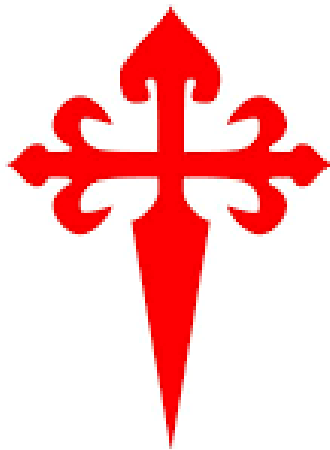


El Camino de Santiago

July 2026



A summary of two pilgrimages to Santiago: 1) along the Camino Frances and 2) subsequently via Fisterra and Muxia, along with a journey to Switzerland for the historic consecrations of four SSPX bishops at Econe, including the text of a daily journal and accompanying pictures.

For the Glory of God, in atonement for my sins, for the sanctification of my soul, my family, and those of my fellow pilgrims, for the new bishops of the SSPX and the speedy and happy resolution of the crisis in the Church; for my beloved wife and family at home; for our benefactors; and for the intentions, spoken or written or otherwise manifested, laid out elsewhere. Viva Cristo Rey!

Monday, June 29.

10:29 PM

Ad Altitude Chalet

Bernex, France

At long last the pen returns to paper and God (and my dear, long-suffering wife) deems fit to allow me to return to the Camino. Tonight I write from a beautiful chalet nestled within the slopes of the French Alps just south of Lake Geneva. Though we await the arrival of Robert in Geneva tomorrow afternoon, our ranks have just about been completely filled. Fr. Brueggemann graces us with his presence this year along with Chloe and Billy and Sam Hone. We joined up with Maureen Bushnell this morning at the Geneva Airport, and Julie Pawlowski plans to make our number eight in Burgos in about a week's time.

We intended to begin our pilgrimage in St. Jean Pied de Port tomorrow, but God planned otherwise. Not long after we purchased tickets roundtrip to Santiago, the SSPX announced that episcopal consecrations would take place on July 1. Consequently, we rerouted our flights so that we could attend this historic event, though it means our time for the Camino is cut down to 21 days of walking. We will have to match our pace from 2018 if we are going to get Father back to Pittsburgh in time to fulfill his duties.

So it was that today we flew via Montreal on Air Canada to Geneva. The flights themselves proved uneventful, but the company was surprising. Eli Badaczewski, a former runner and student, surprised me as we boarded the first plane. He was with his wife at the outset of a journey that leads to a wedding in Sri Lanka.

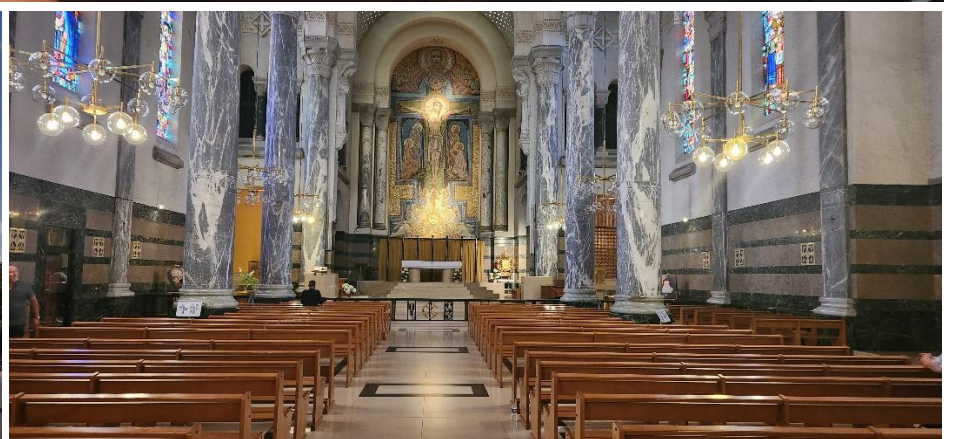
Then came the traditional Catholics. In the Montreal airport we encountered the Jolly (sp?) Family, Katie Gieser, Fr. Greg Pfeiffer, and a bevy of seminarians all en route to Ecône. Many more traditional Catholics were in evidence on the plane itself. The devil would have had to work overtime to overcome the collective guardian angels on the plane should he have desired to wipe out the SSPX, yet that flight must have represented a tempting target.

We arrived in Geneva on time and without issue. It took a couple of hours to get through customs and pick up our car. But we managed to do so and met Maureen in the lot. In the meantime, we ran into Brian Goldade, who has been in Europe for a week and is, of course, going to Ecône.

Maureen had just completed a 19 hour bus trip from Italy, and we were all bushed from lack of sleep on the plane, so it was a disoriented crew that commenced the trip in Switzerland. We immediately went to a restaurant that turned out to be a super expensive place. 32 Euros for a hamburger. It was not quite the burger joint I had suggested, with its salmon-thing for an appetizer. (Yes, I ate the salmon thing!) We laughed at the prices on the menu and considered leaving, but we stayed and enjoyed a fine dining experience.

Following the meal, we drove to Annecy where we visited the church of the Visitation, which houses the remains of Saints Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. The church was built in the 1920s. It was more impressive on the outside than within. We then moved across town to the cemetery where Blessed Anne de Guigne is buried. She is the ten-year-old likely saint for whom Fr. Brueggemann has a great devotion.

Having completed our spiritual ventures, we drove the seemingly interminable distance to our chalet at which this bedraggled crew arrived around 7:30 PM. Father said Mass and we enjoyed a dinner of frozen pizzas and sandwiches before retiring to a very welcome sleep.





Tuesday, June 30.

10:54 PM

Ad Altitude Chalet

Bernex, France

A beautiful day began this morning with the chirping of birds and the clanging of cow bells in one of the most idyllic settings I have ever experienced. After Mass and breakfast, Billy, Sam, and Maureen hiked around Bernex and surrounding hillside while Father, Chloe and I drove out to Geneva to pick up Robert. We enjoyed the vibrant lakeside activity in the city along with its interesting architecture – old and new – as we navigated our way to the Swiss side of the airport. We did accidentally enter France en route, and it was particularly satisfying to pull a U-turn at the border and drive right back out again. We immediately found Robert and made the stunningly

scenic drive along the northern part of the lake to Econe. We made a happy, albeit expensive, stop at McDonald's on the way and arrived at the buzzing seminary a couple of hours earlier than expected.

Econe was like a great big reunion as we all ran into old friends everywhere. Sister Rita Renee gave us a tour of the grounds, and we prayed at the resting place of Archbishop Lefebvre, Bishop Tissier, et al. Later on, we got our bracelets for access to tomorrow's ceremonies. Since we could not get into Vespers, Robert, Chloe, Billy, Sam and I prayed our rosary as we walked to McDonald's (a different one). It provided a foretaste of what is surely to come.

We returned to our chalet after a death-defying wrong turn on the mountain and made plans for a historic morrow. Pope Leo finally broke silence this morning with a final warning about the repercussions of this "schismatic act". Fr. Pagliarani responded with an utterly inspired note of his own. So now, off we go. May the good God guide all involved and may they all respond in a manner compliant with that grace.





Saturday, July 4.

9:55 PM

Albergue Maralotx

Cirauqui

Day 3 = 40.1 km (99.5 down 679.0 to go)

I finally revisit this journal a full four days after the last time. But alas, I have no time to write. Therefore, just stats/highlights.

July 1 – Episcopal Consecrations

Arrived early. Got seats. Beautiful ceremony. Got drenched in massive storm. Sang rosary. Storm ended on cue. Ceremony finished. Spent time with Sister. Returned to chalet.





July 2 – Day 1 = 25.1 km to Roncesvalles

Mass at 3:30 AM. One hour drive to Geneva Airport. Flight to Biarritz. Three buses to get to St. Jean Pied de Port. Soup for breakfast/lunch. Checked in at office. Started at 2:28 PM. Relatively hot up mountain. Chilly, killer wind walking in storm clouds at top. Fr. Brueggemann – super heavy pack, Sam not much lighter. Locals laughed at us for going so late. Got into Roncesvalles just short of 9:00 PM. Ordered food for all including Father and Sam, who crawled in late. Barely managed to eat before 10:00 lights out. Showers

thereafter. By morning, folks running the albergue were whispering about the excommunications after I had mentioned that we had come from Switzerland yesterday.



