

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

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Angela, the pilgrim, the traveler who had stood on the Adriatic shore, had sailed the Mediterranean to the Holy Land and back, had sensed the vastness of God, whose name she blessed beyond the ocean's grains of sand, beyond the drops of water, beyond the multitude of stars (Rule, V:26)...For Angela each place along the way held encounters of God's presence.

In this issue of Heartbeats, Eve Juarez, of Ursuline Academy, Dallas, shares her reflection on her pilgrimage walking the El Camino de Santiago and her encounters along the way:

JUAREZ ON THE WAY

39 days, 693 miles, 1,550,384 steps to discovering His way

For several years I had the El Camino de Santiago (The Way of St. James) pilgrimage on my bucket list. If you are unfamiliar with the El Camino, I encourage you to read Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* or *The Pilgrimage*. If you are not into reading, the movie *The Way* is a lovely portrayal of the pilgrimage. The Camino is a pilgrimage, a spiritual journey, to Santiago where St. James' remains are kept. Hardships along the journey are welcomed tests of faith leading to a spiritual cleansing. Pilgrims have taken this journey since 950 A.D., and thousands continue to walk the path of St. James every year. But walking the Camino as a *peregrino*, pilgrim, is so much more than facts and figures, because in its true essence, the Camino is an experience, an awakening and an invitation to experience what Jesus might have dreamed for us.

Even with all my research, preparation and reading, I still had no idea how the Camino would impact my life and teach me so many lessons along the way. In many ways, it reminds me of the quote, "If you want to make God laugh, just tell God your plans." Surely God was having a good chuckle day as I set off on my first day from St. Jean Pied de Port.

The first decision I had to make was to walk alone or with others. I decided that at this time in my life, I needed to be independent and walk alone. I somehow needed to prove to myself that I was strong and capable. How fitting that within my first mile, I met my first Camino buddy, Thomas, and quickly thereafter, Katharina, both from Germany. Thomas and Katharina accepted me as I was in all my sweaty, dirty exhaustion. I could be my authentic self, and I didn't need to build any protective walls. I soon realized these wonderful people were placed in my life to remind me to be vulnerable and rely on others. We don't have to walk this life alone. It was my first lesson along His Way.

During my pilgrimage, I experienced so many miracles. I was walking one day, and it began to pour. I quickly threw down my backpack near a cross in the middle of nowhere. As I raced to get my rain poncho on, I looked up at the wooden cross. It was engraved with "Eva", my name in Spanish.



I knew then this was God literally calling me by name not only to the Camino, but to His Way.

As I continued my journey, I would meet hundreds of individuals from countries around the world. We shared breakfast, long walks, communal dinners and bunk beds. I believe the Camino is God's vision of heaven on earth. Never have I seen such a spirit in the human race where people come to the table as family, brothers and sisters, sharing and rejoicing in our similarities and our differences. I believe this is how God envisions us living with one another, God's Way, and if everyone could just get a small glimpse of this heaven, we would aspire for this community everywhere in the world. Experiencing this community day after day, gave me hope and inspiration as I returned to home, to my daily life.

The Camino mirrors our life journey in so many magical, beautiful ways. There are hills and valleys, but we must continue forth seeking a way to walk in His footsteps. Although my physical pilgrimage has ended, I enjoy spreading the good news of the El Camino de Santiago. Perhaps this is your call to the Camino and His Way. Buen Camino.

*For Angela, as the Company took shape,
her journeys shifted to the road of life
taken together with her companions.*

A Pilgrimage into Aging:

*Because whenever you start the spiritual journey,
The whole of humanity, and perhaps creation,
Goes along and shares the journey with you.*

Thomas Keating

In September, six Ursuline sisters took Angela's words, "risk new things and be open to big surprises" to heart by joining with six other women on a study pilgrimage in "wise aging". One memorable experience: writing a thank you note to someone you offended or who offended you, thanking him/her for the grace you now recognize in that experience. One participant shared at the end: "I can't thank you enough for the opportunity to join together as we shared a common journey filled with joys as well as challenges. The level of honesty, openness, vulnerability, and courage will stay with me and hopefully carry through with all of us as we continue to grow individually and in community. I am so very grateful that I was afforded a small window into the life of an Ursuline nun and the inspiration, faith, generosity, and humanism that is so much a part of your world."

A Pilgrimage to Gratitude

*Peter JB Carmen offers these thoughts as we
prepare for Thanksgiving, November 22nd.*

Thanksgiving is not something that just happens to us. When we decide to live gratefully, we become immeasurably better.

Once we begin the journey of gratefulness,
nothing is the same anymore.

Gratitude is a decision, taking new forms and
issuing new challenges every day.

A pilgrimage of gratitude brings blessings
beyond reckoning, creating the possibility to
give openly from the heart.

This Thanksgiving is a great time amidst all the
conflict and need for hope to consider making
the pilgrimage of gratitude anew.

www.sitemason.com/files/iVAS7S/111812%20Pilgrimage%20to%20Gratitude.pdf



For Reflection:

- Recall your own times of pilgrimage. What encounters along the way do you still carry?
- What is giving you hope and inspiration during these days?
- Consider writing a thank you to someone sharing your experience of gift from a difficult experience.
- Give thanks to God for the companions who have especially enriched your own spiritual journey.