

“El Camino de Santiago de Compostela”
The Way of Saint James

Once again, another year has begun by offering the first in a series of ‘conversations’ at the Assumptionist Center in Brighton, MA. Continuing the Center’s commitment to be a place where in word and action, “we can learn together and discuss what it means to be Church.”

This first conversation of the academic year focused on the pilgrimage of “El Camino de Santiago de Compostela” in Spain or “The Way of Saint James.” Following the Sunday’s liturgy, the community, residents and several guests gathered in the living room to hear this topic addressed by our resident Nicholas Collura, who, this past summer, walked 650 miles of the Camino in 6 weeks, starting in the south central France to Compostela.

Nicholas, a student at BC, is pursuing a Master’s in Divinity.

By way of background, Nick shared some of the Camino’s history. Dating back to pre-Christian Celtic times, the practice of making pilgrimages as ‘following the stars’ was very popular. After the 7th century and the invasion of the Moors, Christians looked for a new pilgrimage**.** They believed that St. James, evangelizer of Europe, is buried in Compostela. By the 9th century, the pilgrimage to this town became very popular. In the Middle Ages St. Francis of Assisi and Dante were among its pilgrims. During this time, the Camino was one of three pilgrimages favored by Christians which included Rome and Jerusalem. However, from the 16th to the 19th

century it declined in popularity during the Reformation and Enlightenment. It did experience a resurgence in popularity during the 20th century thanks to a few travelogues and the recent film, “The Way,” starring Martin Sheen.

As Nick recounted, the daily walking began very early in the AM and covered an average of 17 miles a day for most of the pilgrims he met. Along the way there was much singing, sharing of personal stories and periods of silence for a variety of reasons. What drew people to this pilgrimage was also wide and varied: some were athletic hikers, some were searching for friends and friendship, some needed time and space in order to make significant decisions in their lives or for others, simply to pursue a desire to encounter God more profoundly in their lives.

It was for the latter reason that Nick chose to make the pilgrimage. During this time, he also experienced the exquisite beauty and joy of creation, recognizing God’s presence in both the ‘beyond’ as well as in the intimate. The true journey for him was interior during periods of walking in solitude as in a desert encounter.

In summation, while reflecting on the overall experience of the pilgrimage, Nick saw the connection of where we are today as pilgrims, 50 years after Vatican II began and the reality of who we are called to be as a Pilgrim Church. In that light, the Camino provides reflection on the nature of pilgrimage for the modern world and the thirst of contemporary Europe especially even during a time of secularization.

After an animated discussion, during which others shared their experience of making the pilgrimage or for some, sought information in their desire to make it in the future, we moved into the dining room for a nourishing brunch and the continuation of the conversation.