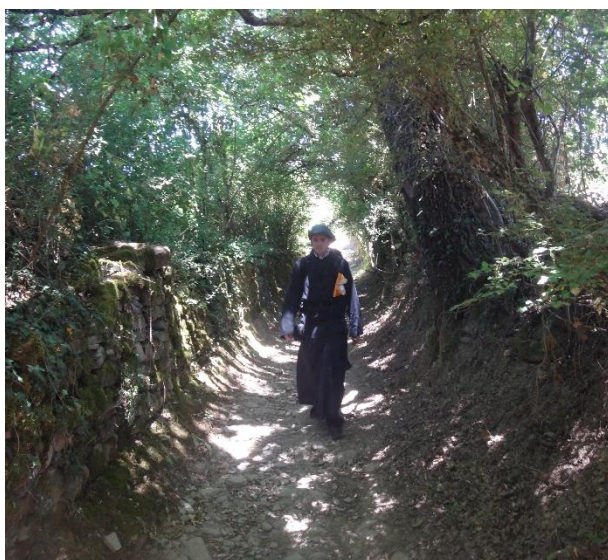






July 3 – Day 2 = 34.3 km to Zubaldika

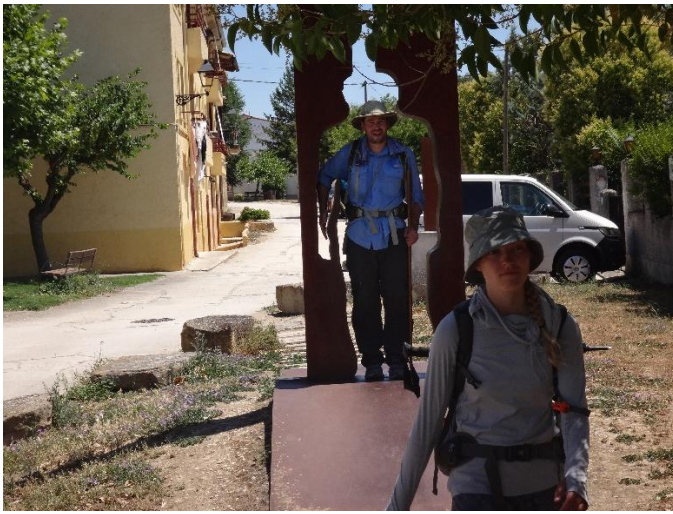
Slept until 7:00. Left at 7:35. Tough day as we started figuring things out. Got to Zabaldika and managed to get permission for Mass in the church though all were spooked about “excommunications”. Said the nun running the church: “If Lutheran priest asked, I would say yes, so you can.”



July 4 – Day 3 = 40.1 km to Cirauqui

Started at 5:39. Brutal heat. Over 100 degrees. Albergue in Maneru closed so we had to crawl further to this place. Father said Mass in atrium. Three French girls we had met earlier joined. Dinner at local (non-pilgrim) bar until 9:00. Bed time now. God Bless America on this Fourth of July.





Monday, July 6. 8:32 PM

Hostal Villa Navarette
Day 5 = 40.5 km (175.6 down 602.9 to go)

Navarette

July 5 – Day 4 = 35.6 km to Los Arcos

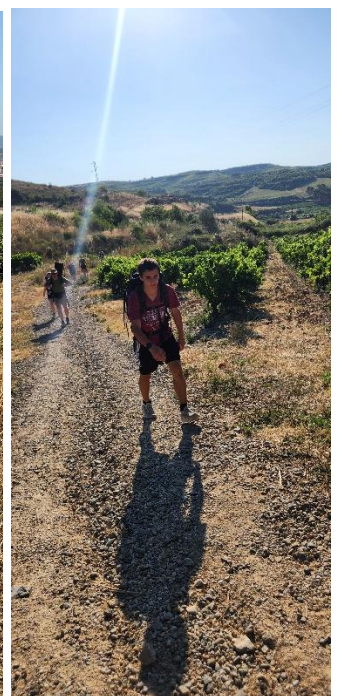
5:50 AM departure after the Irish atheist who photographed Marcel Lefebvre in 1979 and is on his ninth “camino”, got everyone in the albergue to agree to lights-on at 5:00 AM. Much better way to get ready for the day. Flew through to Estella where the Carlist museum was closed. Stopped at metal-working guy’s place and got shells for the younger kids. Wine fount was empty! Toured Irache monastery. Fine lunch in Monjardin after brutal hike up in heat. Made it to Los Arcos at 4:00 PM in temperatures over 100 degrees in spite of absence of food truck en route. Got a hotel so Father could say Mass in morning after Father said Mass on porch of St. Mary’s church in town. Beer and ice cream delighted us as we waited for take-home pizza.





July 6 – Day 5 = 40.5 km to Navarette

Mass in room at 5:10. Left Los Arcos at 6:00. Motored through to Logrono by noon. Father falling apart with achilles issues. After lunch at Logrono, Father and Sam sped ahead to Navarette where they got lodging and food. Rest of us pushed through 100+ degree temperatures. Arrived in Navarette at 4:50, completely wiped out by the heat. The forecast calls for 100+ temps for the next two weeks. God help us.





Tuesday, July 7. 6:05 PM

Albergue Confradia del Santo
Day 6 = 37.5 km (213.1 down 565.4 to go)

Santo Domingo

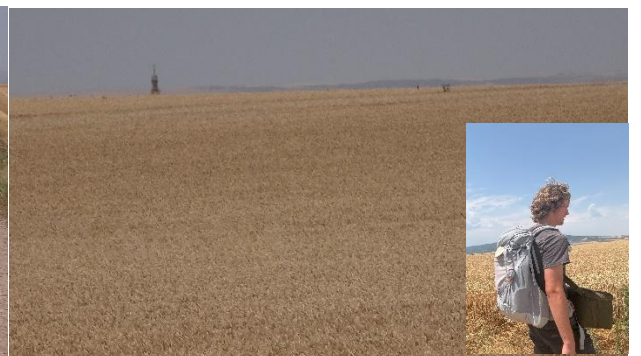
It took virtually a full week, but today we landed the Camino routine. For the first time since we began, I have both the time and energy to write. And so, here in the common room of this fine association albergue, the oldest on the entire Camino (since 1100s), I can explain how it came about.

This entire Camino has witnessed the uninterrupted flow of one dire situation after another. Whether it has been lack of sleep, late starts, wounded warriors, inclement weather, we have consistently completed all of

the essentials on the brink of exhaustion at the end of the day. So rough has each day been, I have actually been able to sleep.

As the two-week forecast presents us with a daily menu of temperatures between 95 and 105, we have started to plan even earlier Masses in order to begin walking earlier. Today, Father said Mass in the hostel at 4:45 AM, even though it means he must say some of his Office earlier yet. We commenced walking at 5:42 and knocked out a quick 16km to Najera by 8:30 or so. We walked in the company of two seminarians from California – David and Thomas – who seem like they will be good priests and are friendly to tradition, and with Robert, Father, Billy and I trading off the Mass kit so that Father doesn't have to tote it alone. We continued our race against the sun until we reached Azofra at 22 km, where we had a light breakfast. The long rise under the powerful sun left us nearly dead at Ciruena, so we rested in the shade and regrouped there. Though the final 6-7 km into Santo Domingo ran generally downhill, we still finished up at 1:50 wiped out.

We checked into this great albergue, showered, ate, did laundry and shopped for tomorrow, all by 6:00. Thus, I am able to write, and soon I will head to bed. We have arranged with the fellow running this place to say Mass tomorrow morning – he even swept the chapel despite my pleas. So it is that we will have Mass at 4:30 AM before beginning the short 35 km to Villafranca Montes de Oca. It is good to find our routine. May the good God grant us similar favors as we trek on.





Wednesday, July 8. 5:40 PM

Albergue San Anton Abad Villafranca Montes de Oca
Day 7 = 34.4 km (247.5 down 531.0 to go)

Another long, hot day today, but another satisfying end. So, I write tonight with content heart, soul, and stomach!

Mass in Santo Domingo's oratorio kicked off the day at 4:30. Last night was so hot that nobody slept well, but it made rising that much easier. (Chloe at one point left her bed to go sleep on a couch in the common room.) After a nicely situated Mass we took our leave from the albergue at 5:35 and started into the dark. Our shortcut to Granon was evened out by a forced long-cut (by construction) to Redecilla, and we were burdened by the nuclear football (= Mass kit), but the van of our group arrived in Belorado, 22+ km later, by 10:00 AM. There we had a nice lunch/snack and plotted our attack on the last 12 km. Unfortunately, due to the heat and lack of shade, the last 1/3 of our hike is worse than the first 2/3. Nevertheless, we labored through the Castillian farmland in the heat of the day with a couple of brief stops, arriving in Villafranca Montes de Oca by 1:45.

We had hoped to stay in the municipal albergue here, given our satisfaction with the last one. Alas! It is closed down. Therefore, we climbed the hill to this place where the boys and I stayed eight years ago. We met with the greatest of hospitality and an unbelievable meal at its beautiful restaurant, where we had a blast recounting our trek so far and its prospects going forward. Those of us who are veterans all agreed that this has been our most challenging Camino ever. We also agreed that this was a phenomenal meal! Whatever the case, we power on, looking forward to meeting Julie Pawlowski in Burgos tomorrow and the dreaded Meseta thereafter. May the good God grant us relief in this tree-less land.



Thursday, July 9.

9:12 PM

Albergue Santiago y Catalina
Day 8 = 38.3+ km (285.8 down 492.7 to go)

Burgos

It is late tonight as I write, which is why Burgos has come fully awake. The others are attempting to sleep. I hope to join their ranks soon.

Father said Mass in our room at the albergue this morning at 4:30. By 5:26 our crew was climbing the hill that held onto us for the first thirty minutes of the hike. We carried on through the increasingly visible forest at a clip that eventually exceeded 6 kph. By 10:00 AM we had put over 24 km behind us as we sat down to a good

breakfast at a town outside of Burgos. We then proceeded along the river trail until about 4 km remained. Smarting from the heat, we soaked our feet in the cold river water and rested for 10-15 minutes. It was good.

