

**From Swords to Shoes:  
Encountering Grace on the Camino Ignaciano**

Hung Pham, SJ, and Kathryn R. Barush

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University at Berkeley

ABSTRACT

On June 2015, six years before the 500th anniversary of Ignatius' pilgrimage, the instructors, Prof. Hung Pham, S.J. and Prof. Kathryn Barush, with a group of twelve graduate students, set off from Berkeley, California following the road where Ignatius once walked, anticipating a transformative journey of their own. Collaborating with Fr. Josep Lluís Iriberry, SJ, director of Oficina del Peregrino del Camino Ignaciano, the Camino Ignaciano Course was designed to give the students an opportunity to deepen their personal relationship with God and to serve as part of the discernment of their life direction. As Ignatius' conversion was inspired by the lives of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, students were moved by Saint Ignatius' experience and his spiritual exercises. Envisioning the students as pilgrims and the classroom as the road, the course emphasized the importance of encountering sacred space and objects in situ and doing theology on the road. This piece is a visual travelogue describing our journey and some of the graces we received with a focus on four sacred sites: Loyola, Arantzazu, Montserrat, and Manresa.

**T**owards the end of February 1522, Ignatius of Loyola, a courtier descended from Basque minor nobles, left the Loyola castle and embarked on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After having recovered from what had seemed to be a devastating, dream-shattering experience (he was immobilized after a cannonball struck his legs), Ignatius committed his life to the pursuit of holiness through imitating the lives of the saints and walking in the footsteps of Christ in perpetual penance. From Loyola, Ignatius made his

pilgrimage through Aránzazu, Montserrat, and Manresa before entering Jerusalem on September 4, 1323 after spending nearly one-and-a-half years on the road.

Engaging in the pilgrimage, Ignatius slowly learned not to run ahead but to allow himself to be led by the Spirit. Step by step, a *camino*, a road was opened leading to ever deeper conversion and transformation. As the pilgrim (for this is how Ignatius refers to himself throughout his autobiography) journeyed through various locations on the physical level, he experienced conversion in the inward journey of his soul. Ignatius reminisced, “On this journey something happened to [me] which it will be good to have written, so that people can understand how Our Lord used to deal with this soul: a soul that was still blind, though with great desires to serve him as far as its knowledge went.”<sup>12</sup> It was this recognition of how God works in one’s life which inspired the Camino Ignaciano Course at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley (hereafter JST).<sup>3</sup>

In June 2015, six years before the 500th anniversary of Ignatius’ pilgrimage, the instructors, Prof. Hung Pham, S.J. and Prof. Kathryn Barush, with a group of twelve graduate students pursuing various theology degrees —six Jesuit scholastics, one religious sister, three women, and two laymen —set off from Berkeley, California following the road where Ignatius once walked, anticipating a transformative journey of their own.

Collaborating with Fr. Josep Lluís Iriberry, SJ, director of Oficina del Peregrino del Camino Ignaciano, the Camino Ignaciano Course at JST was designed to give the students an opportunity to deepen their personal relationship with God and to serve as part of the discernment of their life direction.

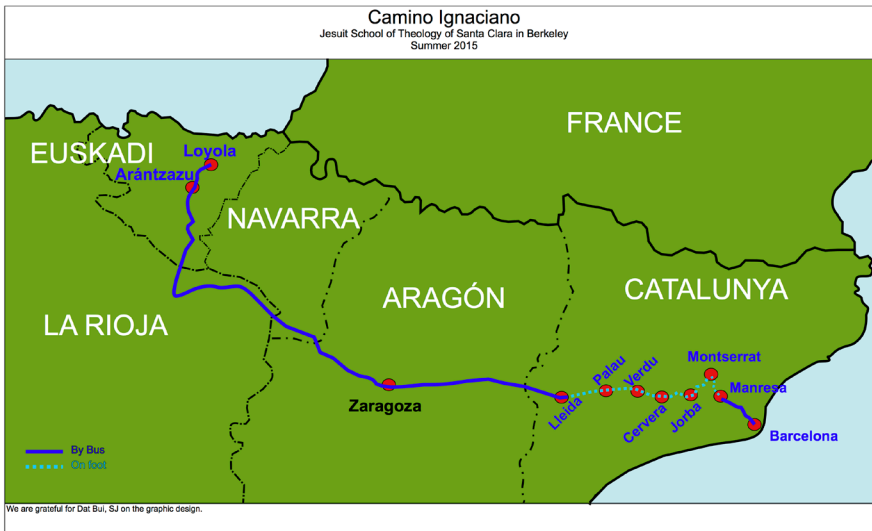
As Ignatius’ conversion was inspired by the lives of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, students were moved by Saint Ignatius’ experience and his spiritual exercises. Envisioning the students as pilgrims and the classroom as the road, the course emphasized the importance of encountering sacred space and objects in situ and doing theology on the road.

