

THE EPISTLE

THE MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER OF
ST. MATTHEW'S PARISH,
PACIFIC PALISADES, CA

NOVEMBER 2018
VOLUME 47 No. 3

(LEARNING TO) WALK

In *The Sacred Journey*, his book on pilgrimage, Charles Foster observes that human beings are splendidly equipped to do what we have done since the birth of our species. Our long, straight hind limbs (legs) that are bad for climbing trees are great for hoisting up our heads to see across the savannah – and excellent for striding.

He goes on to say that *homo sapiens* (thinking human) could equally well have been called *homo ambulans* (walking human); thinking and walking have always been inextricably entwined.

Having spent a week walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain early in October, I am here to tell you Foster is right on both counts. Somewhere around mile 20 I realized that my body had found its natural rhythm, regulated by the length of my legs, the set of my hips and the swing of my arms. A rhythm which allowed me to look ahead, around and down occasionally as my thoughts wandered here, there and everywhere: from immediate details (I'm so glad I bought these shoes a half size larger than normal; oh my God, look at the way the sun is hitting those leaves – so green!) to existential questions (why am I doing this, really? what *is* my life?).

And probably at about mile 40 I stopped thinking about what I was thinking about, and just let the walking be what it was. Seeing and moving and thinking; being aware of myself as a body-soul in motion, sometimes intently present in the moment, other times a million miles away; sometimes leaning into solitude, other times falling into desultory conversation. All held in the steady rhythm of left foot, right foot, hitting the ground.

I learned a couple of things while I was walking.

First, going on a pilgrimage isn't just about the destination, stunning as the Cathedral of St. James is. It is also very much about the walking. The walking reminded me that my body is as much involved in my spirituality as my soul. I suppose this should come as no surprise. From the
(Continued on Page 2.)

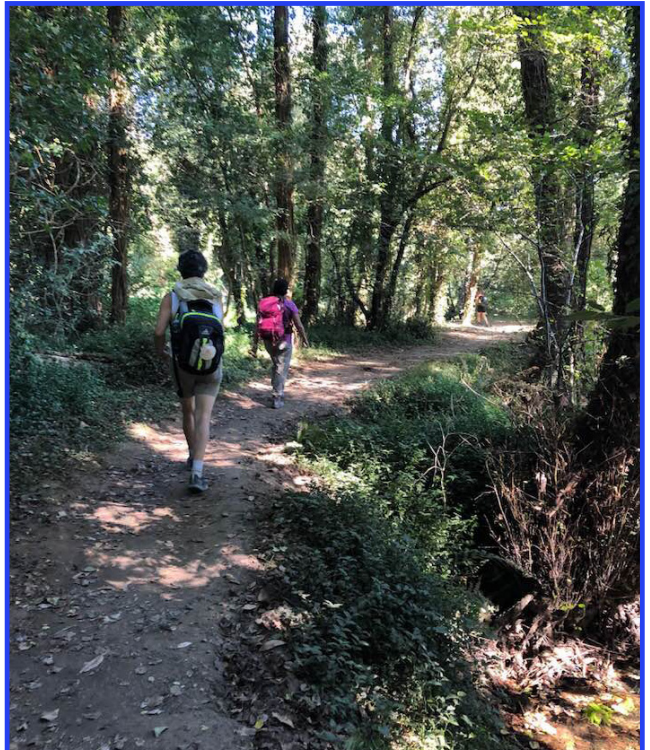


Photo of Christine on the pilgrimage journey
courtesy of Betsey Rice.

(LEARNING TO) WALK, CONTINUED

outset, Christians have claimed that we encounter God in and through our embodiment. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life...” (1 John 1:1). What’s more, the Yahweh-man (Foster’s term for Jesus of Nazareth) invited all who wanted to see God’s reign to hit the road with him. To walk.

And second, whenever I and my fellow pilgrims found ourselves unsure about which way to go, whether it was at the junction of narrow lanes in a village, on the far side of an underpass or on the main drag in a city, if we looked around, maybe waited until others caught up, someone would spot a yellow spray-painted arrow on the pavement or a telephone pole; or one of the yellow-shell-on-dark-blue ceramic tiles in the wall of a building or on a stone cairn. The way we were to go always became clear. And we kept walking.

Now that I’m home, I find that walking reminds me of walking. And whether it’s because I’m stuck writing a sermon, or my heart needs easing, or simply because it’s a beautiful day and Gracie desperately needs to get out, the rhythm of my feet brings back that feeling of being at home and at peace in this divinely designed human body-self. And I am filled with gratitude.

You can read Christine’s “travelogue” of her pilgrimage and see some of the stunning photos from her journey on the following pages.



Faithfully,
Christine+

PILGRIM MEANDERINGS

by Christine Purcell

Through her pilgrimage, Christine's daily journal entries were published on the Parish of St. Matthew Facebook page. Please visit our page to see many more photos and to learn much more information about the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage.