Around 1:00 we arrived at the sublime equestrian statues of El Cid. Within 15 minutes we united with Julie Pawloski. Upon her recommendation, we entered the cathedral plaza by way of El Cid's gate, and then we wound our way to this albergue, which we now occupy solely. Father will say Mass in the choir loft tomorrow before we leave. The fellow who runs the place – Arturo – has been very helpful in so many ways; this being high among them.

A couple hours after arriving, we finally feasted at Taco Bell, and it was good. I even had a Taco Bell beer! The rest of the day was spent touring the cathedral, checking out St. Nicholas Beri – astounding retablo – arranging transportation for a bag so no one has to double up with the Mass kit, buying a bag and breakfast for tomorrow. So now, with a busy day in the background, I turn off the light in hopes of sleep for the first time ever in Burgos.





Friday, July 10. 5:53 PM

Municipal Albergue San Esteban
Day 9 = 41.1 km (326.9 down 451.6 to go)

Castrojeriz

Tonight I write from the municipal albergue in Castrojeriz. This is the third time in this town, second in this albergue that still charges single-digits for a bed – 9 Euros.

The morning kicked off with 4:30 Mass in the choir loft of the church beneath the place where we stayed last night in Burgos. The crew then departed at 5:31 while I watched from the window above. It was a strange emptiness I experienced as they left. The reason for it all was that I had to wait until 6:00 for a bar to open where I could leave the bag that we shipped to here. In order to facilitate Father carrying his Mass kit, we are shipping the bulk of the rest of his stuff. The bag, which we purchased last night after a mad scramble about Burgos, awaited our arrival here a few hours ago.

To make up for my late start, and in a desperate attempt to regain the rest of the group, I set a blazing pace, surpassing 6 kph for the first couple of hours. I ended up in a footrace with Joe Camino, this professional-hiker-looking guy. We traded spots several times until I left him in the dust about 8 km in. After a rigorous march without relent, I caught up to Sam in Rabe around 13 km, Julie a couple of km later, and the remainder as I ran down the hill at the entrance to Hornillos. There we found no open cafes, so we settled for a piece of fruit and moved on. A small meal at Hontanas around 30 km was followed by a rigorous final 10 km along the road (instead of the path) as the sun finally appeared in full fury. We completed this stage by 2:00, had a fine sit-down meal around 3:00, and rejoined with Sam as he got to the restaurant about 3:45. All in all, a rigorous but successful day in the Meseta.

Tomorrow is the big one. 44+ km through the Meseta with a promised high temperature of 95+ degrees. We plan to skip out at 4:30 AM, get to Carrion as quickly as possible, get Father a private room and have Mass there Saturday night and Sunday morn.





Saturday, July 11.

6:57 PM

Albergue Santa Clara

Carrion de los Condes

Day 10 = 43.6 km (370.5 down 408.0 to go)

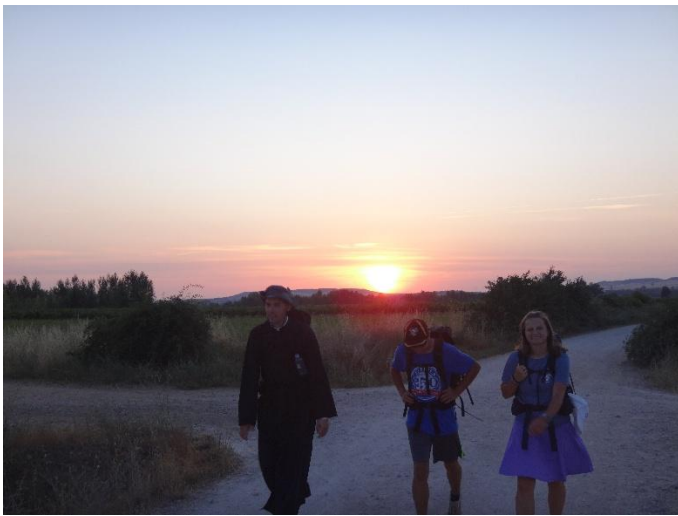
A relatively unexciting tale stands to be told tonight. Last night was spent in rather uneven sleep as pilgrims could be heard outside and leaving our albergue at all hours. As early as 1:30 AM. Heat leads to such things. As for us, we lumbered out and began walking at 4:41, which was appropriate for a day that was slated for 44.1 km. We ended up stopping short of Brierly's checkpoint in Carrion, so our actual distance was about 43.6.

We did not have Mass this morning, and this enabled the early start. About 45 minutes of walking brought us to the foot of the big hill. We pushed to the top in about 15 minutes and forged ahead in the cool, pleasant darkness. With Robert and Maureen in the van, we made it to Fromista, 25 km in, by 9:00. After a short break, we sang the rosary as we embarked on the Senda, the path that runs alongside the road to Carrion for 20 km. We maintained a steady 5-6 kph pace, but with no cloud cover, the Sun and high temperatures did their damage. We were grateful for a final break in Villalcazar, where we had nourishment and a tour of the Knights Templar church. The final 5 km proved similarly grueling, but we clambered into town at 2:00.

Soon after our arrival, Father was granted permission to say Mass in the chapel here, a fine old Romanesque church. Maureen expressed our communal exhaustion when she passed out during the Mass, but thankfully she is fine.

To round out the day, we went shopping, had pizza for dinner, and passed the bottle as we planned the ensuing days; and now we plan for bed. Looks like several more 40s coming our way as we try to stop in Rabanal for a night and have a short day going into Ponferrada.







Sunday, July 12.

7:27 PM

Albergue Santa Cruz

Sahagun

Day 11 = 42.1 km (412.6 down 365.9 to go)

I write tonight from a familiar place, sort of. We have returned to the Benedictine convent run by the Marist Fathers in Sahagun. However, instead of the usual albergue common rooms, we got private rooms – 2 beds in a room – for 25 Euros per room. Dirt cheap, fine accommodations. No communal dinner tonight as the markets are all closed on a Sunday, so instead I write.

Father said Mass this morning at 4:30 in Julie's room, and we started walking at 5:34 AM. A long monotonous 18 km took us across Meseta farmland. We covered it in about three hours. At the end of that portion of today's hike, we crossed a road and the half-way point of our pilgrimage. We took a smoothie break at 27 km as no one was hungry for anything more. Nice temperatures and an occasional breeze kept us feeling

strong. Alas, the sun reminded us of its power over the final 13 km into Sahagun. Even so, today's high only reached 85 degrees, so we were in decent shape when we arrived here at 1:50 PM.

All the priests here are new, but the hospitality remains as before. We had a good dinner down the road, spoke with the folks back home on the phone, and now anticipate a solid sleep. The last is much needed as I did not sleep at all last night due to: I was bigger than the bed, the pilgrims partied until past 10, it rained and I had to bring in clothes and shoes, and people noisily exited the albergue just about every half-hour from midnight(!) on.



A long day comes to a close as I write tonight. We hoped for a restful sleep last night, but it was interrupted by a text message sent to Father a bit after 9:00 by the baggage transport people. They informed us that our albergue of choice was closed and that we had to find another. But there were no others! Unless we chose to go 47 km. So instead, Father called around until we got a hotel with relatively low rates. It is actually closed also, but they agreed to open rooms just for us. Having concluded the arrangements, we settled in for some shut-eye.

Mass this morning was held in the chapel at the convent in Sahagun. The Fathers there set up for Father Brueggemann unaware, of course, that he says the old Mass. We had a quick but necessary (since we could not go shopping) breakfast there before heading out at 5:39. We got to Bercianos, 10km later, in about 1:45 and El Burgo Ranero 7.4 km later by 8:30 or so. A monotonous 13 km along the road brought us to 34 km and a rest stop in Reliegos. This stretch remains mentally arduous due to its unchanging nature and the trees alongside the trail that are everywhere and yet provide no shade. At Reliegos we spoke with some Canadian women. Sam ran into them shortly after. Not knowing he was one of us, they related all that they heard from us, only everything they said was an absurd exaggeration of the truth. I guess this is how these things get started.

Whatever the case, we finished our 42.6 km day at about 2:50, checked into the hotel, grabbed dinner and groceries up the street and returned by 6:00. After a brief spell putting our feet in the pool – Julie got yelled at for going in with her clothes on – we showered and are prepping for bed. Tomorrow is our fifth and final 40+ day in succession. 44.6 km should bring us to Hospital de Orbigo, a place I always found nice, but we never spent time in. It will be our final day before the hills that lead to Astorga, to the Iron Cross, to Ponferrada and Galicia!





Tuesday, July 14.