All knowledge begins with experience. Theological ideas and concepts emerge from experience of personal encounter with the transcendent. Faith formation and pastoral education often take place in classrooms and pulpits, far removed from concrete realities and the messiness of the daily human experience of personal encounter. When disassociated from encounter with lived reality, theological doctrines and discourse run the risk of lacking depth of meaning. Technology, used to good advantage, means that students can explore all the events and locations of the world, but on an important level technology distances them from personal engagement with the potential associative value of such events or locations. It is one thing to watch a live event. It is another to actually be part of it, to live it. It is one thing to read theology. It is another to wrestle with and to do theology. It is one thing to theologize about Ignatius’ trust in God. It is another to walk in the 105 degree Fahrenheit summer heat for 10 to 15 miles in order to personally experience what such a trust entails. Bodily experience and even muscle memory become important parts of spiritual growth and theological discourse. It is on the road where both students and teachers participate and engage as pilgrims.



Pilgrims about to depart from Berkeley, CA.  
Photo: Oscar Momanyi, used with permission

It is on the road where the depth of thought and imagination is enacted. It was on the road where the Risen Lord appeared in the form of a stranger, whom pilgrims met, encountered, and were transformed (Luke 24: 13-35). It is important to note that it was not the saint whom we were chasing after, but a personal encounter with the Divine on the road where the young Ignatius once walked his conversion.



## LOYOLA, JUNE 27, 2016

### PROFESSOR PHAM:

Motivation and desire that inspired Ignatius of Loyola to make a pilgrimage did not come easy. Had his leg had not been struck and his bones not crushed during the battle in Pamplona, Ignatius would not have been confined to bed convalescing in Loyola but would have continued his pursuit of “vanities of the world and special delight in the exercise of arms with a great vain desire of winning glory.”<sup>4</sup> Only during this period of immobile convalescence, being pushed to the extreme border between life and death, helpless on his own, removed from the world which he



Loyola, Conversion Room of St. Ignatius.  
Photo: Sarah Stanley, used with permission

knew, did life alternatives emerge. Possibilities were imagined; new life directions envisioned. He read *La Vida de Cristo*, a Spanish translation of a work by the Carthusian monk Ludolfo (Rudolfo) de Sajonia (c. 1377-1377/78), and a book of the Lives of the Saints written by a Dominican Friar and translated into Spanish in 1480 and 1511<sup>5</sup> which helped Ignatius to pause and contemplate, “Suppose that I should do what

Saint Francis did, what Saint Dominic did?”<sup>6</sup>

Wrestling between his former way of life and new possibilities, between “things of the world” and “going barefoot to Jerusalem and eating nothing but herbs and performing the other rigors he saw that the saints had performed,”<sup>7</sup> Ignatius was first aware of the various interior movements of the spirits that were stirred up in his soul. From this awareness, Íñigo began to discern the bad and the good. Furthermore, he came to realize that it was not he but God who had initiated the encounter, ever so “gently and kindly” awakening holy desires within him.<sup>8</sup> Inflamed with divine love, Ignatius resolved to go to Jerusalem “as soon as he was restored to health undertaking all the disciplines and abstinences.”<sup>9</sup>

Although none of the participants had undergone dramatic bone-crushing injuries or were pushed to the limit of immobile convalescence in the same way that Ignatius had, we both as individuals and as a group were wrestling with our own human limitations and vulnerability on our way to and during our stay in Loyola. One Jesuit student reflected on how the difficulty of negotiating a delayed flight on foreign territory put him in touch with his fear of uncertainty, leading him to pray and to rely on God’s grace at work in the moment. For another Jesuit student, the sudden death of a good friend and Jesuit companion prior to the Camino had left him feeling helpless in grief and sorrow. For a Latina-American student, the anticipation of entering yet another culture both widened and narrowed the space-in-between in her liminal intercultural identity: widening it by being enriched with the best values which each of her cultures offer, narrowing it by being caught in the loneliness from a realization of belonging to none. Looking back, the Camino served as a way for her to contemplate life’s mysteries in a deeper and more active way.

Anxiety and insecurity began to creep in as I watched members of the course assemble in the Jesuit chapel for a blessing before heading to downtown Berkeley to board the train for the airport. No longer dressed in some neat coat and tie walking to the school and meeting students in their casual attire and air conditioned classroom, all of us appeared well-equipped with walking gear and outdoor outfits, eager to get on with the journey. The road would literally become our classroom and we, teachers and students, pilgrims.



Mural with pilgrims where the Camino Ignaciano & Camino de Santiago intersect. Photo: Kathryn Barush

Multiple worries and concerns rushed through my heart and my mind at different levels. Feeling of losing control settled in. What would happen if what we had planned all along did not come through? Would students behave the same as they had in class? Their lifestyles, customs, language were so different from mine (our students hailed from countries and cultures as diverse as Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines, the United States, and Vietnam; they comprised lay and



religious, women and men). Three weeks walking on the Camino seemed to me, at that moment, like an eternity. What had I gotten myself into? And why? The road ahead seemed reduced into fears that choked up any previous excitement. Fear intensified and anxiety heightened as we wandered at midnight around the parking lot of the Barcelona International Airport after the long transcontinental flight, looking for our Spanish correspondent and guide. The road seemed dark; my spirit immobilized.