GETTING TO GO

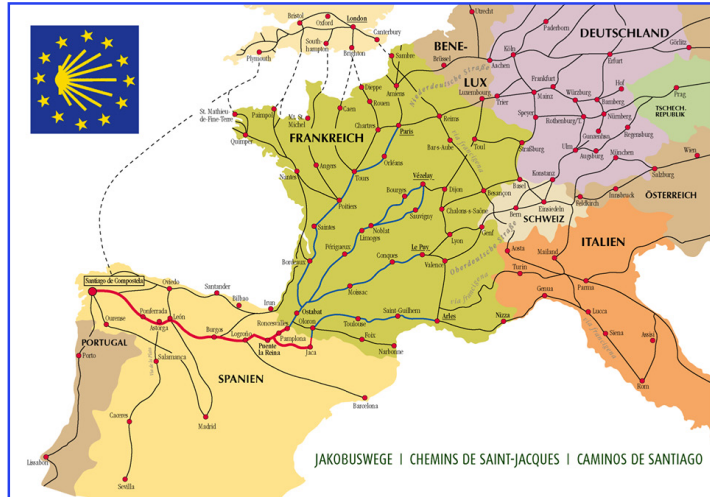
Yes, after crazy busy summers, these two intrepid travelers are at it again, seizing the opportunity to reset, refresh, renew. Destination: Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

Christine's flight from LAX was smooth as silk; Betsey's from Boston, not so much. Delayed by thunderstorms, she skidded into the glitzy Toronto airport just in time to say "hey, great to see you, looks like it's time to board!" We found our seats and stowed our stuff, only to discover along with the flight crew that there was a problem with catering (yes, really) that meant a four-hour delay.

And the fun was just beginning. After finally landing in Porto, Portugal at about 3 pm local time, we grabbed our bags and found our way to the Metro, where two Portuguese women behind us in the ticket line took pity on us, even after we confessed that no, we weren't English, but Americans. Once we were on the train, Christine's phone rang; it was the manager at the hotel where we would shortly be checking in. They had double booked our room, he said apologetically; he had arranged for us to stay somewhere else. Was it nearby, we asked, since we were supposed to be meet up with friends at his place? Well, no, about a 15 minute cab drive away, he was so sorry, but it was a five star hotel...! Okay, we said (I mean, what else can you say?) - see you soon.

We arrived at the hotel around 5 pm, took off our shoes in the lobby, and sipped on the delicious Port that above mentioned manager provided. Once our six fellow travelers appeared, we strolled to a nearby plaza for a delicious dinner outdoors accompanied by a mournful saxophone, just like in the movies. Upon our return, the manager handed us into a cab bound for our replacement digs - truly gorgeous room on the 14th floor where we crashed for the night.

Are we there yet? Not quite. When the alarm went off (at what felt like the middle of the night) we pulled ourselves together and walked to the station a half mile away where we met up with same six friends and boarded a bus for Tui, just across Portugal's northern Spanish border. Arrived in time to check into our hotel, add the last two pilgrims to our merry band, wander over to an outdoor cafe in the shadow of the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assuncion, enjoy another delicious meal and do some sightseeing in the older quarter. After an amazing dinner finished off by complimentary aperitifs, we found our way back to the hotel and sank into bed. Tomorrow, with our Credenciales del Peregrinos in hand, we begin walking. Buen Camino!



PILGRIM MEANDERINGS



PILGRIM MEANDERINGS

PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY ONE – PORTO TO PORINO

Fortified by a delicious breakfast, we followed the yellow painted arrows and scallop shell markers out of Porto around 9:30 am. Before long we were out in the countryside, passing by stone houses, open fields and vineyards, lots of vineyards. There were options along the way - places where we could elect paths through woods rather than sidewalks through industrial parks, and we chose them every time. We were not alone - passing or being passed frequently by pilgrims of all ages, most of whom smiled back at us and said "Buen Camino!"



Our destination was Porino, a small town about twelve miles to the north/northeast. And by the time we arrived, around 2:30 pm, we were tired, hungry and ready to sit for awhile. Our hotel was a couple of miles out of town; fortunately the manager retrieved us from the small restaurant where we had gathered. An hour later we were in the swimming pool, rinsing off the dust and weariness in its cool depths.

Not surprisingly everyone was ravenous for dinner. When all twelve of us (yes, we picked up two new friends) descended on a small family operated restaurant, the long table was soon covered with plates of salad, varieties of sausage and seafood (baby squid, anyone?) and delicious bread; and we cleaned nearly all of them. Tomorrow will be slightly shorter (perhaps 1/2 mile, no more) but more elevation gain. Hoping for a great night's sleep, we sign off with much love.



PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY TWO – PORINO TO ARCADE

Sixteen miles. Really. We were mentally prepared for about thirteen, and finally figured out where the problem lies: the tour materials tell you how far it is from town to town. But reaching the next town is not the same as getting to the hotel on the far side of that town. No matter, we did it: mile after mile, through rural villages, under woodland canopies, along well trafficked roadways, up hill and down, we kept walking, until we finally reached the sea - an inland bay of the Atlantic Ocean in the city of Arcade.

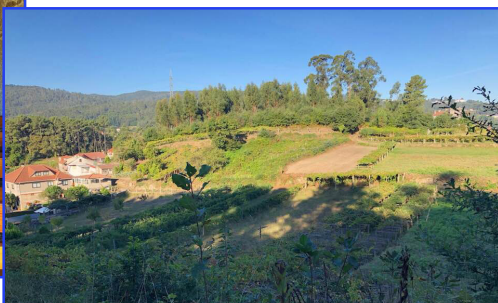
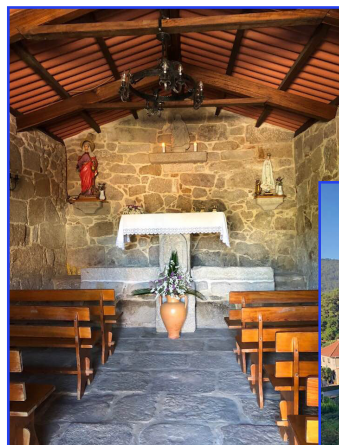
With three days of travel under our belts, our band of ten has become a band of friends. Every one on the trip knew at least one other person, but no one on the trip knew everyone else. It's been a wonderful experience, unwrapping the gift of companionship together as we have walked, rested, laughed and eaten together. And there is still more. For now, though, footsore and perhaps a bit overfed, we'll be signing off.

PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY THREE – ARCADE TO PONTEVEDRE

Our third day on the Camino was blessedly shorter - a mere 8.5 miles. We set out from Arcade, through a small residential neighborhood and out into the countryside. Our route traced the ancient Roman road, some stretches still paved with original ancient stones. Our elevation gains were mostly in the morning; when we decided to stop at a market/bar we were pretty hungry. Simple food - fresh bread, thinly sliced ham much like prosciutto, creamy cheese and garden tomatoes, with just a bit of olive oil and salt. Absolutely delicious! Finished off with coffee with milk, and a refill of water bottles. Fortified, we covered that last couple of miles pretty quickly and were on the outskirts of the Pontevedre by 2 pm.



Pontevedre is a provincial seat, with an historic district along the river. There in La Iglesia de la Divina Peregrina - the Sanctuary of the Pilgrim Virgin, pilgrims receive prayer cards asking Mary to watch over them "con ojos de misericordia", eyes of tender mercy. In its shadow stand the Convent of San Francisco, with gardens in front, and a large plaza. We found a great place for dinner; its charming young owner introduced us to his beautiful five-year-old daughter, served us a series of smaller plates of scallops, calamari, pork (both spicy and mild), salad and a desert to die for. A rounded scoop of some kind of whipped cream/cream cheese/curd combination drenched in a burnt caramel sauce. As we were finishing, with a flourish he placed a heavy glass bottle of thick liqueur and a tray of shot glasses on the table. His friend makes it, he said. It tasted like kahlua, blended with herbs - so good.



Betsey as always is posting her amazing photos on Facebook and, because she is kind, including a couple of mine. I am sharing them, so please take a look at some of the scenes. Tomorrow we REST.

PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY FOUR – RESTING IN PONTEVEDRE



So here's a question: how is it that on a day we are supposed to be taking a break, we wind up clocking 7 miles? Answer: when the place (Pontevedre) has a picturesque and interesting historic district that is a delight to tour on foot, and there is a river that winds round it with wonderful bridges and an actual river walk.

It was a great day. We started late, having done lots of laundry (another question: when is a bidet not a bidet? When it is a laundry sink...!) and found our way to the old market, a huge building on the river where local fresh fish, meats and flowers were available for sale in open stalls. Check out Betsey's photos (shared by Christine) on Facebook and you will be amazed. And then there were the spices. And the chocolates.