6:53 PM

Albergue Karl Leisner

Hospital de Orbigo

Day 13 = 44.6 km (498.8 down 279.7 to go)

Epic day today ends with a “W” in Hospital de Orbigo. Though it was very hot in the hotel last night, some of us managed some sleep. Chloe not so much. Whatever the case, Father celebrated Mass in the common room of the hotel at the now usual 4:30. We departed at 5:30 on the nose and arrived in Leon a couple of hours later. The city was quiet but waking up while we were there. It was too early to visit the cathedral’s interior, so we pressed on. Julie stayed to spend some time. We went non-stop all the way to Villadangos at 33.3 km. All were suitably wiped out, so we took a solid hour’s rest before continuing. It was almost 3:30 when we got to Hospital, the town with the fabled bridge. We checked in to this superb albergue but were too late to pick up a meal anywhere. Instead, we went shopping, made ourselves dinner and feasted. While Robert, Chloe, Billy, and Sam play cards, Father says his breviary and I write. We look forward to a good night’s sleep as the albergue is at a sweet cool temperature already. We have earned a solid rest after five straight 40+ km days. We have suffered mightily but are all still standing. Tomorrow, we go through Astorga and head for the hills.





Wednesday, July 15. 7:37 PM

Albergue Gaucelmo
Day 14 = 37.8 km (536.6 down 241.9 to go)

Rabanal del Camino

Billy Joel sings "Piano Man" accompanied by Billy Winschel, Robert, Chloe and Sam as they play cards at the table in the yard of the albergue run by the British Confraternity of St. James tonight. It is a pleasant scene.

Father said mass this morning in the courtyard of our place in Hospital. We took our leave at 5:44. As I was placing some tape on my foot, the group took a wrong turn (on the better marked path) in the first km. We thus almost missed our shortcut! Recovering quickly from the mistake, we zoomed up the hill to the cross overlooking Astorga at nearly 6 kph pace. We got a photo with all of the present Pittsburgh crew for Father to send out to the parish by way of an update on our (his!) progress. Not much doing in Astorga this morning as Spain was sleeping off its celebration of victory over France in the World Cup semifinals. The group showed great strength and growing resilience as we continued up to our break at Santa Catalina – 11 km short of our day's end. This was an albergue we stayed in eight years ago that I had hoped to revisit. By 1:30 we climbed up the cruelly steep entrance to Rabanal. We checked in to this place quickly, with plenty of time to get to the restaurant with the grapevine canopy ceiling. Amidst great expectation we proceeded thence. Only to find it closed! First the Carlist museum, then the wine fount, and now this. Ugh. God's will be done.

We got a meal at a nearby albergue that was not even open. They called in the workers just for us. God bless the good, compassionate lady at Our lady of the Pilar! At 5:00 we enjoyed tea with the British hosts and fellow pilgrims. It was a delightful time yet again. I thoroughly enjoyed a conversation with a young Korean who is studying Classics at Manchester University in England. Cheung-Jo (sp?) is his name. I left him with a Miraculous Medal – he has fallen away from practicing the Faith of his youth – and I hope to see him again.

Short day beckons tomorrow as spirits soar. Cruz de Ferro at 7.3 km and Ponferrada at the end. Life is good on the Camino for us. We will see how it goes for these Brits whose Team England plays Argentina in the other semi-final tonight. They are leaving the albergue doors open late so that folks may watch the game which commences at 9:00 Spain time.





Thursday, July 16.

5:40 PM

Albergue Guiana

Ponferrada

Day 15 = 31.5 km (568.1 down 210.4 to go)

For what it is worth, England lost to Argentine last night. So Spain vies against its former colony on Sunday, 9:00 Spain time. At this point our projected whereabouts remain uncertain for the event which will surely have this country on fire.

Presently I write from this wonderful albergue on the outskirts of historic Ponferrada. It is a repeat from last go-round. After 4:30 Mass in the backyard of last night's lodging, we hit the road this morning in the darkness at 5:39. Robert took off up the hill and the rest of us followed at a distance. We dropped off our rocks with little fanfare at around 7:15 or so. Having accomplished this rather underwhelming feat, we worked our way through the beautiful mountain trail to Molinaseca and all the way to Ponferrada with hardly a stop along the way, though Father, Billy, Maureen and I paused briefly before leaving Molinaseca for the long sidewalk stroll that I dread. In the last village in the mountains, Billy and I bought a beverage of orange juice with banana slices from a girl named Lucy Fruit. It (and she) was delightful.

As we approached Ponferrada the trail detoured off the road it used to follow onto a new nature walk. It was really annoying as it was not pretty, it added needless distance on gravel, and it left us ripe to get caught in the short rainfall that came to town. Nevertheless, we strode right on to this awesome albergue and checked in to a private room for eight. After showering, we all (minus Julie) walked triumphantly to McDonald's a mile away. We feasted like kings and waddled back here. I had my first McDonald's beer to go along with the one from Taco Bell in Burgos. It was exciting if only in principle. We will shop soon and then sleep in a room with AC as we prepare for a long day tomorrow.









Another routine day on the Camino passes today. How so? Well, the places we counted on being there for us were all closed, and we had to adjust to new situations. Once again, the day commenced with 4:30 Mass in our albergue after a relatively good night's rest. We departed at 5:40 for another 40+ km day. After winding our way through Ponferrada's pleasant suburbs in a cold mist, we pushed down the road and fields of grapes en route to Villafranca del Bierzo in similarly sublime conditions. We rested for about 45 minutes there and then commenced the tortuous trek up the Valcarce Valley under the noonday sun for 16 km until we reached our destination. Then came the disappointment.

We got to Albergue El Paso at 1:50 only to find that they closed for rest and repairs. So much for the place that treated us so well years ago. As a result, we went to the municipal albergue where we found that the restaurant (also of fond memory) in town is also closed. So, we went to the "supermarket" which, of course, was closed. Nevertheless, when it opened we all purchased food for the day and morrow, and everyone feasted happily in the kitchen.

As the day closes out, we envision the huge hill that lurks 3-4 km ahead of us and the glorious land of Galicia that it protects. We have been eagerly awaiting its arrival for two weeks. Tomorrow!





Saturday, July 18.

6:28 PM

Albergue Oribio

Triacastela

Day 17 = 33.1 km (642.4 down 136.1 to go)

What a beautiful day this one was upon the Camino! Late last night Julie shocked us all when she came in and announced that she was able to get the key to the church in Vega de Valcarce and that Father had permission to say Mass there this morning. So it was that we started this day with a 5:00 Mass. Everybody looked forward to some extra sleep with the late Mass time, but alas it was not to be. Twice during the night – at 1:00 and 3:00 respectively – Billy rolled over in bed and hit the light switch, waking up the room. Everyone except for himself!

We took to the road at 5:57, merrily proceeding as a group for the 4 km or so until the behemoth hill. As soon as we started the ascent we got all split up, with Robert leading, followed by Billy. It was grueling as expected, but all arrived in Galicia at the top within 1-2 hours. Brierly has this climb at the end of a long day. I cannot imagine doing it under the sun. It would be brutal.

At the top of the hill, we spent some time admiring God's beautiful creation and then went to the church that housed the Eucharistic Miracle. It did not open for another half hour, so we grabbed a bite and waited. It was pretty awesome to see the relics of the miracle and the statue of Our Lady, which had changed posture to look at the actual body and blood of Christ.

Invigorated by it all, we clambered through the next 8.5 km to the steep hill that reaches the peak altitude for the day. At the top we all rested in the shade of umbrellas and consumed Magnum and beer. It was good. We then resumed the walk in high spirits, belting out our daily rendition of "Country Roads" and then singing the rosary. The final 12 km went quickly as we bounded down the mountain through the beautiful Galicia countryside. Around 2:30 we wrapped up a short 33 km day in Triacastela and checked in to our albergue. To my surprise, we found a restaurant that does not close throughout the day. We feasted and then went about our daily business.

Stress and uncertainty have unfortunately returned. Tomorrow we will finally catch up to Fr. Stanich's group in Portomarin. He says he has some leads on places to say Mass. As a result, we will leave here at 4:30 AM without our usual morning Mass. Problem is we have called a whole slew of places and looked all over the internet for beds for tomorrow. There are none. Our only viable option is the Xunta Albergue since it does not accept advance reservations. So, it looks like tomorrow will be a forced march foot race with all the newbies starting out in Sarria. We have to cover 41 km by 1:00 when the Xunta opens. As I close this note with our new French friend Xavier picking on the ukulele, I pray that God shepherd us through one more time. As I wrote that, Julie came in to say that she arranged for father to say Mass at 5:00 at the church of St. John – Wow! Julie is a wonder worker and God is good.







Sunday, July 19.