In the bunk bed of the tiny hostel, struggling with the darkness of my fear and anxiety, I stumbled upon the folder of the students' reflection papers. Slowly and prayerfully, I had a powerful vision of each of their faces appearing in front of mine so vividly together with their holy desires in wanting to walk the Ignatian Way. For one Jesuit student, the desire to "gain a deeper sense of Ignatius, who he was, how he thought, what made him a saint" had energized him to walk.<sup>10</sup> For others, the desire to grow in a deeper trust of God empowered them. Reflecting on her reason to walk, a student wrote succinctly:

Two years ago I spent a year in Ecuador living among those we call the poor. It was the hardest and most amazing year of [my] life. There I encountered God, witnessed suffering, tried to fight injustice, and fell in love with people. What happened there led me to JST. But I am not there anymore, and this life is not like life there. Now I know that it was my Pamplona moment and I find myself in liminal space. I have been asking deep questions like how do we know [what] God's will is? What is my vocation? ... With a hunger for God, desire for adventure and ephemeral joy I applied [to this course in order] to [have the opportunity to] walk.<sup>11</sup>

One after another, students' motivations and desires began to ignite mine. Recalling some of the graces which I had received on the past journeys three years ago during my Jesuit formation brought me deep consolation.<sup>12</sup> As the desire for the students to experience the grace of what it means to place their trust in God had then moved me to create the course, so had it now empowered my next step, continuing on the road with trust and courage.



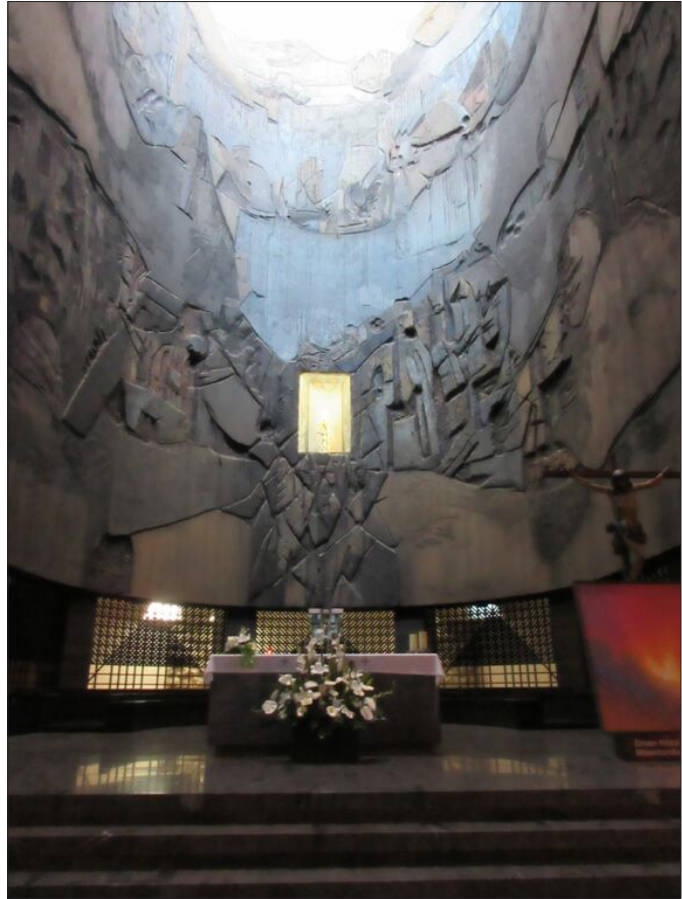
Walking through the forests of the Basque Country, Spain. Photo: Hung Pham

**ARÁNTZAZU, JUNE 28, 2015****PROFESSOR PHAM:**

Leaving Loyola, our group arrived at Aránzazu on a busy Sunday morning. The whole sanctuary was buzzing with adults and children, men and women, young and old, tourists and pilgrims, hikers and walkers, speaking and talking in different tongues. Walking up to the mountain, everyone seemed eager to reach the top guided by unspoken words and common expectation of something spectacular ahead. Excitement filled the air. One by one our group strolled into the Basilica of the shrine. Immediately upon entering, I was taken over by the magnificent modern architecture of the Basilica. The high ceiling with ample space invited us in for morning prayer.