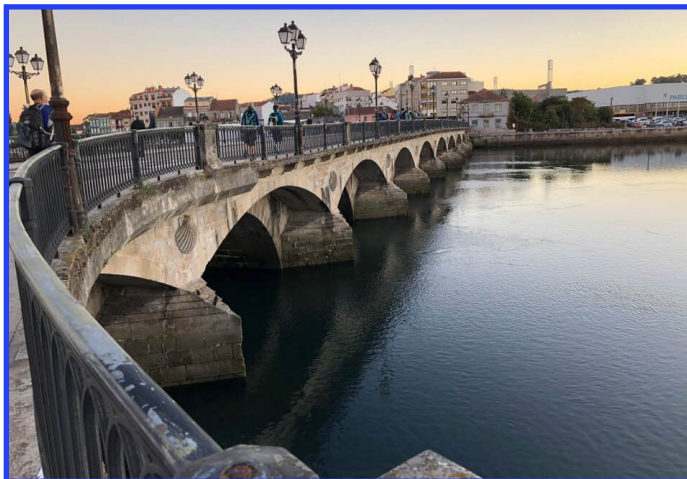
A perfect late lunch outside a small cafe not far from the Basilica de Santa Maria Major held us over until dinner - we returned to the same restaurant and our new friend did not let us down. If it seems like we are obsessed with the food, it is because we are! It's easy to give oneself permission when the days involve so much walking; and, it would be a crime to pass up such incredible food and delicious wine on a gorgeous outdoor evening in the shadow of a cathedral. Rested and oh so satisfied, we crashed into bed. Tomorrow we walk...



PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY FIVE – PONTEVEDRE TO CALDAS DE REYES

Today was long and hot. Not initially - we started shortly after the sun rose, around 8 am, and the temperature was perfect for walking. But by the time we got to early afternoon, we were hungry and the sun was HOT. What's more, somehow on that stretch of the Camino cafes were few and far between. Footsore and weary, with at least 10 miles under our belts that included a lot of macadam, we found a late lunch not all that far from our day's destination - Calda de Reyes. The good news was when we finally arrived at our hotel, we learned that there are natural hot springs there, which fed the large swimming pool! Even better, surrounding the above-mentioned pool (whose water was delightfully warm) was an extensive grape arbor. Never would I have imagined that the view from my chaise would be of fragments of blue sky framed by grape leaves. Amazing.

Two more days of walking lie ahead. Tomorrow we will reach Padron, about 13 miles; and the following day (Friday) is a long last push to Santiago. In a strange kind of way, it is as if we are just "hitting our stride."



PILGRIM MEANDERINGS

PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY SIX – CALDA DE REYES TO PADRON

I bet you all are wondering what we did today. Drumroll, please...we walked. Another fourteen miles at least - the various walking apps in the group do not agree on the exact amount. Most of it was just beautiful, fewer vineyards, more woods, occasional lambs and horses out in the fields. Once again we started just after sunrise which comes late in this part of the world; it is still quite dark at 7:30 am. Chilly and clear, with the sun gradually warming us up. By around 11 am we were due for a “bano-break” and came upon a coffee bar that was packed. A group of young men were playing the guitar and singing Frank Sinatra songs “My Way” and “New York, New York”. They were reading the English words off their phones and laughingly stumbling over the pronunciation. So fun!



We met a couple of interesting pilgrims - Christina from Venezuela who is working as a fundraiser for an NGO in Columbia, looking forward to seeing an aunt in Santiago and a sister in Barcelona; and Mike, from Georgia, who, though he cracked a rib falling backwards while taking a photo of one of the Camino crosses along the way, is determined to finish and joined us for a couple miles.



Once again, the hotel was on the far side of town. No matter, though, that just means fewer kilometers tomorrow, our last day. Next time we write, it will be from Santiago.

PILGRIM MEANDERINGS: DAY SEVEN – PADRON TO SANTIAGO

On this amazing final day of our pilgrimage, we began early. We had many miles to cover, somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen, the last couple in the city of Santiago itself. Plus, the Bishop of the indigenous Anglican Church in Spain was driving up from Madrid to celebrate Eucharist with us at 5 pm.

During the early hours we moved pretty quickly. For one thing, it was cold! Starting out around fifty degrees, we didn't see the high sixties until close to noon. Some of the route was again in wooded areas, but more of it was through smaller villages off the main road north from Padron.



After lunch, the last four miles seemed to take forever. At last we were coming up the main avenue leading to the top of the hill where the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela has stood for centuries. Past a beautiful park, across into the medieval old city, narrow, angled streets and pilgrims everywhere. Around a final corner and into the huge plaza in front of the Cathedral. It is truly stunning, a massive facade between two towers covered with ornate stonework stretching toward the sky.

We had just enough time for beer, hard cider and Pilgrim Cake before entering the Cathedral and finding our way to the small side chapel where the Bishop Juan Carlos and his assistant, Rev. Colin, were waiting for us. After an intimate service together, we proceeded to the office where you get your Pilgrim Certificate. We left our paperwork, had dinner, and then returned to pick it up. Finally, following a short walk (1/2 mile?) we checked into our small hotel, marveled at the view of the Cathedral as night fell, and crashed.



Thank you all for sharing this unique and deeply meaningful journey with us through these postings and Betsey's photos.

Pilgrimage photos courtesy of Christine Purcell's traveling buddy, Betsey Rice.

