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NT770: Spiritual Pilgrimage

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Pilgrimage Journal

It's taken a few days to fully process the magnitude of lessons learned over the past few weeks while on the Camino. I still find myself chewing on words that Ron and Wanda shared with us such as "the only way is through" and "I'm not where I want to be, but I'm not where I used to be". There was a rhythm of life that I discovered through walking 12 – 18 miles every day. Countless conversations, hours of processing, and walking at my own pace brought my musings to attention.

The first lesson that the Lord taught me was that "it's a lot easier to go through life when I'm healthy". Walking the Camino is a lot easier when walking in full health. Prior to embarking on the Camino, I was on a mission trip in Haiti. The trip was powerful but towards the end, our entire team got sick from either unclean food or water contamination. We all ended up with high fevers, continuous diarrhea, chills, and aches for multiple days. Also, due to a tropical storm, we were grounded in Haiti for an extra three days. After several delays and uncertainties about flights, our team arrived home on Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup> at 3AM; the flight to Tui, Portugal was that same day at 10PM. All this to say that I was battling sickness and continuous diarrhea throughout the first 8 days of the trip. Walking the Camino was a lot more physically demanding due to the constant dehydration and inability to fully absorb water and food. I was thankfully and surprisingly able to recover as each day went by, and as I felt my strength returning, I felt the Lord joking with me that "it's a lot easier to walk forward in life when I'm not holding in my crap". I want to live being aware of whatever unnecessary burdens that I am carrying. I

understand, literally and profoundly, that walking through life is a lot more difficult when pain is left unaddressed. It's better to stop, rest, deal with my issues, and get healed instead of forcing a pace. Thankfully, I did not have any undignified accidents while walking, but I do recognize that walking in this manner for longer durations, without any improvements, could have led to a messy situation to say the least. My first lesson was the importance of getting healthy.

The first lesson led to my second; "the Lord wants to wash shame from my soul". There was a day that I walked ahead of the group and went alone. The reason I did this was because I wanted to process the shame that I knew lingered in my heart. I've received a lot of healing and deliverance from past traumas and open doors, however, I knew and sensed residual thoughts of shame and guilt that still reared it's ugly head in occasional moments. I walked ahead to pray and cry out to God transparently my frustrations, anger, and shame. I yelled out at many points while I was alone crying out "why am I still wrestling with this?" "How can I be freed of this?" "What's wrong with me?" After a few hours of angrily walking and praying out loud to God, I felt Him speak to me and affirm His affection for me. A lot of my mistakes in the past revolved around women. The Lord showed me that even today, when I felt that I had failed in even minor ways to be a "good husband" to my wife Deborah, shame and guilt would come up. I was working to try to prove that I had changed, or that I was a different man from my past self. The Lord told me that this was unhealthy and that I needed to let this unhealthy expectation of myself go. He told me that my first allegiance was to be to Him alone. And that His love for me was not dependent in any way on what I could do for Him; He affirmed that He actually liked me and considered me a friend. For me, this revelation was healing; God actually likes me! Putting God first would allow all my other relationships with Deborah, my future children, friends, and myself to be in healthy order. The shame I had felt from my past could only be deeply washed

off by soaking in His presence and hearing the truth over and over again that God loves me; He actually likes me as a person. I've been sitting with this truth and have been finding deeper healing. Naturally, I am considered a confident person. My past failures poked holes in my confidence. I realized up through now, my confidence was rooted almost entirely in myself. But what would it look like for me to be fully confident in the Lord? This is what He has been teaching me. And from this place, I have been able to walk in deeper freedom, abandonment, and unshakeable confidence.

The third lesson the Lord spoke to me was about my original design. The Lord spoke this to me when I was sitting at the lighthouse in Finisterra. I had just thrown my rock, that I had written shame on, over the cliff. Sensing that shame had been released from my soul, I began asking Him how the Lord originally designed me? What did I look like when fully healthy? He told me that there were four marks for me to recognize when I was living shame-free in my original design. He said that He made me to live with unhindered passion, bold authenticity, above offense, and demonstrative of His mercy to those around me. There were many ways that these four traits of mine were warped and twisted from shame and my broken responses to my failures. But when the Lord spoke these attributes to me, something broke through in my soul; I began to see what the Lord saw in my healthy self. I recognized these attributes within my soul when I was a child. When the Father was speaking to me and calling forth this in me, I felt that I was reclaiming something that I had lost.

There were a few other honorable mentions regarding lessons learned on the Camino. Walking for long durations of time definitely began to hurt the feet. But walking with good company was a lot easier than walking alone. Walking with others helped the time pass and distance seem shorter. Walking alone may have occasionally been faster, but it was objectively

more difficult. Also, walking by other fellow pilgrims on the Camino and making time for conversation reminded about how in life, many of us are moving forward towards the same destination. Our paths may cross for short periods of time, but sometimes those short moments can be geysers of life and refreshing that help spur each other forward. Also, I kept thinking to myself that it's about the journey; not the destination. It was key to pause, look around, and enjoy the beauty of nature all around while walking. Rushing towards the destination solely would have made me miss the beauty that was all around me.

The Camino was a life-changing journey that spoke profoundly of our ongoing pilgrimage of life. We are called to do it with God and one another. We are called to enjoy the journey. We are called to be sensitive to our well-being. We are called to be free. We have His grace to navigate the transitions of life. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to walk the Camino de Santiago; I look forward to walking it again.