



For 15 days the pilgrims of Santa Clara Berkeley USA walked from Loyola to Manresa and from there they flew to Rome, where they met Fr. Sosa, General of the Society of Jesus.

The Camino Ignaciano pilgrimage is a personal and communal encounter with God through the framework of Ignatius of Loyola, the pilgrim. I joined this adventure along with other 14 other students and faculty from Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University Berkeley Campus. We studied, read and prepared for months before our actual walk. Our physical, academic and spiritual preparation took us more than just the logistics and fundamentals of how to be ready for it, but it brought us to a deeper connection with oneself, one another and with God through the eyes and experience of Loyola. Once I was asked if I would recommend this Camino Ignaciano and what a person should expect from it, I think I have an answer now.

This is not an easy question to respond for it has many dimensions. However, some aspects are fundamental to the experience itself.

"The Christian life is pilgrimage from earth to heaven, and our task is to take as many as possible with us as we make this journey" (Warren W. Wiersbe). From the beginning our preparation, it was clear that this Christian journey was not meant to be alone. We ought to live it and not only endure or survive it as a group and as individuals. We are doing it as personal journey yet we are also inter-codependent of each other. This quote illustrates it perfectly. The key is, therefore, that "to take as many as possible" is open to interpretation. We are invited to take each one of our family members and friends with us as well as those who asked us to pray. We take many in our prayers as well as in our thoughts and our heart. Each one of us took different intentions, different pains, joys and sorrows in this journey and we carried them as much as we needed to be carried. Some of us left them early in the journey. Some of us carried them to the end. There was no limit or expectations as much as the quality and intentionality of our actions. The best part of it was that no one is doing it for his or her sake. We are all doing it ultimately because God has put in us the desire to seek for him in the journey, in the walk, the pilgrimage, the suffering of our long walk and chats and as well as in the admiration and contemplation of his creation.

We walked as Ignatius did. We ate perhaps the same or similar pan con jamón as well as the café con leche, yet God unique work with us was special and tailored to us. He did for me what I needed the most. God manifested himself in the art work that we saw, the creation and beauty of a new day; he blessed our daily morning conversation and more importantly, he healed and touched us when we all needed on his own time and space. The pilgrimage embraces the not only the walking and companionship but visiting and passing through the same places that Ignatius passed; we allowed these sacred places to speak to us. The grace of the pilgrimage is to be open to being touched when less expected. To be able to recognize God when I seek him, but when he sees that I needed the most.

If you are thinking to walk this pilgrimage, I invite you to leave your agenda behind. The only thing you need is an open and willing to be touched heart, confident mind set and good pair of shoes.

Alejandro Báez, S.J., Summer Pilgrim 2017

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