

Fr. Anthony is away walking the ancient pilgrimage route of the Camino in Spain.
Below is his fourth report of his journeys.

Step by Step along The Way (Week 4)

Last Sunday was Mother's Day in Spain. Happy Mother's Day in Australia for this Sunday. We are continuing our westward march towards Santiago de *Compostela* and entering into a *final week*. Some days have been tough and exhausting; others, easy and (relatively) relaxing. It is interesting how a 16km walk can quickly come to feel like a stroll in the park. Every day is different – every hour is different along the Way. As we have travelled along, many things have come to mind. Some of these thoughts will take a little while to mature, but as we turn towards our destination, three things in particular are crystallising for me: the rhythmic freedom of pilgrimage; the gift of companionship; the necessity of surrendering. These hold true, not only for the Camino, but also for the pilgrimage of life as well.

It is surprising for me how easily the routine and concerns of the life have vanished away. The things that occupy my everyday living now feel very far away. It won't take long to return to normal with a thud, but that's not the point. Distance gives us perspective and that is what the rhythmic freedom of pilgrimage is all about. We enter into a different mode of existence, a different way of being, if only for a short time, and the narrow confines which control our thoughts and imagination melt away. At least, when we return home, we will carry with us the memory that other ways of "thinking" and "seeing" are possible, and that is what the rhythmic freedom of pilgrimage provokes. Each day, we get up and walk, but with a certain sense of freedom to concentrate on one thing – the day's journey ahead. In normal mode, we can look too far ahead in life, as if all things depend on us. The rhythmic freedom of pilgrimage deepens a sense of providential care. My hope is that this deepened sense will remain with me beyond the journey's end.

I am grateful for the gift of companionship. Some of the people that I am walking with have been close friends for a long time, others I know well, one or two I hadn't meet until the beginning of the walk. One of my sisters and brother-in-law have now joined us for the last week of the trek. Sometimes these sorts of journeys can be claustrophobic and smothering, but there has been a great spirit of freedom and companionship among this group. We begin each day's walk together, but soon spread out, quickly establishing our own rhythm and pace, sometimes walking alone or with others, meeting up somewhere along the way, and then arriving at our next destination in our time. The evening meal becomes the place to share war stories, experiences, sights, and prepare for the next day. This experience of companionship makes me grateful for all who have shared my walk across a whole lifetime.

Finally, there is the necessity of surrender. Weather is the one thing that we have no control over – and we have encountered most things that the weather can throw at us (barring extreme "weather events", of course – although we did have a hail storm the other night). If the day's journey requires a walk in the rain or the heat, then that is simply what is necessary to do. If you leave something behind, lose something along way, break something (hopefully not a bone), then you simply must make do as best you can. If a hill needs to be climbed, or worse, descended (believe me, going downhill is often more dangerous and painful), then you must follow the path ahead. This is not a form of passivity, but a surrendering. Passivity leaves you unaffected by what is happening around. Surrendering, on the other hand, requires involvement - leaving aside the need to be in control or dominate your environment or others. I am learning that "surrendering" is an active participation in and formation of life's circumstances. So with these thoughts, onward to Santiago! Again, happy Mother's Day.

Fr Anthony