If the period of convalescence in Loyola was marked by Ignatius' wrestling against his initial instinct of returning to his former way of life, then the journey to Aránzazu could be characterized as the beginning of his ongoing struggle against external social pressure to get in touch ever so deeply with his own desire and conviction. Riding to Aránzazu, Ignatius would have shared the road with many "pilgrims bearing crosses on their shoulders, praying and singing devoutly and practicing other penances."<sup>13</sup> To Ignatius, Aránzazu embodied a step in both familiar and unknown directions. Like other members of the Loyola family who had come and prayed in front of the sanctuary of La Virgen María de Aránzazu, Ignatius knelt down, his eyes fixed on the smiling Virgen with Baby Jesus on her lap.<sup>14</sup>

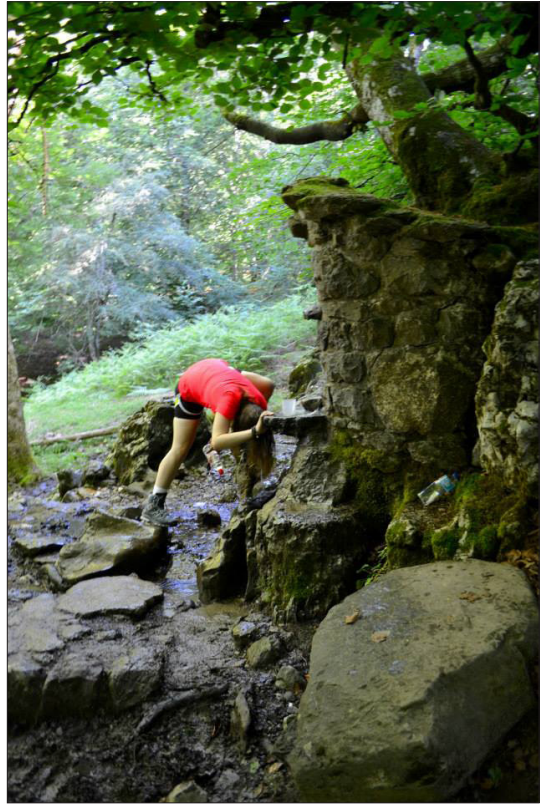
Rather than praying for some miraculous cure, Ignatius sought the grace to confirm his decision to leave his former way of life and to embark on the journey to Jerusalem to imitate Christ. What he had received in Loyola was meant only as an initial step in a long journey. Ignatius could have easily remained in the serene Aránzazu spending the rest of his life in devotion and penance or joined the flow of pilgrims walking toward the famous Santiago de Compostela. Instead he continued moving in the opposite direction, heading south toward Montserrat, his eyes on the horizon of the Holy Land. As in his early experience of discernment in Loyola, Ignatius recognized movement and direction were essential dimensions of his spirituality.



Sanctuary of Our Lady of Arantzazu, Oñati, in the province of Guipuzcoa, Basque Country, Spain.

Photo: Sarah Stanley, used with permission

Upon entering the church, our group was scattered in all different directions mesmerized with the multiple layers of beauty found in various statues, stained glass windows, and paintings. The quiet tranquility and dimly lit candles drew me to the front of the sanctuary. The Virgen sat on the thorn bush presiding over the sacred space, one hand holding the globe, the other her baby. A rather big and rusty cowbell at her feet captured my curiosity. Continuous clicks of the cameras and muttering from dispersed groups of students who seemed in constant search for a perfect angle, a perfect photo, disturbed the quiet solemnity. I was annoyed. Wouldn't it make better sense to settle into the space and to breathe in its air *first* before moving around and taking photos? Instead of praying, my mind was lost in thoughts of how distracting modern technology could be. A wave of questions flooded my mind: What were we doing here? Were we pilgrims or tourists? I decided to hide myself behind the lectern still stewing in my inner dialogue. Some minutes passed. Then I looked back to see where the group was. I was utterly moved by the magnificent glimpse of everyone praying. Detached from technology, they were either kneeling or sitting in the pews in their own silence. The serene beauty of the sanctuary had slowly unarmored the different preoccupations of our various inordinate attachments, physically or mentally, and drew us ever closer to its solemn sanctum. It was not we who found the road, but the road and its subtle yet prevailing beauty that found us.



A pilgrim washes her hair in the sacred spring at Arantzazu.

Photo: Sarah Stanley, used with permission

## ***MONTSERRAT, FOURTH OF JULY, 2015***

### ***PROFESSOR BARUSH:***

With blistered feet and clothes that never got quite clean enough in the *albergue* bathroom sinks, we were settling into our life as pilgrims by the time we left the Saint James Pilgrim Hostel in Jorba. We had met a pilgrim from Belgium there, walking the Camino de Santiago (which intersects at several points with the Camino Ignaciano). After we broke bread, he told us, “*ultreia et useia!*” – the lyrics of an old pilgrim chant in archaic words that are said to translate to, roughly, “onwards and upwards.” With his prophetic send-off, we crawled into our bunks and rested before the long journey ahead.

It was early dawn when we hoisted our backpacks onto our shoulders and began the long, hot trek to



visit the ancient mountain shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat, nestled in the Catalanian mountains. When we arrived at the bottom of the mountain, the sun was racing to the center of the sky and our shadows were becoming shorter. Humming and breathing and listening to the footfalls and rhythmic taps of hiking poles, we began the ascent with determination and anticipation. Prof. Barush encountered and jotted down a powerful experience.



