



There was this woman named Angela, who, just over ten years ago, became one of the countless many children of God over the last thousand years to venture on one of the most treasured pilgrimages in the world, El Camino de Santiago, meaning “The Way of St. James,” which culminates at the cathedral that has stood in its current form for over 800 years, where tradition has it, the relics of the apostle are buried. And now, it is believed that around half a million people each year step into a journey that

eventually leads them into northwestern Spain, some for adventure, some for personal growth, some for an escape, some with a little bit of faith thrown in for good measure, but all of whom with the God who insists on being with them, and with us, on all the various paths taken in this rather interesting terrain of a world.

But for Angela, at the time, this particular journey of a lifetime was meant to be a celebration of her 80th birthday. And, of course, life got in the way, as it often does for all of us travelers, no matter how well we plan in advance. Deaths in the family emerged, causing Angela and her daughter, who insisted on joining just to be on the safe side, to delay the start. The path they chose could have been 500 miles’ worth that would have seriously tested Angela, especially with her type 2 diabetes, being worried how her feet would handle the not always smooth ground, and so the mother-and-daughter team narrowed it down to 60 miles instead.

Nevertheless, such a life-shaping experience isn’t just about personal growth or individual thrill-seeking, but about the other pilgrims found on the way. Angela said,

Many we met were at a reflective time in life dealing with personal issues. One man whose wife had recently died carried a red candle which he would light at each overnight stop. Some pilgrims were dealing with serious illness, but did not want that to define them. There was something surreal about walking the ancient route. Removed from the familiarity of everyday life, people sometimes walked alongside others telling their stories and explaining their very personal reasons for doing the pilgrimage. We heard stories of heartache, loneliness, illness, and loss ...[as well as] tales of twisted knees, sprained ankles, and infected blisters. Yet people dusted themselves down, bandaged themselves and just continued.

Perhaps a rather fitting telling about all of us, as best we can, when life or the world tends to get in the way of whatever plans made, including our intentions for how we hope to be the living disciples of today, trying to find our own path in bringing a bit more of God’s love to life, attempting to be our own version of James from long ago, struggling to humbly emulate the Lord who adds the needed hope for all the journeys. As for James, the story so goes, that when Pentecost happened long ago, when the Holy Spirit unleashed the power of numerous languages to spread the Gospel of hope all over the world, James was divinely nudged to head to the modern day Spain and Portugal and a portion of France. It is believed that he carried out years of ministry to the people there before returning back to Jerusalem, where, unfortunately, he became the first apostle martyred for spreading too much hope, too much love, too much of a change-up to a world that insisted on operating with power and greed and silencing anyone who got in the way. The tradition, then, has it, that close friends of James then brought his body back to the

place where he brought that hope and love and an eternal change-up to the just as precious children of God thousands of miles away, and so eventually grew El Camino de Santiago.

For Angela, as with the countless many who have completed the sacred trek, there is a Pilgrim Mass at the ancient cathedral. She wrote,

it was a sacred time of worship and of sharing...alongside people who had pushed themselves beyond fear, anxiety, blisters, wounds, and even serious illness and heartache. Nobody is free from pain on the Camino...[And] in the amazing Santiago cathedral, as the priest announced the moment to share the peace of Christ, it gave a whole new depth of meaning to the privilege of sharing the meaning of Christ. Pilgrims who were tired, elated, and humbled, hugged each other and even wept together at the awesome privilege of traveling a unique journey alongside very special people, yet ordinary people, who were true travel companions.

Again, another fitting telling for all of us who come to depend on peace and love and embraces shared from our beloved fellow travelers on this mortal road; a reminder that in the eyes of God, saints are not reserved for the eternal rest, but that the saints still beautifully live among us now.

One of the treasured symbols of El Camino de Santiago is the scallop shell, which is rather prominent along the coastline there, but one of its most important reminders is the multiple paths that can be taken, not just with the over dozen ways for the pilgrimage to northern Spain, but for all of us, to remember the countless ways we can humbly but beautifully follow Christ, and share the hope and love and grace and mercy to a world that still longs to not only hear it, but to see it in this earthly midst. And to recognize that even if this painted portrayal may not necessarily show it, but to rest assured, that such paths can be and are definitely over rather difficult life terrain, and will not be quite as straightforward as others, but the Gospel insists that all are still cherished by God just the same, and the same promise applies: that no matter where you go, Christ will never, ever leave your side. So, in whatever way you live as a most precious saint of God in this world, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!

For Angela's full story:

<https://caminomemories.com/camino-stories/angelal2014/>