4:06 PM

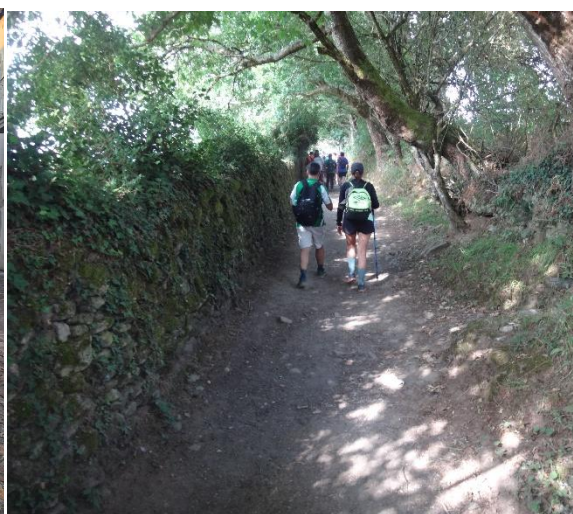
Xunta Albergue

Portomarin

Day 18 = 41.4 km (683.8 down 94.7 to go)

I write early today, for we won the race. We exited our albergue this morning at 4:37 in hopes of acquiring lodging in the only place remaining in Portomarin. Under cover of darkness and a low-lying fog, we sped across Galicia at a consistent 6 kph pace, reaching Sarria and our promised croissant by 7:45. We feasted on that croissant with gloriously accompanying butter while we watched hundreds of newbies start their pilgrimage. Alas, in the meantime, a cat decided to relieve itself on Robert's bag right before we departed. This event came to pass at 8:16. Over the next nearly four hours we used the newbies as springboards, leaping from one to the next, as we cranked out the kms without rest at 6 kph pace. We reached 40 km before noon and finished 41.4 at 12:06. Upon arrival we found Fr. Stanich's crew at a restaurant. Introductions were made and hands shaken. They had started at Sarria this morning, arrived early, and had already had Mass by this time. It seems like a

highly spirited crew with whom we will share dinner tonight. They are scheduled to get to Santiago a day after us, so this likely will be our only interaction. In the meantime, Julie joined Robert, Chloe, Billy and I for a quick bite, and now we are readying for Mass at the big Knights of Santiago/Hospitaller church in town. All is well as our Camino begins to wind down.





Monday, July 20.

3:49 PM

Albergue O'Cruceiro

Melide

Day 19 = 39.7 km (723.5 down 55.0 to go)

After Father Bruggemann got kicked out of the big church in the center of town, he said Mass in the small chapel of San Pedro. It was frankly a much more amenable location. Afterwards we ventured down to dinner with Fr. Stanich's group. It proved to be a wonderful meal with equally wonderful company. Everyone clicked nicely and we all had a truly festive time. As 9:00 drew near we all headed back to the plaza to catch the

beginning of the World Cup final. The masses were out all draped in the red and yellow of Spain. It was entertaining watching everyone get riled up, but we went back to bed thirty minutes later. Of course, the game was scoreless at that point, though Spain clearly controlled the field of play. As I lay in bed, I could tell exactly how the game progressed by listening to the reactions of the crowd in the plaza. At midnight the game was decided and Portomarin went nuts. The noise was punctuated by the incessant ringing of the church's bell. Spain 1, Argentina 0 – OT.

Our night's sleep truncated by these activities, we still managed to rise and have Mass at 5:00 AM. We followed Fr. Stanich's crew – albeit a half-hour behind – and resumed the trail outside of Portomarin at 6:00. We caught up to them and had a final parting snack about 11 km in. Fr. Stanich and Regina Brueggemann got a head start from the café. In time we caught them and had some great conversation up to the Alto do Rosario. We sang the rosary from there to the church in Palas de Rei, where we apparently interrupted the folk Mass practice with our closing hymns and prayers. Having said our farewells to Regina – they are staying in PDR – we shot through the next 9 km and had a quick rest/bite with 6.4 km remaining at a beautiful café with manicured grounds. The last 6.4 went quickly through lovely Galicia, and we got checked in to this nice urban albergue at 2:30.



Tuesday, July 21.

6:37 PM

Albergue Porta de Santiago

O Pedrouzo

Day 20 = 34.9 km (758.4 down 20.1 to go)

Last night we had a room on the top floor of the albergue all to ourselves... until about 6:00 PM. At that point this big dude barreled in. He broke the top bunk of the bed and threw himself onto the bottom one. He was out within seconds, sawing logs at about 120 decibels. The noise continued, alternating snoring with sleep-talking, until after we left in the morning. It was the first time I have ever resorted to earplugs. Funny stuff.

We had Mass in the common room at 4:30 and left at 5:34. No reservations in O Pedrouzo, for we planned on staying at the one non-Xunta place that does not accept them. The website said it opens at noon, so we had to push pace to get done with 35 km before then. We got to Arzua at 12 km at 8:00, just in time to witness the masses of newbies emptying onto the streets. We waded through these folks until we got to our resting place about 10 km short of here. With about 1.5 km left we saw a sign saying that the albergue had 28 beds left. It was 12:02! As far as we could tell, the place had filled to half-capacity in just two minutes. We had to fly to get in. We took the ugly road to save time and arrived at 12:17 to find two men waiting in line. The place did not actually open until 1:00. Our rush was completely unnecessary.

After checking in, the normal day's routine followed. Having completed all tasks, we now sit in the common room playing cards, listening to music and just generally socializing. Life is good with but one short day to go.

One note of interest. My Darn Tough socks have proven their worth, but they have also proven mortal! Huge holes developed today, and I had to tape my foot to prevent blisters. Oh well.



Wednesday, July 22. 5:23 PM

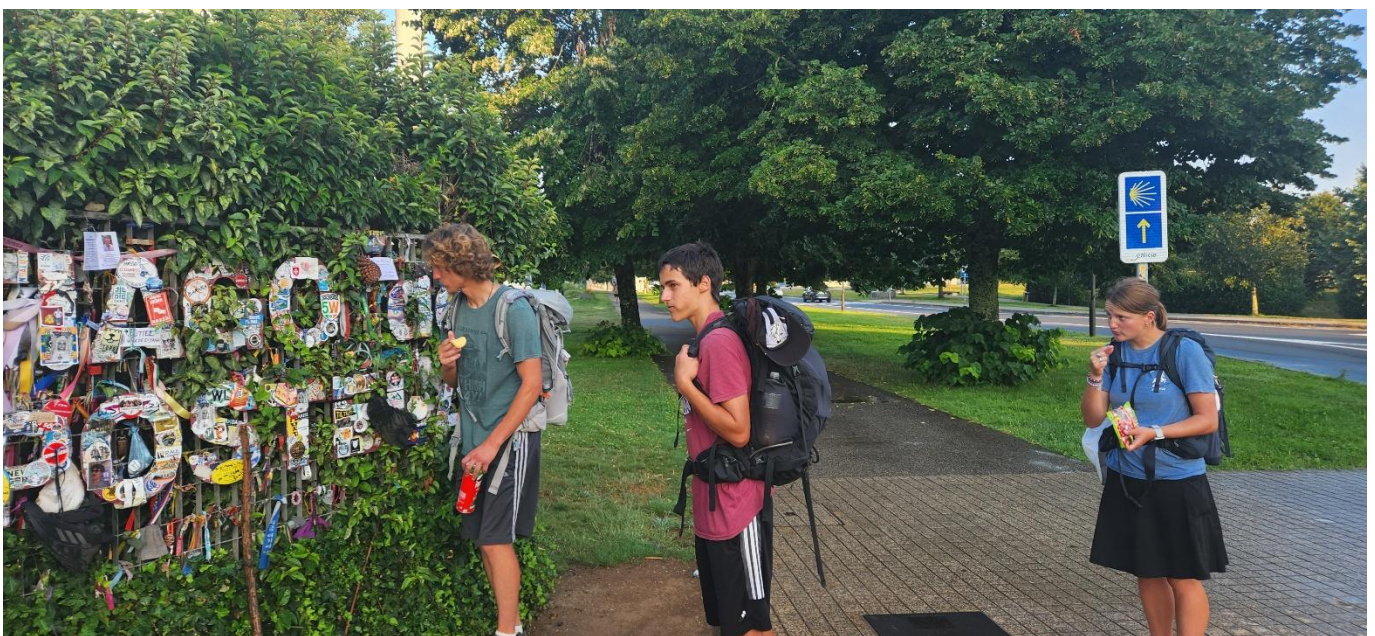
Albergue Km. 0
Day 21 = 20.1 km (778.5 down 0 to go)

Santiago de Compostela

Thanks be to God and our guardian angels, and to all the heavenly dwellers we so often invoked, I write today from the resting place of the earthly remains of St. James the Greater, apostle of and martyr for Our Lord Jesus Christ! It was a short day in terms of walking, momentous in terms of events. Leaving O Pedrouzo at 5:04, we sped along at 6 kph pace and reached the Santiago sign outside the airport in good time – and together. It boded well for a strong finish to our journey. Then things came a bit undone. We eclipsed the final hill to the TV station and sang our daily “Country Roads”. Following this warmup, we sang the glorious mysteries of Our Lady’s rosary. This got us to the edge of town where we awaited Julie and then Sam, who mysteriously had disappeared. Julie arrived not long after – she had thought we were to meet atop the hill before the final descent. But Sam never appeared. We were in a hurry to get to the cathedral, get our Compostelas, and get to Mass, but for 45-50 minutes we waited, completely at a loss as to Sam’s whereabouts. We finally left without him and carried on to the end. As it turned out, Sam had taken a wrong turn in Lavacolla, about 8 km back, and had wandered for some 45 minutes trying to find the track. It was a shame as we had hoped to finish together what we had started together. Sam came in about five or ten minutes after us.