A moment to rest along the Way. Photo: Hung Pham

My toenail had slowly been turning a gothic shade of dark plum due to the minor “trauma” of pushing against my boot, so she had put on some practical German sandals which were much more comfortable but sloped on the sides and so kept trapping little stones. As I walked in silence, I shook them out thinking of the song *By My Side*, from the 1970’s musical *Godspell*, that my friend Marie had sung at mine and my husband’s wedding many years ago:

*Let me skip the road with you  
I can dare myself  
I can dare myself  
I’ll put a pebble in my shoe  
And watch me walk (watch me walk)  
I can walk and walk!  
(I can walk!)<sup>15</sup>*



Here I was, skipping the road but far away from my husband and the baby daughter who is one of the most amazing fruits of our loving union. But, like the pebble in my shoe, there were burdens and shortcomings that I was reflecting on as we trudged slowly up the winding, dusty mountain pass. One of them was pregnancy loss and the healing that came with the electric heat and sweat of walking 250 miles; I was starting to trust my body again (*I can walk!*). There were other things, too: choices, anxieties, losses...but, as we approached the shrine, none seemed insurmountable (*I can walk and walk!*)

Looking down the mountainside was dizzying but spectacular. I noted the huge Benedictine monastery where I would later visit the nuns who create saints and sculptures from clay. At that moment, their swimming pool looked like a mirage of some tropical watering hole as I rubbed dust out of my eye. The tour busses zipping up the mountain past us in clouds of diesel seemed as though they were from another universe; women in billowing silk scarves and men with sunglasses and panama hats shouted friendly greetings out the window and others pointed their cameras at our sunburned and dusty cavalcade. Zooming past, they disappeared around the tight bends (*watch me walk, watch me walk*).

We knew we were getting closer when the air became cooler. Little mosaic stations depicting Madonnas the world over (Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe) decorated the high mountain walls as we yawned to un-pop our ears in the altitude. When we finally arrived at the town, we found ourselves in a sea of tourists in shorts and linen with ice cream cones and cameras. It seemed as though there was a constant flow of foot traffic in and out of the souvenir and clothing shops as we rested on some dusty stairs quite aware of how smelly we were after the long climb. One of the students stopped in the medical bureau to get a strange rash evaluated and another looked at me and asked, plaintively and profoundly, "Where's Mary?"

The injured student emerged from the clinic (she was ok) and we all rallied for one more push—this time to the monastic housing where we would stay for the night. As we approached the outskirts of the shrine, we saw the long queue to see the Black Madonna. In the courtyard of the basilica, a group of men and women practicing a form of earth-based spirituality stood at four compass points facing the hot afternoon sun. Their ritual was a reminder that the mountain was much more ancient than the Bible, and that the ground and nature pulses with an energy of its own. It was Mary who called to the Camino Ignaciano pilgrims from inside the mountain, however, and we got in line to pay her a visit—just as Ignatius had several hundred years prior.

The enthroned statue of Mary, holding a great, golden orb with Christ seated on her lap, is attached to many legends and oral histories. Some say that the statue was carved by St Luke during biblical times and then carried to Spain by one of the apostles. During a Saracen invasion in 718, the statue was said to have been hidden from the enemy in a cave.<sup>16</sup> It was later discovered by shepherds who had been led to the hiding place upon following mysterious lights and heavenly song. A later Bishop wanted to move the statue to Manresa, but it miraculously became heavier and heavier—Mary apparently wanted pilgrims to come to her in the mountain of Montserrat. The shrine has since been the site of many miracles and attracts over a million pilgrims a year.<sup>17</sup>

St. Ignatius of Loyola was one of those who found solace at the shrine of the Madonna of Montserrat. It was there that he surrendered his sword and took up the symbolic garments and life of a pilgrim, following the path of Christ.

In their discussion of pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon (e.g. voluntary, non-routine), Victor and Edith Turner point to the transformative effect of approaching the final grotto or shrine, where sins are forgiven and the pilgrim identifies with “the symbolic representation of the founder’s experiences”—hence “put[ting] on Christ Jesus’ as a paradigmatic mask.”<sup>18</sup> Even though Montserrat was one stop—or perhaps, “station”—along the way to Jerusalem (here I am thinking of the Via Crucis, with its many sacred centers where the pilgrim pauses to pray), it was here where Ignatius symbolically (and literally) cast off his knightly attire and sword, and clothed himself as a pilgrim in sackcloth with a gourd to drink from. When he arrived at Montserrat he kept vigil all night and decided to “clothe himself in the armour of Christ.”<sup>19</sup> While at Montserrat, functioning in this context as a both a destination and point of departure, Ignatius made a written confession for three days—compatible with the Turners’ notion of the transformative effect of reconciliation during this phase of pilgrimage.

