

Spain 2016

For the first 3 weeks of October I was invited to be a participant in an Adult Pilgrimage to Spain organized by and for staff members of Cerdon College. The trip to Spain was unforgettable. An incredible country with an even more incredible history, I don't think I really prepared myself for the cross culture/religious mix that has marked Spain and its history. It was an experience that will take me some time to reflect upon and process.

We covered a big part of Spain, beginning in Madrid, visiting Toledo and Segovia (where Teresa and John of the Cross once lived), then south to Granada which included a day at the Alhambra Palace, then over towards the west to Seville then up through Salamanca, Avila and onto Santiago de Compostela. From there we went further north crossing over the top of Spain towards San Sebastian (near the Pyrenees). We then made our way down heading west towards the coast, stopping in Pamplona, Sabadell, Manresa, Montserrat and finally arriving in Barcelona from where I came back to Sydney.



There were many highlights for me - Granada and the Alhambra Museum, Avila, Santiago de Compostela and Manresa to name a few. For obvious reasons I choose these places. Alhambra with its history of Roman, Moor and Christian influences was fascinating and it was certainly special to enter the convent where St Teresa entered and lived most of her life. To be able to see her influence and the different convents and monasteries of both her and John of the Cross' reform certainly gave me an understanding of the why of the reform and the influence such a reform had on the church of Spain during that time.

Santiago de Compostela is where St James is entombed and where pilgrims from all over the world find their joy and comfort at reaching this place after days, weeks or months of walking the different journeys of St James commonly known as the Way or Camino.

The final highlights were the visits to Manresa and Monserrat, both places with significance to St Ignatius of Loyola. The cave at Manresa where Ignatius began to write his Spiritual Exercise, now a place of prayer was certainly a very meaningful, peaceful and prayerful place for me. A sort of sanctuary towards the end of a long journey. I was sorry not to have been able to spend more time there. The town of Manresa itself, was filled with the person of Ignatius. The 'man in sackcloth' as he was known who was inspired by and inspired the people of his time there.

Looking at the trip as a whole, I found being exposed to the history and influence on Spain of the various cultures and religions together with such things as the Inquisition and the

recurring wars a lot to digest. An overwhelming aspect which I felt while traveling around and visiting many Churches, Basilicas and Cathedrals was the power that our own Catholic Church has had throughout Spain's history especially shown in the so

many architectural styles of churches that we encountered (including the most ornate, gold leaf laden churches that I have ever seen) and in some cases the harsh and powerful ways in which Catholics came in possession of them.

Our discoveries and personal reflections led us to great discussions over the meal table as each of us in the group grappled with the day's discoveries and what effect it has on our own understanding of life, history and God within it all. A truly blessed time for me, ABSOLUTE PURE GIFT.



The cave in
Manresa



From the top of
Monserrat