

The Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: A Closer Walk

Introduction



*I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go.
(Psalm 32) 8.*

This is an installment of a book posted by the author on:

<http://gryjhnsn.tripod.com/santiago/id13.html>

The reader is encouraged to print each chapter for personal use.

The book is designed for printing in two columns on 8-1/2 x 11 (letter-sized) paper and allows for printing on three-holed punch paper for loose-leaf notebooks. It also will shrink to fit A4 (European) paper and notebooks.

Additional resources for the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage are posted by the author at:

<http://gryjhnsn.tripod.com/santiago>

Note to Third Edition: The photographs and notes have been updated to include material from the author's *Caminos* during the years 2003 and 2004. The Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop of Santiago, which was posted for pilgrims during the Holy Year of Santiago 2004, is a particularly helpful spiritual resource for pilgrims. See posting at: <http://www.archicompostela.org/Peregrinos/Inglés/Peregrinsantiago.htm>

Gary Johnson,
January, 2005

Introduction

I visited Santiago de Compostela as a tourist in December 2000. I was gripped by the spiritual atmosphere of this town in the northwest corner of Spain, and resolved to return as a pilgrim. This book is a devotional preparation for the journey I hope to make in the company of friends, both from the United States and from Spain. May it be of use to anyone planning to follow the road to Santiago -- *el camino*, whether as a pilgrim or as someone open to learning more about the faith that has inspired and guided pilgrims.

Even as a tourist, joining those who had arrived from around the world at the pilgrim's mass in the cathedral was a moving experience for me. Representatives from different language groups offered prayers. I had seen some cathedrals empty of worshipers in Europe, but dozens of rows in the Santiago Cathedral were filled. Some present wore the traditional hat of the Santiago pilgrimage. Some carried the pilgrim's cane. Many bore a shell, representing the town's location near the Atlantic coast in Galicia. There were travelers with backpacks who must have just stepped off the road and into the church. The day I visited happened to be a feast day, and mass ended with the use

of the *botafumeiro*, the massive incense burner that requires eight men to swing it above the heads of the worshipers.

My visit to Santiago de Compostela had an immediate effect on my spiritual life. I spent a weekend alone in that city, and I returned to the cathedral again and again to pray. Even when I arrived early in the morning and had corners of the cathedral to myself, I felt surrounded and uplifted by the prayers of the pilgrims past and present. I found myself praying for more than I had ever prayed for before, without shyness and without hesitation. I became hungry for more, thinking of new topics and returning again and again.

Below the main floor is a chapel with a Roman-era sarcophagus. When discovered in the ninth century, it was hailed as holding the remains of the Apostle James the Great -- "Santiago." The Apostles had been witnesses even "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and local traditions had preserved reports that Saint James had preached as far away as Spain before he returning to Jerusalem, where he was "killed by the sword" (Acts 12:2). Medieval legend held that his body miraculously had been returned to the land where he had preached. I can testify that this chapel is a spiritually charged place, as pilgrims have known for centuries.

I also joined the line of worshipers who climb the stairs behind the high altar to pass behind the great golden statue of Saint James. This stream is visible at all times when the cathedral is open, including during religious services. Everyone embraces the statue from behind. When I did this myself, the feeling was evocative. It recalled a child hanging onto a parent's neck, a safe and secure feeling of being borne that we all can remember. It brought to mind the image of Christ as the good shepherd, bearing a lost sheep on his shoulders. There is a color picture of

that scene indelibly etched in my mind from the first Bible given to me by a beloved great-aunt. Later on, I considered how much deeper the feeling of being borne by a good shepherd must be to an actual pilgrim at the end of a long physical journey.

When I returned, I felt an impulse to share this experience. I was particularly moved by the response in Spain. My involvement with my firm's new office in Madrid took me there frequently. I made the happy discovery that one of my colleagues, Juan Jiménez-Laiglesia y Oñate, had made the pilgrimage twice before. He told me how significant both journeys had been for him, and that he and his wife had named their youngest child Santiago. Juan offered to join me, if I could find the time to make the journey myself. I accepted his offer.