The experience of the students reflects, but also, crucially, continues what Ignatius had experienced in the sacred mountain. For example, one of the students shared that “at Montserrat, [a] sense of identification with Ignatius deepened” and another affirmed that “as [he] walked in places like Loyola, Montserrat and Manresa, [he] was permeated by the spirit of the Saint in a more radical way.”<sup>20</sup> The student who had wondered aloud where Mary was among the throngs of people had a moment of peace and consolation at the shrine where she was able to leave behind burdens of her own:



A pilgrim praying at the black Madonna of Montserrat. Photo: Hung Pham



The Shoes of St. Ignatius of Loyola.  
Photo: Kathryn Barush

In little moments, when I paid attention to the grace around me instead of the pain of my feet and exhaustion, it was evident how the Spirit was at work. The interior work along with the great consolation at Montserrat, brought me inner peace. I became in tune with my deepest desires and was graced with interior freedom. I was reminded through this transformation, that the Christian vocation is about love. I am grateful for the grace of freedom that will enable me to love more deeply and healthily, beginning with myself.<sup>21</sup>

While this experience was one that emerged from her own personal pilgrimage, struggles, and contemplations, it was the act of following Ignatius's route that acted as a stimulus for this shift. She recalled, "As [Ignatius'] conversion story unfolded before us, it drew me inward to the spiritual dynamics at play in my own story."<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, another student (a Jesuit scholastic) shared a moment of letting go of unhelpful burdens keeping him from becoming a good priest and Christian. His description is framed within the autobiography of Ignatius, even though the experience is entirely his own: "The moment in which Ignatius placed his armor and sword before Our Lady of Montserrat... illustrates the power and beauty of conversion and turning one's life around."<sup>23</sup> The student goes on to describe a significant vision in which Mary helps facilitate a leaving behind of burdens; together, they stamped out the unhelpful "negative messages that led ... to darkness and isolation."<sup>24</sup> The theme of reflecting on letting go of negativity appeared in many of the students' narratives post-Camino. Another shared:

As the scene unfolded, I wasn't before a statue of Mary. Instead, I was experiencing the real presence of Mary alive and well in my prayer... I've found myself reflecting about what Ignatius had left behind, and I began to similarly ask myself if there is anything that I need to leave behind as I look ahead into the future.<sup>25</sup>

Again, the experience that Ignatius had and the imaginative putting-on of the "paradigmatic mask" of the saint helped to facilitate a powerful, and very personal, moment that revealed the things that were blocking the students in their lives and in their relationship with God.

There is a lightness that comes with letting go of our swords and carving out a new path. We learn that *we can walk and walk*.

*I shall call the pebble Dare  
We will talk, we will talk together  
We will talk about walking  
Dare shall be carried  
And when we both have had enough  
I will take him from my shoe, singing:  
"Meet your new road!"<sup>26</sup>*

## **MANRESA, JULY 11, 2016**

### **PROFESSOR BARUSH:**

We were not on the road for long when the tooth-shaped mountain dwelling-place of the Madonna of Montserrat, the quietude of the monastic chanting, and the sun-drenched passes began to seem like a dream.



We made our way down, down, down the mountain, toes jamming up against our hiking boots, dust filling our noses, drinking water that was already warmed by the heat of the morning sun. Busloads of tourists were already arriving for their days-out; there were only a few bedraggled passers-by who we recognized as walking pilgrims like us; most eyed, with curiosity, our international, backpack-and-staff-bearing, slightly



Hung Pham and Kathryn Barush point out the Way.  
Photo: Juan Pablo Marrufo del Toro, used with permission

scraggly group. I half-heartedly cast a rock I had been carrying to represent a “burden” down the mountain, but I had already made peace with the pebble in my shoe on the way to Montserrat.

There was a moment when we were walking that I paused to look back up the mountain, shielding my eyes with my hand, and everyone was helping one another scramble down the steep and rocky ridges. One of the students exclaimed, “WOW, there are really epic things happening right now!” and another queued up one of the riveting parts of the soundtrack to *The Lord of the Rings* films (the bit that is played at moments when heroic things are happening—Frodo and his companions trekking across a sweeping landscape to fight evil, for

example). If the road to Montserrat was characterized by teamwork and anticipation, the road to Manresa was, to borrow from one of Tolkien’s chapter titles, “The Breaking of the Fellowship.” Just as Ignatius would face a discernment of spirits in the cave (which nearly led him to take his own life), and where he had visions and revelations that would form the foundations of the *Spiritual Exercises*, it was a time of physical, mental, and spiritual challenges for the pilgrims.<sup>27</sup>

The heat of the early morning had already climbed to record temperatures of more than 105 degrees Fahrenheit as we slowly trudged across the parched and desert-like landscape; one of the students from Kenya aptly commented that he felt as though he were in the Sahara. The heat compounded swollen legs and the sweat introduced more blisters to already aching feet. Before we penetrated too deeply into the desert and solitude, Prof. Pham offered to arrange a bus for anyone who felt they could not carry on, but everyone opted to continue. Then the unimaginable happened. Despite our efforts stocking up on water at lunchtime (filling every conceivable drinking bladder and bottle) we slowly began to run out of our stores one by one. The heaviness of the bottles in our backpacks probably exacerbated our sweating.

