

# IGNATIAN PILGRIMAGE - INPUT

## INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimages are a treasured custom in our spiritual heritage. Throughout the years thousands of spiritual seekers have ventured far from the walls of their comfort zone to places where they can deepen their understanding of themselves and God. In his autobiography, Ignatius speaks of himself as the Pilgrim (although only once in the Letters)

Following his conversion, he undertook a pilgrimage from Loyola to Barcelona that shaped and transformed his life and that of the church. It was his own dreams and question marks about life that inspired him to take that journey. This practice was so transformative that he required it of his companions *“The third experience is to spend another month in making a pilgrimage without money, but begging from door to door at times, for the love of God our Lord, in order to grow accustomed to discomfort in food and lodging.”* [67], because for Ignatius leaving aside all the hope and expectation that they might have of money or other created things, they might place it whole-heartedly, with true faith and intense love, in their Creator and Lord.

## MAIN IDEAS

Ignatius had resolved to initiate a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and as his first objective he travelled to Montserrat. He passed an all-night vigil before the Black Madonna after laying down his sword as a symbol of his conversion to a new way of life. He then made a detour to the neighbouring village of Manresa where he experienced profound mystical illuminations and started conceiving the Spiritual Exercises.

The Camino Ignaciano (the Ignatian “way” or “road”) is the route that he walked in 1522 from Loyola to Manresa. The route is about 340 miles long. Find more about this route on the following website: [www.caminoignaciano.org](http://www.caminoignaciano.org). Iriberry and Lowney wrote a book on this pilgrimage where they tell us “let this book guide your steps through the path Ignatius took... but allow your ideas and prayers to be the ones that guide your heart. This Journey changes his life and it also changed history.” Therefore, we can learn from Ignatius experience but we need to make our own journey, especially taking into account that for Ignatius it was very difficult reaching a new comprehension of himself: he had to go through a personal trauma, a pilgrimage and a profound conversion, as well as great sufferings and joys.

In the end, Ignatius’ pilgrimage was an opportunity of healing and inner freedom as well as a reorientation to new values and goals. His trip energized his mission and led him to experience God.

In her book *Seasons of Contemplation*, L.M. Browning writes “many believe a pilgrimage is about going away but it isn’t; it is about coming home. Those who choose to go on pilgrimage have already ventured away from themselves; and now set out in a longing to journey back to who they are”. Many times, like Ignatius, we feel the need to go away from what is familiar to look inward and focus on matters of the soul. In this part of the journey, we are invited to extend this tradition and go on foot to a meaningful destination of our choosing. Our journey will be an occasion to engage not only our mind but also our spirit and body and seek God in All Things, in the surrounding landscape, the surprises that the road carries as well as the people we meet on the way.

For Pope Benedict XVI, places of pilgrimages “make visible, almost tangible, how our forefathers encountered the living God, how HE did not withdraw after creation or after the time of Jesus Christ, but is always present and works in them so that they were able to experience HIM, follow in his footsteps, and see him in the works HE performed”.

## FINAL THOUGHT

### God’s Angel to Prepare the Way

“See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says”.

– *Exodus 23:20*

## EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Reconnecting with Ignatian pathways and pilgrimage traditions
2. Deepening participants’ understanding and appreciation of Ignatius’ pilgrimage experience and connecting with this experience in their lives
3. Taking time for walking, personal meditation and communal reflection as a complementary experiential tool to theoretical learning

*“Always remember this: life is a journey. It is a path, a journey to meet Jesus. At the end, and forever.”*

**Pope Francis**