

For thirty-eight hot days during the summer of 2006, the four members of our family walked five hundred miles across northern Spain on the ancient pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. We had looked forward to sharing the time before our youngest son, age 18, left for college. We did not anticipate how honest we would be willing to be with one another, or how in the course of journeying on an external trail, we would also commit to journeying towards more authentic relationships with one another. The physical challenges we faced were difficult, especially for me, but not nearly as extensive as the emotional and spiritual ones. Now, two years later, we continue to experience the changes that began on the Camino including orienting our lives by what is most important to us, being more willing to admit our weaknesses to ourselves, God, and one another, and traveling more lightly both physically and metaphorically.

Following the Path

The call to journey towards God is unrelenting.

We leave the Known Presence in search of the Unknown Reality.

As we go seeking God, God walks with us.

On the way we discover God-close-by and God-far-away.

We travel far
to move into the sure knowledge that
God was at home,
God is on the road,
God waits for us where we will arrive.

Physical Spirituality

Pilgrims can do the stupidest things! To say that many move in ignorance would be a gross understatement. For those who begin without paying attention to the physical nature of their journey, reality introduces sacred invitations to embody truth with greater awareness.

When I asked a man hiking up a mountain why he was wearing sandals, he told me, "I didn't hear that we needed good walking shoes until it was too late to buy and break them in, so I just bought a pair of sandals. I figure they will probably last for the eight hundred kilometers between here and Santiago."

A woman answered my inquiries about the bloodstained gauze wrappings on her feet and legs. "A podiatrist treated me in the last town. He told me that I needed to stay off my feet for three days before continuing, but I don't have any time to spare! I'm just going to see what happens."

One night on the way to dinner I saw a man limping with a torn Achilles tendon. He expressed hope that it would heal overnight. If it did, he could continue on to Santiago, more than twenty days of walking away.

On the thirteenth day of our pilgrimage my right shin began to hurt. I rested it the fourteenth day and bought a leg brace that gave me support. I continued walking on the fifteenth day.

What were we thinking? We weren't. We had a goal we wanted to reach. We believed we could make our bodies follow the lead of our wills. Throughout the centuries pilgrims have sacrificed their physical health to the cause of reaching a holy site of their desires. The cumulative physical stress of an extended pilgrimage is hard to anticipate, but ever so real. Some have paid the ultimate cost. On the way to Santiago one finds markers honoring those who have died, recently and in the distant past.

All along pilgrimage routes one can also find remains of hospitals as well as modern-day facilities where the physical needs of those who are traveling can be attended to. Embodied spirituality is not an abstract concept as one is faced with soaring spiritual desire and limited physical resources.

What is the importance of knowing that our bodies cannot always take us on the spiritual journeys we can imagine? How can our bodies serve as our spiritual teachers, especially as we encounter our physical limitations? In what way is God present in us, inside our fleshly inhabitation, especially when our bodies are sick, suffering, weak, or

dying? These questions matter to pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike.

Give It Up

How would your life change if you were willing to accept that expressing your worst self is a vital part of what you do every day?

If you acknowledged to yourself, "I am most prone to disappoint God when..." what could shift?

What if you discovered that you were ready to let go of those beliefs and behaviors that no longer serve you (and hurt both you and others)?

Might you be readying yourself to give up something you value?

Honesty precedes release.

What are you willing to know about who you have been? Who do you hope through the grace and help of God to become? Are you willing to pay the costs of confession: sincerity, truthfulness, and integrity?

Acceptance can be very painful. It can also be liberating.

Are you willing to step towards freedom?

The way is steep, unknown, perhaps even dangerous. What will you give up?

Geoffrion Family Camino Prayer We Recited Each Morning

Thank you Christ.

We ask for a good day, fun day, and safe day.

May we know and express Your wisdom and kindness.

May Your love flow to us and through us.

Thy will be done.

Amen.

My desire to walk the Camino began years before I arrived in St. Jean Pied de Port, France where we started our pilgrimage. Perhaps you are aware of a desire to go on pilgrimage to Compostela or somewhere else. The years of spiritual preparation that preceded our journey made it as meaningful as it was. As you nurture your dreams and listen to God's voice calling, may you too become more ready for all that lies ahead.