In the meantime, Billy was the first to spot the cathedral in the city, though Julie was the only one to see it from the hill. We made our right turn at Cervantes and entered the plaza singing “Sancte Pie Decime”, “Christus Vincit”, and “Viva Cristo Rey”. It was awesome. We marveled at the moment for a spell, met up with Sam, and went to the pilgrims office for our Compostela. The lady at the office did not believe at first that we had traveled so far without skipping (!), but she backed down when we insisted. We got our papers, dumped our bags in a locker, and while Father went to the chapel of San Roque to set up for Mass, the rest of us went to the cathedral. We only had time enough to see the cathedral and rush to Mass. Fr. Enriquez said a requiem Mass for Fr. Nichols, who recently died, while Fr. Brueggemann said his Mass at a side altar. We then met with Fr. Enriquez and the seminarians before shipping off to McDonald’s. There we feasted to our hearts’ content and got our final stamp

on our credentials. We were pleased. We then checked in to this fine albergue and paid a proper visit to St. James in his church where we laid our petitions at his feet. Now folks have gone their separate ways – some touring, some resting, some preparing for tomorrow when we will split up for good. Before that comes to pass, though, we will share a meal tonight with the seminarians here in the welcome environs of Santiago de Compostela.



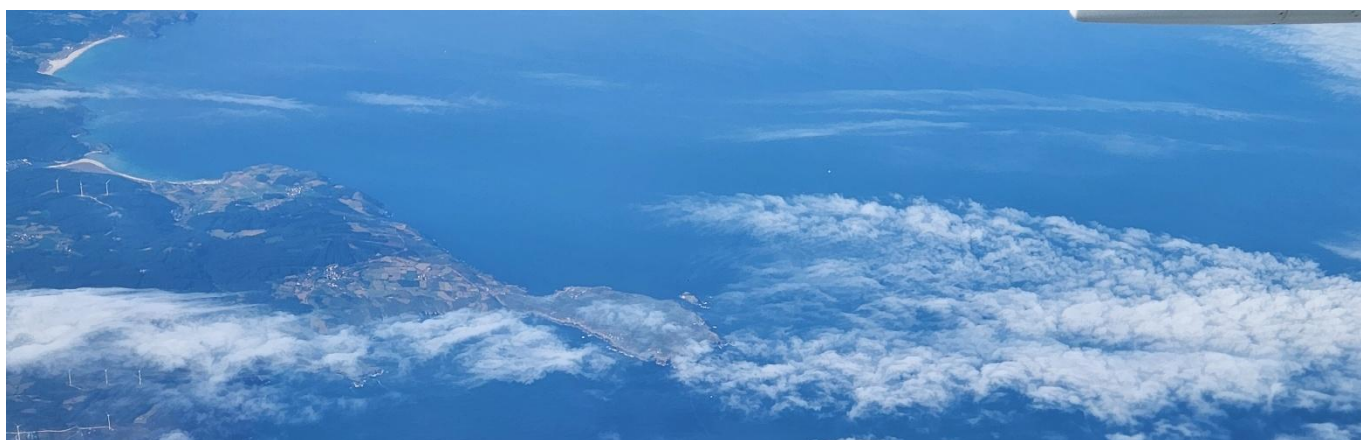




The meal with the seminarians did not pan out. We all met around 7:00 to eat, but they decided they wanted some local dish that was not served at O Patron. Fearing that they were going to spend their time in endless pursuit of a meal, the Winschels and Sam decided to stick with O Patron and let the others go where they may. It came as no surprise when the seminarians returned later after a fruitless search. Even still, they did not eat there. Rather, Father treated them all to a meal eventually, elsewhere in town. We others enjoyed a filling dinner in which we had a humorous conversation in broken Spanish/English with the waiter. We then walked about town and the festival (St. James' feast day approacheth) and ended up at our favorite helado shop where we met Julie and ate happily.

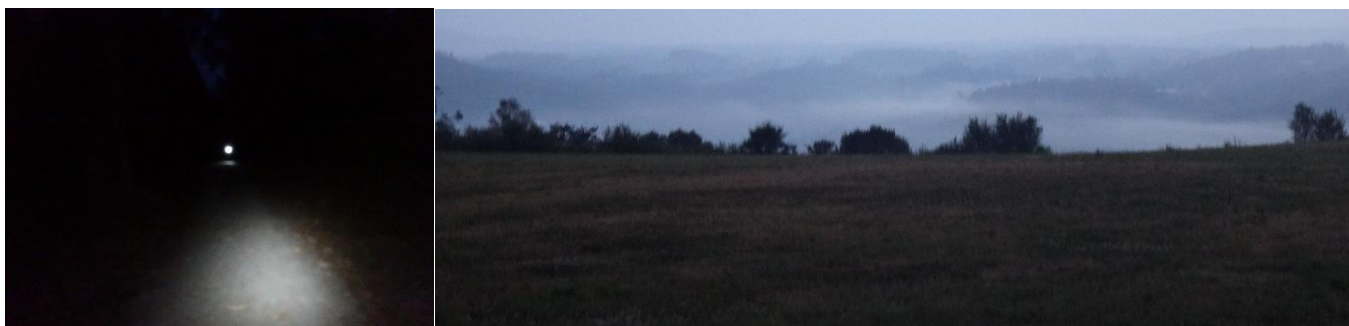
Before heading to bed, Father and I discussed travel plans and departure schedules for this morning. Thus, after a night where those close to the air conditioner slept soundly, and I, who was most distant, boiled sleeplessly in my bed, we rendezvoused one last time in the common area around 6:00 AM. In an atmosphere of glum acceptance, we saw off Father and Sam. Almost miraculously, though, at the last instant Maureen's flight came through, and she decided to walk with us to Fisterra. So it was that a few hours later the five of us took our sad leave of Julie and began our new trek westward to the end of the world.

A strange, almost surreal, loneliness surrounded our group, now reduced to five, as we started out at 9:25. We walked slowly as if trying to rediscover purpose after having fulfilled the important end already. In time things picked up, and we wound up the short day around 1:45 in our favorite albergue west of Santiago, the same where we stayed twice last year and intend to do the same this.



Yesterday, after writing, we decided to forego the fruitless wandering about looking for a meal after we got a cold reception at a place that actually was serving. Instead, we went to the market and fixed up our own feast. A while later we walked around the town before a final meal of chips, salsa, cookies and such.

This morning we departed at 5:10 and climbed the long ascent to the top of the hills surrounding Negreira. 10 km later we emerged from the woods to find a dastardly dark cloud leering at us. After a quick stamp stop at 13 km where we adjusted our packs to make rain gear accessible, a rainstorm chased us down and hounded us. Incessant rain followed until we took the shortcut around the big muddy hill that we bypassed last time. We found our way back to the trail after this successful maneuver with a couple of Danes in tow. The sun emerged to dry us off as we wrapped up our walk in Olveiroa. Or so we thought. It was not yet noon. We could not bear the thought of finishing so early with so much time to kill. We figured we would rather spend that time in Fisterra tomorrow. Cee was too far of a reach at 18+ km distant, but this place was 3.5 km further up the line. So, we continued on and got here after 37+ km of walking a bit before 1:00. There is not much in terms of amenities here to resupply for tomorrow, but there is a restaurant attached to the albergue that serves food all day (including spaghetti as a primero) and a swimming hole ¼ mile away that I hope to go check out. In the meantime, we rest and recreate as per usual.

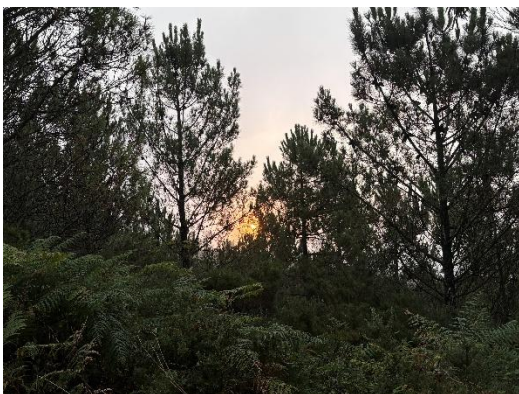


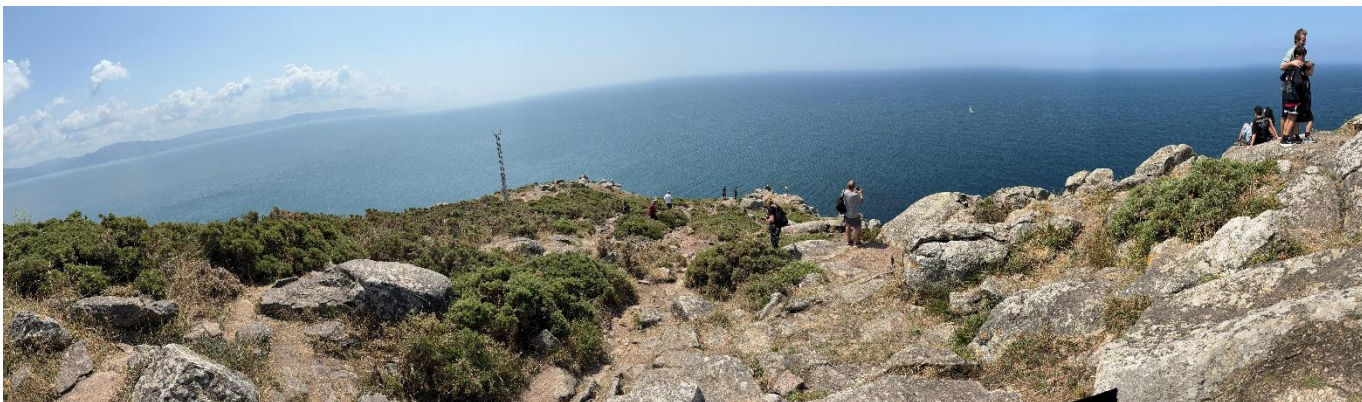


Pen strikes paper in the early evening of the feast day of our beloved St. James the Greater. It has been a good day.