The resolution was made, but how to prepare? I searched for a book of daily Bible readings selected with this pilgrimage in mind that would offer structure and companionship for the interior part of the journey. There are many books in print on the *camino de Santiago*, but not the kind of devotional I had in mind. I decided to compile one myself, as preparation for my friends and myself.

The writing would be based on both spiritual significance and physical facts. A pilgrimage has three parts: the preparation, the journey and the impact on the life of the pilgrim. The journey itself is the most intense part of the three, but not the only part. All are connected. The journey itself will be more meaningful following the right preparation. The impact will be greatest if reaching the pilgrimage site is a climax, but not a conclusion to a faith journey.

A pilgrimage reminds us that life is not only about the destination, it is about the journey. Yes, Santiago de Compostela

is a beautiful old city, and the intensity of joining prayers with those of other pilgrims for more than 1,000 years is overwhelming, but a pilgrimage is not about the destination alone. It was on the road itself, the road to Emmaus, that the risen Christ appeared to his disciples. He walked with them and talked with and told his companions of the kingdom of God. It was on the journey that they encountered Christ.

A journey across the top of Spain is not a stroll in the park; it takes dedication. The journey itself can become an act of worship. There are many opportunities for prayer along the way, both with others on the road and in solitary withdrawals. Music is a traditional part of the pilgrim's life and is an integral part of worship. The many churches and monasteries on the road have been visited by worshipping pilgrims over the centuries. The journey as an act of worship is reminiscent of other scenes, most notably the periodic journeys of the people of Israel to Jerusalem, accompanied by the chanting of psalms, including special psalms for ascending the holy mountain.

A pilgrimage journey is the most graphic reminder we can have that our life as a whole is a pilgrimage. Each of us is on a journey with God, and a journey to God. We spend a few weeks on the road so that we can understand better that we are strangers in a strange land. We always are in need of food and water, the material kind and the spiritual kind. We seek companionship, with each other and with God. We rely both on our physical and interior conditioning.

My brief visit to Santiago also brought home certain facts of life. It rains a lot in that region, in every season but especially during the colder months of the year. Like Jerusalem itself, the city is situated on a hill, and there are hills along the way to Santiago. The roads leading to the city go through villages and towns and

past farms and pastures. Old bridges and narrow stone pathways remain, many originally built for pilgrims. We no longer draw water from wells, but finding fresh water is necessary, even if from plastic bottles. The pilgrim's nagging fear at the end of a long day's travel is that there will be "no room at the inn."

The book is written with a whole year in mind, a year that will include the actual journey, but also will include devotions for the periods before and after the journey. (See "How to Use this Book.") I thought it would be a relatively easy matter to choose the Bible passages most appropriate for a pilgrimage year, but I was wrong. Pilgrimage themes, images and figures are everywhere in the Bible: themes such as travel, sustenance, guidance, exile and deliverance; imagery such as roads, mountains, bread and water; and figures such as shepherds and lost sheep. To my surprise, I even found that the Bible is filled with references to the foot! I might be so bold as to say that the Bible as a whole is written from the perspective of the pilgrim.

The sense of travel and movement affected the lines I drew around the excerpts, especially from the Gospels. Official Bible lectionary verses often exclude the connecting details that set the stage for the telling of a parable or the performing of a miracle. Whenever possible, I included references to location, and to departing and arriving. These are an essential part of the message for the pilgrim.

This book is not meant to replace devotional aids that are guided by the liturgical year. It certainly is no substitute for attendance at church services that include readings set by the lectionary used in Christian denominations. Nevertheless, I decided that the devotional life of a pilgrim over a special one-year period has a rhythm of its own. My choices are personal, including the assignment of selections to specific dates. The Bible readings are

simply that -- excerpts with no commentary. The English text is chosen from the New Revised Standard Version. Some days have two selections.

So this is the preparation for a spiritual journey I plan to begin myself on July 25, 2003, with the hope of beginning the actual pilgrimage that autumn and continuing the readings afterwards until the following July 25. I am confident in my spiritual preparation; what has me worried is the physical challenge. An out-of-shape middle-aged American male, one confined most days to a desk chair and a computer, has some real conditioning to do before setting foot on the *camino*!

The illustrations come from along the *camino*, and especially from the city of Santiago de Compostela. Explanations and credits for the illustrations are at the end of each chapter and in a separate appendix, so as to avoid distraction from the Biblical texts themselves. There also is an index to the Bible verses that are included in the book.