There was nowhere to re-stock in the desert, and not so much as a farm vehicle to hail on the lonely and empty roads, and so we carried on. The physical challenges were not, however, without



Ultreia et Suseia – onwards and upwards!  
Photo: Hung Pham

moments of spiritual revelation, one of the hallmarks of a walking pilgrimage. One student recalled a moment of grace and reconciliation:

I remember [as we came close to arriving] at Manresa, [one of the pilgrims] struggled with each step, her knees swollen and giving out. I walked beside her trying to encourage her, but felt exhausted myself and wasn't much help. [Our guide] Jose came beside her, and without a word took her backpack onto himself, and supported her as she walked. When I saw him do this, I was deeply moved. I chose that moment as my "icon" of Jose: him walking with [the pilgrims'] bag, letting her rest her hands on his shoulders. I felt like Jesus said to me in that moment, "you are seeing him as I see him. This is who he truly is." At the same time I knew in a deep and interior way that Jesus looks at me the same way, "as I truly am," not as I see myself and not as others see me. This moment was a moment of deep forgiveness for me, an icon of Jose, an icon of forgiveness, and a window into the compassion of God. If only I could see like that, with the eyes of Jesus all the time. How wonderful life would be.<sup>28</sup>

Ignatius did not name the Jesuits "the Ignatians;" he called them "the Society of Jesus" to emphasize the importance of the teachings, compassion, humanity, and divinity centered in Christ. The student's experience again transcends Ignatius' to focus directly on Jesus, which allows him to re-examine his own



Pilgrims crossing a field. Photo: Kathryn Barush

life. Like Ignatius, he asks to "see with the eyes of Jesus." It again marks an example of the moments when Ignatius' journey was not being copied by we modern-day pilgrims; rather, we were continuing it. This resonates with the Thomist notion, succinctly paraphrased by Jacques Maritain, that "artistic creation does not copy God's creation, it continues it."<sup>29</sup>

There was a moment on the outskirts of Manresa where we could see the vista of the city, hazy and terra-cotta colored in a smog of dust and heat. Our guide pointed out some of the Ignatian sites and we were all politely interested but preoccupied by our thirst and ready to rest and pray in the sacred cave where Ignatius had battled his demons. A final push occurred when we realized we could not cross the bridge into town; it was cordoned off with rubble and barbed wire. With no other entrance into the city, we were urged by our guide to cross, one by one, holding up wire and crawling underneath, hoping that the structure would remain intact and not send us plummeting into the river. Our slow, painful march through town was conspicuous, as usual, and it was a relief to get to the pilgrim bureau where we would receive our certificates of completion. The moment felt less than celebratory, however, with a few sick pilgrims suffering from heatstroke. I felt a twinge of affinity at that moment not with Ignatius but with my patron

saint, Catherine of Sienna, remembering an illustration I had of her as a child pressing compresses to the heads of sick people as I rushed in and out of the bathroom with paper towels and compresses for foreheads and armpits.

We were all eager to move onwards to the hostel, and when we arrived found that there was only one bathroom available. Dazed and on the verge of heatstroke, we hydrated and rinsed our underwear in the public sinks while we filed, one at a time, into the showers. It was while I was hanging my clothes off the balcony that I noticed some chaos in the hallway. One of the students had noticed his backpack was missing. After overturning the rooms, we conceded, sadly, that it had been stolen. I had often passed him at the wee hours in the morning while battling bouts of insomnia as he sat in hallways and common rooms writing, writing, writing. He travelled the lightest of all of us, with only a string bag (the kind you get for free at conferences) and the clothes on his back. He had his passport on his body, but in the stolen bag was the journal he had been writing in for the entire pilgrimage. It was with great empathy that we consoled him; there was no way he would ever see his journal again. It was heartening to watch the outpouring of kindness as the other pilgrims lent out soap and clothes and essentials.

And so we battled challenges and demons and empathized with Ignatius as his prayer and longing reached a fever-pitch in the cave at Manresa. The barbed wire, heatstroke, and stolen bag all seemed to prepare us for what we would encounter in the cave. In the words of one of the students:

Many of us had almost yielded to fatigue, heat and thirst which indeed overstretched our capacities to the point that we indeed felt the frailty of our humanity. Experience of human weakness and failure is an experience of our true self, our true identity. In my fatigue I was reminded that I am a limited creature and God is the almighty and unlimited creator. I view this as a call to rely on God more rather than rely on my strength and wisdom.<sup>30</sup>



Pilgrims standing around the spiral well cover, 'From Cardener to the Antarctica' (2001-2004) by Chilean artist Fernando Prats. The 117 inscribed names of mystics and visionaries include St. Ignatius. Near the River Cardener, Manresa. Photo: Kathryn Barush

It had been a long day, and it was time to go to the cave to pray and reflect on the challenges we had undergone.