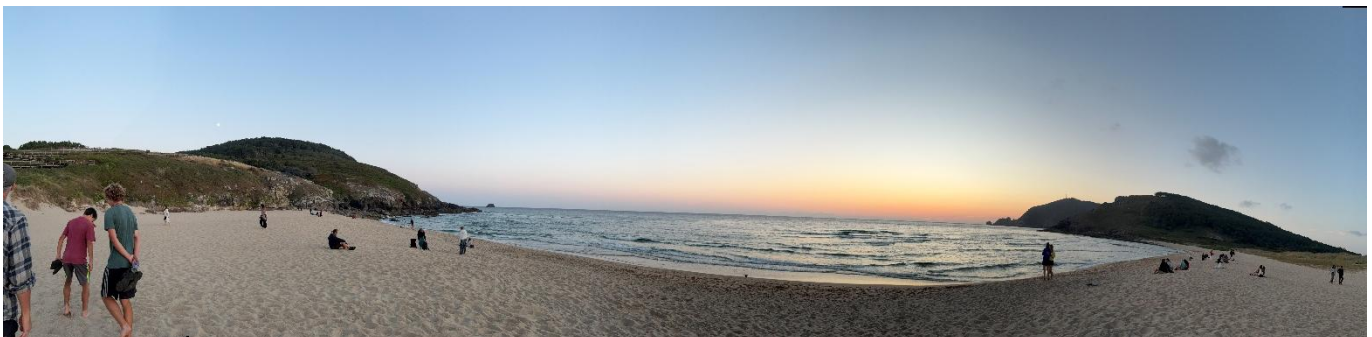
Yesterday after writing herein, we ate a hearty meal at the restaurant. We then took a stroll down to the nearby creek and the swimming hole. A fine and relaxing time was enjoyed by all as we took in nature's delights. Back to the albergue we went and did our sundry bits of nothing until we turned lights out and retired.

We slept in and started at 5:35 this morning because we found out that Sylvia's confectionary in Cee does not open until 9:00 AM. Our timing was accurate as we arrived around 8:40. We walked through the woods enshrouded in dark skies and drops of rain. Fortunately, we saw no storms; however, we also saw no cross. I have no idea what became of the cross on the trail above Cee – or if we just could not see it for the misty sky. Whatever the case, Sylvia's opened a few minutes early and we feasted our eyes on the beautiful assemblage of food. As we made off with our bounty, I asked Maureen to express to them our gratitude and wonderment at their concoctions. She did so and engaged in fruitful conversation with the owner's (of over forty years) daughter. It was an invigorating break. We then took back to the trail, missed our shortcut in Corcubion because of a medieval festival, happily discovered the church of San Marcos, and then hoofed the rest of the way to Fisterra without interruption. We set foot in the Atlantic Ocean just after 11:00 AM and took an hour to span the beach's 2.5 km. It was pleasant but crowded – a function of the weekend no doubt. We then dropped our bags at the albergue and raced up the Cape where Robert, Billy and Maureen climbed down to the ocean while Chloe and I rested above on the rocks. Returning, we ate at our favorite pizza shop and walked away content. Since Maureen had to leave by 6:30, we rushed to get our Fisterrana, tried to go shopping – all was closed for the feast day – bought some drinks at the Chinese market, and headed for the sunset beach. What an absolutely marvelous beach – the nicest I have ever seen. Maureen was so inspired that she dove in – fully clothed. With 45 minutes before her bus departure, she was soaked to the core! She went back to the albergue, showered, and then we sadly saw her off at the bus stop. Now, with laundry done and showers taken, we await the sun's descent, a spectacle not to take place here on the western end of the time zone, until 10:05. Hopefully we will get some pictures to compare with those of our dearly missed family at Van Buren Point 4-5 hours later.







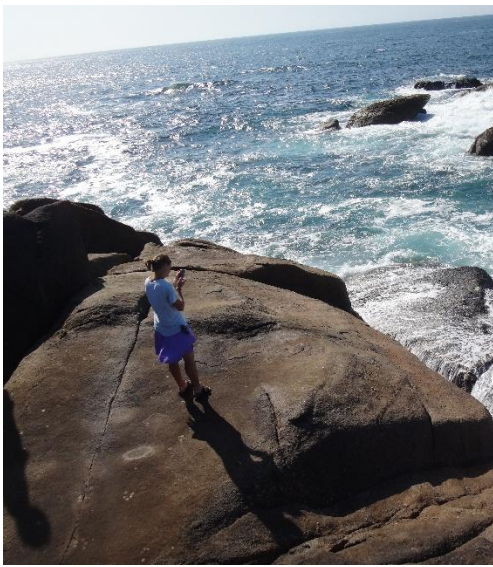


With our numbers dwindled now to four, we rest in our albergue in Muxia while a festival of sorts rages outside. Live music, rides, and throngs of people gather along the ocean front. We will soon join them, at least to get our meal at the usual pizza place.

Last night, since all the mercados were closed, we got what provisions we could for today and for the sunset from a vending machine. Thus, all we had to pass around at sunset was a puny bottle of Aquarius, and all we had for breakfast was nothing. The sunset was well attended but not as magnificent as last time. We enjoyed ourselves though, and then we retired to bed. We slept soundly until 7:00 and left Fisterra at 7:34. With temperatures in the 60s all day, a nice breeze and plentiful shade, we rolled leisurely through the short trek loaded with scenic oceanside vistas, with but one stop at Lires, halfway. The number of pilgrims going the other way surprised us, but otherwise there was little of note besides the Aussie who was desperately pushing a stroller with two kids in it up the mountain. We got to Muxia, engrossed in its revelry, a bit before 2:00. In the meantime, we noticed that the markets are once again closed – it is Sunday after all. Tomorrow could prove to be another hungry day. In the meantime, we look forward to an afternoon and evening enjoying the things Muxia has to offer.







Monday, July 27.

3:03 PM

Albergue Ponte Oleira

Ponte Oleira

Day 26 = 34.4 km (62.5 down 52.9 to go)

I love it when a plan comes together. So said Hannibal Smith, the leader of the A-Team. With his sentiments I cannot agree more heartily. For once, just about everything went according to plan this past 24 hours. We had a fantastic meal at the pizza place yesterday, arriving just before they stopped serving food and the entire festival shut down for siesta. Afterward, we found a little hole-in-the-wall operation/tienda, where we got provisions and Galician Crème Liqueur. We spent some time at the rocks, played some cards while passing the bottle, and finally went out and watched the sunset at 10:00. In the meantime, we planned the attack for today.

We slept in this morning and then took our leave at 6:15 AM. Taking advantage of Chloe's navigation skills, we completely rewrote the route to Vilatoso, cutting many kms off of our trek. Our resting place in Dumbria was closed, so we pushed on to O'Logoso, where we had a great meal a few days ago. It was only 10:45, and we had gone over 28 km. Alas they were not serving the pilgrim menu yet, so we settled for some bocadillos. We then stepped off the last 5 km and arrived here – the same place as last time – just a bit before 1:00 PM. The last stretch the sun came out in force, giving us a sense of what is to come. Mid 80s today, might reach 90 tomorrow. We will do what we can to avoid it all in the last days of our journey.

After checking in today, Robert, Chloe and I drank a toast to my Pa. It has been a different Camino this year, so this has been the only Gin and Tonic of the entire way. I was too thirsty to enjoy it properly.





Tuesday, July 28.

3:30 PM

Albergue Coton

Negreira

Day 27 = 31.7 km (94.2 down 21.2 to go)

Last night we had dinner at the albergue and went to bed not long after. The room was hot and everybody had a hard time falling asleep – except for Billy, who at one point started sleep-cheering(!?) as though he were playing a video game. He then fell silent while everyone lay there envious. Except for me, for I had already abandoned hope and gone downstairs to read a travel magazine about the coast of death.