I am particularly grateful to the Instituto Cervantes, which is the source of most of the illustrations, for its permission to use them in this book. They are posted on the website of this Spanish cultural body that promotes the teaching of the Spanish language and the understanding of the cultures of Spain and the Spanish-speaking world. On that website, the photographs can be viewed in their original context and formatting, with very high

production values. I strongly urge those interested in the *camino* to visit the Institute Cervantes' "Centro Virtual Cervantes" website at:

http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/camino_santiago/

I wish you every success on the *camino de Santiago de Compostela*. May you experience your pilgrimage to its fullest over the period of a year. May you prepare yourself well and may there be a lasting impact in your life.

Gary Johnson,
Evanston, Illinois
September, 2001

Music is a central part of the pilgrim's experience, and I choose as my theme the American gospel tune, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee." G.T.J.

Words: Unknown author.

Music: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," traditional American folk song

I am weak, but Thou art strong;

Jesus, keep me from all wrong;

I'll be satisfied as long

As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.

(Refrain)

Just a closer walk with Thee,

Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,

Daily walking close to Thee,

Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Through this world of toil and snares,

If I falter, Lord, who cares?

Who with me my burden shares?

None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.

(Refrain)

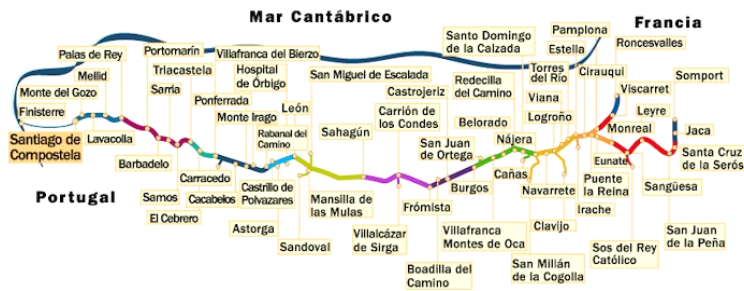
When my feeble life is o'er,

Time for me will be no more;

Guide me gently, safely o'er

To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.

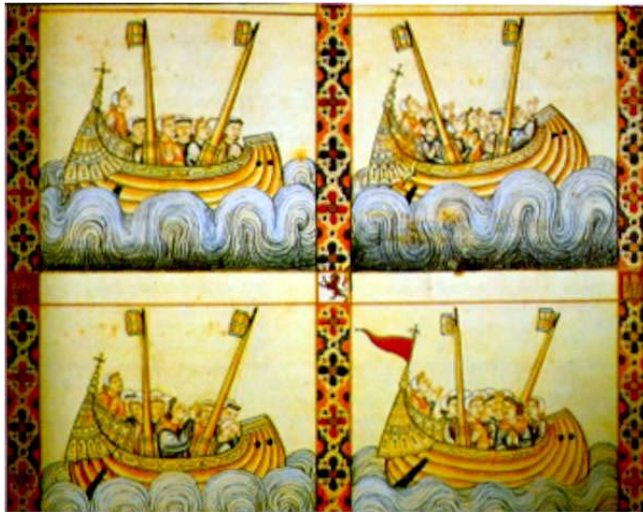
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Today's pilgrimage usually starts on Spain's border with France, but earlier pilgrims considered the pilgrimage as beginning when they left home. Many took a nautical route to reach the Galician coast.



Transporting the remains of Santiago.



Pilgrims on a nautical route.

Sources of Illustrations (Title Pages, How to Use this Book and Introduction)

Map: Map of major pilgrimage routes beginning in France. Cervantes Site. http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/camino_santiago/(*Mapa detallado.*)

Nautical picture: Pilgrims arriving by sea in Galicia on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims from the British Isles and from the French port of La Rochelle made their pilgrimage by sea. http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/camino_santiago/finisterre/finisterre.htm

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Transporting the body by boat: Treasure area, crypt, Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Depiction of carrying the body of St. James from port of Jafa to Iria Flavia (A Coruña), by disciples. October 2004. Photograph by author.



*Outside Portomarin.
The author's group during their Camino of
the Holy Year of Santiago 2004.*