

We cannot always take a long lunch or let go of all that is on our to do list for the day. Yet it is important to remember that the weight of our life is not to be measured in what we accomplished or how much got done but whether we learned to live in the light of God's Love. It is not always easy to recognize and respond to the moments that deserve a bit more time, a bit more presence of attention, a bit more awe. But we are a bit more capable of recognizing them when we are aware that they exist.

That notion of living in the light of God's love leads to one more story. That of a student whose knee was having a hard time holding up to the strain of walking 12-16 miles a day. She was doing her best and was bound and determined to power through it. As it is with many of us who are generally quite capable, she was set on being able to manage it all herself. On a day when it was hard to keep up, she told her compatriots to go on ahead, she would catch up. This was to mask the fact that she was on the verge of tears from the pain and the frustration. This, though, landed her in the midst of a small group of pilgrims from Mexico. Despite their lack of English and her poor Spanish, they saw through her toughness. Soon enough one of the ladies from the other group had an Ace bandage out to wrap her knee. From there they walked with her and sang her songs to

keep her spirits up. She now knew what it was to be loved in the midst of one's vulnerability, one's weakness; to be loved and cared for as one is, not as we wish we were.

Christ came to encounter us as we are, where we are - not because of our competence or our capacity to achieve. If we wait until we have it all together in order to allow Christ in, we miss out on the fullness of the encounter that is being offered. We miss out on the fullness of the encounter that we long for.

We don't all have the time and the resources available to head off to Spain for a long walk through the countryside. However, there are spaces and places in each of our lives where we can - if we make a bit of effort - slow down, take notice, open up and increase our ability to be present to God, who is already present to us.

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A Walk That Leads  
to Awareness

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This past summer, I was privileged to accompany a group of students from the University of Portland on a pilgrimage. We were off to Spain, to walk the Camino de Santiago. It is an ancient path that leads from many different places to the Cathedral in Santiago, Spain and the remains of St. James, the apostle.

Hundreds of thousands of people walk this way every year. Our group walked the last 140 miles over the course of nine days. For many people it is an opportunity to be alone for a bit; to allow the solitude and the rhythm of walking to help them slow down and reflect. For me there was far less introspection than I expected. Most of this was due to the fact that I was more of a shepherd than a pilgrim. I was responsible to the students I was with. They were fairly self-reliant; however, they were also quite interested in talking and processing their thoughts along the way. In this walking and talking with the young people that I was with, I was offered several insights that enhanced the journey.

One of our number would joyfully greet each and every person whose path we crossed with the standard Camino greeting of, "Buen Camino!" This of course was the greeting that many people used, but she offered it with such gusto that it was noteworthy. She explained to me that she started the Camino

waiting for the grand insight that it would offer. She walked the first several days patiently waiting for some sign or experience or insight that would be her grand nugget to take away from it all. She eagerly awaited the great way that God would be revealed. When that great inspiration did not come, it occurred to her that God would not be revealed in a grand way. God would be revealed in the everyday ways of sunshine, beauty in nature, the ground under her feet,



and most especially in the people she encountered along the way. If each of those people were to be God revealed to her, she was determined to greet them as such and seek to be a bit of God's love revealed in turn. Thus her enthusiastic,

"Buen Camino!"

How true it is that we long for great and marvelous ways for God to be revealed to us. We seek for fantastic ways or opportunities that God might be made manifest in our lives. But if we have eyes to see, we would notice that God is there, all around, every day. When God did enter into the world in the most unimaginable way - in the flesh, to a people, in time - it was so in sync with the regular movement of life that so many people did not notice. Part of experiencing the wonder of God that we long for is slowing down a bit and taking in the fact that the grace of God ebbs and flows all around our everyday life.

This slowing down is something that I know I struggle with. I am one who tends to move quickly from one thing to the next. Even in a situation such as the Camino where my only task is to take a long walk, I have the tendency to look to get the task done so that I can then relax. This does not lend itself to soaking in the wonder of what we move through on a day to day basis. Another day along the way, I was walking with two students and we stopped to have lunch at a roadside home/café. I, of course, was expecting this to take about 20 or so minutes and then we would be on our way once more. However, after settling into our table we became aware

that the house dog had a puppy who was days old. After making known their enthusiasm for the presence of such a puppy, he was placed in the hand of my student companions. Their pure joy in this encounter caused me to realize that

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this lunch was going to take a bit longer than normal, and it did. We were there for about an hour and a half. Yet it was worth it. Those two students had issues that were weighing heavy on them. That lunch with that newborn puppy did a great deal to offer a bit of relief from their struggles in life. It was important in that moment to not worry about a schedule. Slowing down and being present to the moment was the most important thing to do there.