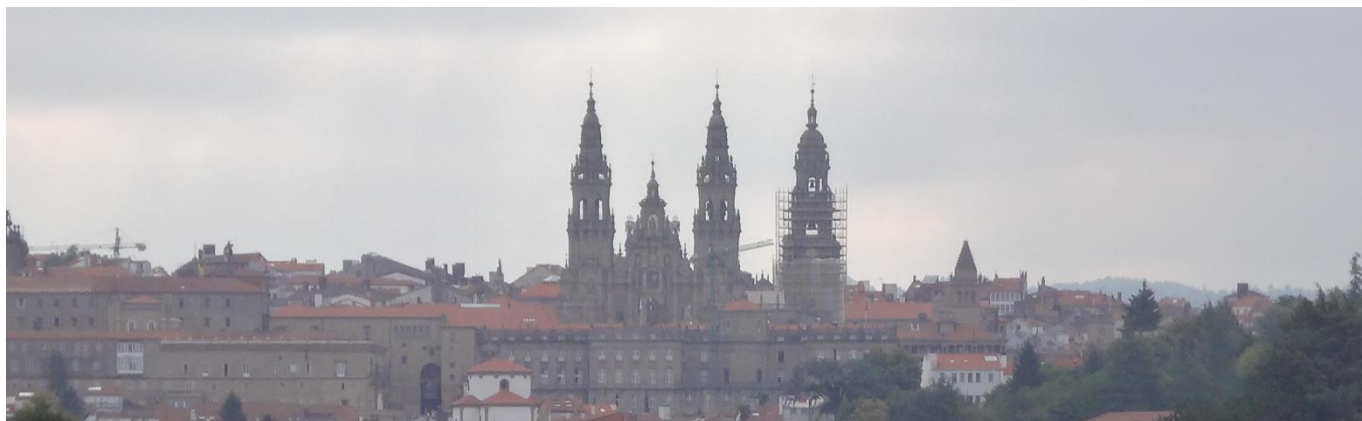
At 6:02 we started out on the penultimate day of walking. We fumbled through the dark, finding our way along a path barely discernible from this direction. It was shocking how many pilgrims walked the other way. This stretch has really taken off since we were last here. Otherwise, little excitement took place as we cut corners where we could and we completed almost 32 km by 12:20. We went shopping for the first time since we were last here in Negreira and for the last time in Spain. It was pleasing, and we got enough provisions to last until McDonald's and the airport saga that begins tomorrow. We are all anxious to begin that final stage of our journey after we return to St. James in 20 hours' time.



A lot of time to kill last night in Negreira so we returned to our favorite grocery store to get something for dinner. Chips, salsa, cookies, Trina and some strange pink Galician Liqueur made up the meal. We ate and struggled through the pink stuff and then headed to bed. In the meantime, I spoke with a teacher from Seville, Spain who had just finished her first day. She is heading out to Fisterra on a four-day hike. She spoke of how her school – a primary school – teaches Spanish, French and English to each student, including teaching four different subjects while only speaking English. Wow! We have really dropped the ball here in America.

We woke up this morning after sleeping in a bit and left at 6:05. It was a spirited, albeit uneventful, walk as all were excited about wrapping things up. That event took place with great cheer at about 10:15. We got to the cathedral, took some pictures, got our Compostelas and dumped our bags in storage with glee. We then returned to the cathedral. We could not rejoin with St. James, but we spent some time with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament chapel. We then zoomed out to a triumphantly joyous meal at McDonald's. With time aplenty and nothing to plan, we just feasted and relaxed. It was good.

We then spent the afternoon shopping for gifts (I also got myself a long overdue wedding ring – to replace the ones I lost in the 20th century), revisited the cathedral and finalized our stay in Santiago by indulging in the fruits of our favorite Santiago helado shop. Having resumed the companionship of our faithful backpacks, we sped to the bus stop, where a bus showed up within seconds, and we enjoyed wheeled transport for the first time in nearly a month. And now we sit in the airport awaiting an even speedier form of travel, the kind that will take us across the ocean to our dearly missed and beloved family and home.







Thursday, July 30.

1:07 PM

Air Canada Airplane

Madrid Airport

Among the final words I wrote in my Camino journal three years ago was an expression of a desire to return in the near future with another group. This desire has come to fruition, and I was grateful that the good God has allowed it to be. That being said, this time I have been satisfied but also sated. I do not have the same conviction to return that burned immediately last time. God's will be done.

As we fly over the land we once walked, I would like to reflect on this Camino while its rigors and rewards remain fresh.

There were eight of us who walked this year. At one point I had anticipated as many as thirteen or more. A number of things conspired to reduce our numbers, and perhaps, given the challenges we faced, it was all for the best. What were those circumstances that tried us so?

The fundamental problem was one of time. We had originally planned for a 23-day pilgrimage. Given that most folks take 30+ days, we knew that it would require a fair amount of effort. But then, when they announced that consecrations would coincide with our planned start, we immediately had to cut two more days from our schedule. Fr. Brueggemann and Sam, and therefore all of us, were to be in Switzerland on July 2 and in Pittsburgh on July 23. In the interim we had to cover nearly 500 miles across the entirety of Spain. This meant nearly 40 km per day with virtually no room for error or digression. Everything had to go perfectly and according to plan. Moreover, it had to work for all eight people. Unlike last time, there was no room for different folks to cover different distances in different times. Everyone had to make time or miss the mark... and the plane.

To add to the logistical woes, we had to accommodate the needs associated with having a priest on board. Now, to be perfectly clear, Father had warned us of the difficulties involved, and he naturally bore their brunt. Furthermore, not one of us would have traded either the daily Mass or Father's company and leadership for anything. Nonetheless, it made a taxing trek much harder. *Tolle Crucem!* First of all were the sheer weight and size of the Mass kit, which Father somehow dragged along with all his other stuff up over the Pyrenees on day one. He toted it all virtually singlehandedly through the first five days, though Robert and I each took a short stint. Eventually we passed the kit around – called it the nuclear football – for a couple of days before deciding that too was unworkable. So, starting on day nine, we began shipping the bulk of Father's other stuff so that he could carry the kit in his bag. This, however, resulted in other difficulties, because now we had to plan all of our lodging in advance and we had to stay where we planned. This cut down on our flexibility and became one more thing to contend with after a long day.

On top of all that, finding a place for Father to say Mass was rarely easy. And if it was in the afternoon, Father had to fast for three hours prior. This was very hard on Father because he desperately needed the calories and electrolytes to maintain our pace and distance. As a result, Father often said Mass early. But this too was difficult because, faced with insanely high temperatures (95-105 for nearly ten days) we had to do most of our walking before the sun reached the fullness of its fury. So, Father had to say Mass early, often at 4:30, and rise

earlier yet to prepare for Mass and say the requisite Divine Office before the Mass. So, while we often awoke at 4:10 AM, Father preceded us by an hour. Thus, he never got adequate food or sleep. I can only believe it was the graces that flowed from the Mass that allowed him to overcome these deficiencies. The same graces pulled the rest of us through this thing relatively unscathed. In spite of the insane heat, the lack of grocery stores for the entire first week, the inability to get a rhythm due to lack of provisions and dependence upon restaurants/cafes that were never open, and the most ridiculous day one ever, we forged our way through as on the wings of God's grace – thanks in large part to the daily Mass.

Somehow, by the end it all seemed to click. Sam, whose feet had all but rotted off, and who had seemingly gone toe to toe with the devil on multiple occasions, had overcome the pain and found his stride. Father, hobbled also by blisters, especially early on, and with ankles taped and not taped depending on the hour, was able to clunk along at the blistering pace, always with self-effacing good humor. Maureen with nothing but optimism escaping her lips, mended her bag almost daily but mended everyone else's spirits more often yet. Julie was the miracle worker who conjured up Mass locations for Father out of nothing. As a wily veteran of the Camino multiple times over, she had her way of doing things that did not necessarily mesh with ours, but she made it work to the benefit of all. Billy, the youngest of the crew, flinched from nothing, accepted all the burdens, even the football, without hesitation, and showed tremendous resiliency throughout. Chloe exhibited a combination of speed and spirit that kept things going both physically and mentally. When she occasionally pulled from the group for her alone time, it was felt throughout. Robert proved a stalwart throughout. Drawing on the lessons he learned eight years ago, he was heavily responsible for pulling us out of the doldrums of week one and of forcing the pace when needed to get us through the week of 40-45 km days – the very thing that caused the lady in the office, who certifies hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year, to doubt the integrity of our walk.

In sum, our group meshed very well. Though long stretches would pass on the trail with silence when we were doing our work, joyful conversation and commiseration (it is possible) always carried us through the rest of the day and night. Music, card-playing, and general conviviality around a meal always topped off the day's toils. And though we did not meet a whole lot of outsiders along the way, we had a cohesive group with a shared animating spirit that more than compensated. (Plus, we had the joyful Australian bikers with whom we played leapfrog from Burgos to Santiago to keep us going! What a delight to finally meet and talk with Dean and Amy(?) near the cathedral at the end.) I wish we could have kept the group together out to the ocean and back, but it was not to be. It was enjoyable keeping everyone posted by text in the meantime. I think the good God and His Camino have forged some true brothers and sisters of the Way! May it all be to His greater glory. Amen. Viva Cristo Rey!





July 2



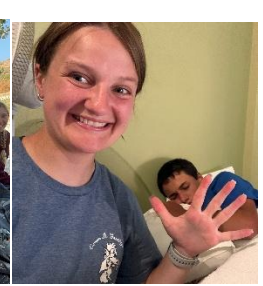
July 3



July 4



July 5



July 6



July 7



July 8



July 9



July 10



July 11



July 12



July 13



July 14



July 15



July 16



July 17



July 18



July 19



July 20



July 21



July 22



July 23



July 24



July 25



July 26



July 27



July 28



July 29

