state of mind can reveal much about the depth of our faith. That is an experience and lesson that we must extend to our entire existence, for the God who accompanies us on pilgrimage is the same God who accompanies us on our pilgrimage in everyday life as well.

At many moments along the way it is possible to experience an attitude of serenity and gentle joy, a confident hope that rests in God's providence and where everything that happens to us seems to be in accordance with his designs. If everything goes well on the road, the weather is favorable, we walk without pain, the food is tasty, the scenery is inspiring, in any , it contributes to a state of contentment and peace, we are grateful for the gift of faith and it seems easy to find God in all things. We feel comforted.

But there are days with difficulties, and many of them arise unexpectedly, such as blisters on the feet, shoes that get damaged, the hostel that does not offer comfort, a day of lasting rain, the encounter with another pilgrim who seems different to us, and so on. We do not always manage to keep this gentle joy and peace within us. But it is common to all pilgrims to be open and to trust that

nothing on the road happens by chance. It is time to observe what is moving within us, and this look usually leads us to an encounter with our disordered affections. It is the right time to strengthen our faith and learn to listen to our inner motions.

Days may arise when we face much greater difficulties and situations that test our faith. Days of dryness and deep monotony, where all sense of this tiring journey seems to question our degree of sanity and logic. Days when God seems to have hidden himself. Monotonous and arid lines fill us with anguish making us seek at every instant some sign on the horizon that the stage is concluding, but the only thing seen ahead is the dryness of the landscape and clouds of heat rising from the stony ground. There is not a single leaf or supportive shade to allow us a little rest. These are days to find out how much our faith is rooted as well as how real is our faithful willingness to follow the Lord.

#### **Perception of the Presence of God:**

The ability to perceive the divine presence, to see God in everything and in all things can be used as an indicator of the inner silence we manage to attain.

The presence of God becomes evident when we make inner silence. The senses seem to open up and gain high increments of sensitivity. Beauty is evident in creation, objects, creatures and situations seem to be clothed with a certain sacredness, there is a mental clarity. Spontaneous comprehensions of the meaning of many events of our life are frequent and enlighten us.

In fact, God is always present (*Acts 17:28*) but our thoughts generally act like great waves that break in a deafening swaying that does not allow us to hear our inner voices.

During the period in which I was preparing for the pilgrimage, some people asked me if I was not afraid of getting lost, getting hurt, if there was no one nearby for possible help, if I was afraid of not finishing the kilometers of the road, etc.... None of these things frightened me. But, I felt a very concrete fear: Fear of the Silence. Of what it would shout at me.

However, the silence was like a melody full of harmony, governed by a creative master who took advantage of everything around him to reveal a little more of who I was and of his immense love at every step. Silence is the language of God.



Stage 23 - Montserrat Mountain - Photo Helen Novaes



**Holy Indifference:**

Holy indifference and the ability to live it is the indicator of our degree of abandonment and trust in the divine will. It is a healthy non-concern of one who knows to be cared for and protected by the jealous presence of God in any circumstance. Indifference is not a state of irresponsible non-concern, but an active and responsible attitude. It is the consciousness of adopting a conduct that performs everything that is your duty in every situation.

To set out on pilgrimage is not necessarily to set out aimlessly, aimlessly, recklessly and inconsistently believing that God will be responsible for the entire conclusion of our journey. Just as in life, we ourselves are responsible for the choices we make and from them come most of the results we obtain. However, it is not uncommon to attribute as responsibility and "God's will" many of the results we obtain, especially the painful ones or situations of failure. What is necessary to understand is that, although failures and sufferings occur, they are not necessarily God's will; but He will grant us to take some benefit from the situation if we are open to learn.

It is a fact that all along the way we learn something if we are attentive. The most important thing is to learn to enjoy the lightness with which holy indifference allows us to live. It is only when we are conscious of having done our best, acting with our best (*Magis*) that we can remain calm in the awareness that, even if we do our best, the results of our actions depend still and only on God, not on our merits. Everything is always grace.

*"Act as if everything depended on you, knowing well that, in reality, everything depends on God." Ignatius of Loyola*



Stage 17 - Pina de Ebro - Photo Helen Novaes

### **The example of Ignatius.**

Going through the important places in the story of Ignatius, reliving the facts of his life, diving into his interiority helps us to perceive who he really was. This dive also enlightens us and helps us to see ourselves as we really are. Our essence. Our original self. Our face without the warrior's armor and without the usual masks that we use and that sometimes so attached end up confusing ourselves about who we really are.

For many Ignatius was always a warrior who knew how to lead the order he founded using the discipline and organization he learned from his military experience. Others prefer to see him as the spiritual master whose book of methods became a reference for the development of Christian spirituality. But as we walk with him, the image of this objective, pragmatic and rational man opens up to reveal to us a man of prayer, contemplative, of deep spiritual sensitivity who was moved to tears at the sight of the starry sky and who dialogued affectionately with the flowers whose charm dazzled him. He inspires us and helps us to courageously allow ourselves to be revealed through the eyes of God upon ourselves.