I was relieved that the decorative trappings and bas-reliefs had been stripped off in a recent renovation to reveal the smooth and bone-white walls of the cave, giving a sense of the bareness where Ignatius would instruct about how to compose a space for prayer in the *Spiritual Exercises*. He encourages the individual retreatant to see through the gaze of the imagination to the "physical place" of a scriptural scene or any passage or topic. He teaches, "by 'material place' I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or our Lady happens



to be, in accordance with the topic I desire to contemplate.”<sup>31</sup> In a compelling reversal, we imagined first Ignatius in the cave, with his thoughts and prayers, as he was imagining mountains and temples several hundred years before. For me, the cave was full of the memories and I imagined that the walls themselves were imbued with the impact of his experience, creating a strange sensation of mild claustrophobia and awe.

Even as we prayed, there was a sense that the Camino had not ended here at the cave, but was, in a sense, just beginning. One pilgrim’s thoughts reflect those that were shared while we prayed at Manresa, aloud and in silence:

I continue to have a sense of Jesus’ presence near me, and I feel that this has been the point of the Camino for me. Jesus is real; he is near; he is present. I have come to realize that the Camino didn’t end at Manresa. In a genuine way, the Camino continues, and I have been assured by Jesus that he is with me. I am reminded of the words of the resurrected Jesus to this disciples: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age,” (Mt 28:20 NRSV).<sup>32</sup>

The ancient pathways that our Camino students travelled served as roads not only to and from sites and shrines, but inward. The multi-sensory pilgrimage experience—the pain of blisters, the sweat, the smell of incense in ancient churches, the feel of the cool water in mountain passes, the salted tears in those silent prayers—is something that cannot be taught through books or slides. Students no longer read about those experiences, but are living them. History blossomed in living color all around we pilgrims, students and teachers; in Spanish polychrome altarpieces from Ignatius’ time to the ancient trees along the route we



Pilgrim praying by a statue of St. Ignatius, depicted holding both a sword and pilgrim staff.  
Photo: Hung Pham

traversed. As we walked, the ancient pathways transcended time and space as they mapped on to our own experiences and stories. To conclude with the words of one of the student pilgrims, “that outward journey was a symbol of what continues to take place in my soul.”<sup>33</sup> We are collectively changed for the better, with our symbolic swords left behind and words to share.

## NOTES

---

1 Ignatius of Loyola, Joseph A. Munitiz, Philip Endean, *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters Including the Text of The Spiritual Exercises* (London: Penguin, 1996), 18. This translation is used throughout the essay unless noted otherwise. Hereafter, [Au].

2 [Au 14]

3 We are grateful to the Bannan Institute Course Creation Grant from Santa Clara University and the Grant from the President’s Office of the same University. The financial support of these grants have made the Camino Ignaciano Course possible. We also want to thank Bill O’Neill, SJ for his judicious comments on an earlier version of this travelogue.

4 [Au 1]

5 *Vita Iesu Christi e quatuor Evangeliiis et scriptoribus orthodoxies concinnata* and *Leyenda aurea*, composed in Latin by a Italian Dominican friar Jacobo de Varazze (de Voragine), d. in 1298 as archbishop of Génova. There were various Spanish translations of this work such as *Flos sanctorum, a honor e alabanza de Neustro Señor Jesu Christo* (1480) and *Legenda seu Flos sanctorum* (Toledo 1511).

6 [Au 3, 5, 7]

7 [Au 8]

8 Ignatius of Loyola and David L. Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation and A Contemporary Reading* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 7.

9 [AU 9].

10 A Jesuit student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

11 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

12 There were a couple of previous “journeys” that I (Prof. Pham) did in Spain. One was part of the Camino Ignaciano: from Manresa to Montserrat. The other was part of the World Youth Day in Spain where we walked eight days from Salamanca to el Santuario de Nuestra Señora de la Peña de Francia, as part of Magis Experience in the summer of 2011.

13 R. Garcia-Villoslada, *San Ignacio de Loyola: Nueva Biografía* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1987), 185.

14 Ibid.

15 Jay Hamburger and Peggy Gordon, "By My Side," from *Godspell* (written by Stephen Schwartz), New York, Arista Records.

16 Fr. Michael P. Duricy, *Black Madonnas: Our Lady of Montserrat*, March 26 2008. Accessed May 10, 2016. <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/olmont.html>

17 Boss, Sarah Jane, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 5 and Fr. Michael P. Duricy, *ibid.*

18 V.W. and E.L.B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 11.

19 [AU 20].

20 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

21 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

22 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

23 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

24 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

25 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

26 Jay Hamburger and Peggy Gordon, 'By My Side,' from *Godspell* (written by Stephen Schwartz), New York, Arista Records.

27 [AU 23-25].

28 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

29 J. Maritain, "Art and Scholasticism," in G.E. Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 327.

30 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

31 Ignatius of Loyola and David L. Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 47.

32 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.

33 A graduate student pilgrim reflecting on the experience of walking the Camino Ignaciano in June-July 2015.