The way he acquired a refined self-knowledge capable of recognizing the malice of sin and all that distanced him from God (EE 63); how by inwardly savoring spiritual things (EE 2) he gained the inner knowledge of Christ (EE 104) and also the knowledge of every gift that comes from God (EE 233); if not transforming us, at least it makes us find inspiration for our whole life. With his dedication, change and daring, Ignatius was able to change the world. With this realization I came closer to what he meant when he said: *"No one knows what God would do with us if we did not put so many obstacles in the way of his grace"*.



Stage 2 Ignatian Way - Top of Mount Arriurdin

### **go on pilgrimage on the Ignatian Way?**

The number of people who know of the existence of the Ignatian Way in Spain is still small. This is the road that Ignatius of Loyola traveled when he left his home in Loyola in the Basque Country (Euskadi) on pilgrimage to Jerusalem but which ended up having a prolonged and strategic stop of 11 months in Manresa near Barcelona in Catalonia. This pilgrimage changed his life and transformed the world.

The newly recreated route provides today's pilgrims the privilege of reenacting one of the most important journeys on foot in the history of mankind. Following in the footsteps of Ignatius, visiting the places that marked his story of conversion and personal transformation from a knight and soldier into a saint, allows us to dive into the dreams and inquiries that drove him, instigating us to do the same for ourselves.

To say that the pilgrimage of Ignatius changed the world at the beginning may seem too pretentious or too modest a statement; but it is a reality proven in the first instance by the thousands of people who have already made and are making at this exact moment the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Exercises whose origin was given in this pilgrimage and that, until today, 500 years later, continue being perpetuated through hundreds of centers of spirituality and retreat houses existing all over the planet. To further justify this statement, which is not extravagant, it suffices to point out that the Exercises are not the only fruit of this pilgrimage. This journey was also the first step towards the foundation of the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuit order. In the course of history the Jesuits contributed significantly in different fields from astronomy, seismology, mathematics and technology to the invention of the Vietnamese alphabet and the foundation of one of the largest cities in the world: São Paulo. They also participated in the negotiation of the border between Russia and China, among many other things that affected the social, cultural and technological development of humanity. Until today the order created by Ignatius is present in more than 100 countries serving countless social causes, especially Education.

Fortunately for humanity, Ignatius did not keep the ideas he had in Manresa to himself, nor did he abandon the arduous path he had to follow to reach a new understanding of himself. He went through great personal trauma and great suffering, as well as great joy. His genius lay in his ability to translate his own journey to enlightenment into a series of exercises that any of us can do.

If Ignatius' pilgrimage changed the world, so will ours to a greater or lesser extent. His pilgrimage helped him to understand himself in a much deeper way and to shape the future direction of his life, and the same is true for all those who set out on pilgrimage.



Stage 21 - Cervera Photos Helen Novaes

The **Ignatian Way** brings together exceptional attributes such as: natural beauty, historical curiosities, the possibility of an immersion in Spanish culture and contact with its people, enjoying exquisite gastronomy, overcoming physical challenges and, finally, living a great adventure full of emotions that provide us with a transforming experience.

But beyond all those attributes that make it closer to a religious tourism route, the **Ignatian Way** is the best option for those whose motivation for pilgrimage is felt as a call to go outside, to experience the uncertainties, to feel the courage to assume the present from one's past and to start a new future. This is the difference between being a religious tourist and a pilgrim.

For those who really make the pilgrimage consciously, who live it with intensity and resolutely enter into it with a soul full of generosity and liberality as Ignatius asks us in the entrance to the EEs; the freedom achieved can be experienced within us, as well as it will expand and unfold in an external repercussion of service and donation to the other.



The Way becomes an eternal metaphor of our own life and will continue to mobilize in our daily lives the various dimensions that were recruited during the journey: memory, feelings and desires will forever move our actions and operations.

May the 500 years of Ignatius of Loyola's conversion continue to show ways and inspire internal movements that bring about changes and transformations that make it possible to build the Kingdom of God and to see all things new in Christ.

Bon Camino!



Watch video summaries of my 2018 pilgrimage on the Ignatian Way on my YouTube channel:

<https://bityli.com/tHQAD>



See the lecture about my pilgrimage in "Encontros Inacianos" of Ediciones Loyola and "Rede Servir" on 12/02/22:

<https://bityli.com/LXwPN>



Do you want my help?  
[helencpaiva@gmail.com](mailto:helencpaiva@gmail.com)

To know more about the Ignatian Way in Spain visit the website:  
<https://caminoignaciano.org/>

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