

A PLAN B A Pilgrim's Prayer Journal
for future Spiritual Camino Seekers

CAMINO

2020

by
Br. Dan O'Riordan

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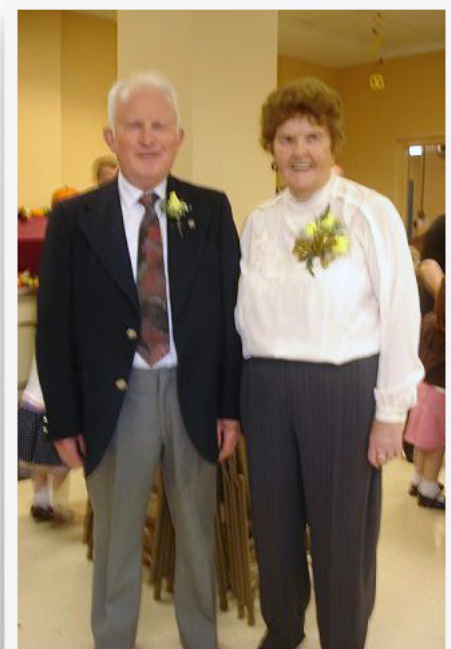
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DEDICATION

This Book is dedicated to my parents, Connie and Rita O’Riordan, my first and greatest teachers as well as all those that have been part of my journey of life.



My parents on the occasion of their 50th Wedding Anniversary.



Gathering of Family and Friends at Our Lady's Well Ballyhea, Cork 2017.

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*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took
the one less traveled by, And that has made all
the difference.”*

- Robert Frost

INTRODUCTION

For a long time I have had the longing and burning desire to follow in the footsteps of thousands of pilgrims over the centuries and make the pilgrimage of walking the Camino de Santiago. A number of my closest friends have followed the way of St. James on the scallop shell trail for the 500 miles across the Pyrenees, from the French town of St. Jean Pied de Port to the “end of the world” at Finisterre. After years of hoping, it seemed like 2020 would allow me the opportunity to finally make my pilgrim’s trek across Spain during the month of May.

By January, I began to make some of my plans a reality and got my flights booked as well as bookings for my first few nights of simple lodging along the Camino. I arranged my flights so that I could finish my pilgrimage by spending some time in Scotland and Ireland. I booked a couple of nights on the island of Iona, just off the shore of Scotland. St. Columba founded the first monastery on the Island of Iona in 563. It is often regarded as the center of Celtic Spirituality, for which I always had a great affinity. I also booked three nights at a hermitage near the ancient monastery of St. Kevin, located on the outskirts of Glendalough in the Wicklow mountains in Ireland. I wanted to take a couple of quiet days after my Camino to process the experience as well as get some rest and prayer time before traveling south to Cork to spend a few enjoyable days catching up with family and friends.

As Robert Burns once said, “The best laid plans of mice and men often go astray”. The world that we knew in January and February of 2020 quickly came to a screeching halt by March, as the world was overtaken by the Covid-19 pandemic. Countless lives were lost and so many suffered and continue to suffer. Most of our world remains under lockdown and restrictions. Essential workers, who sacrificed their safety and the health of their families, such as the doctors, nurses,

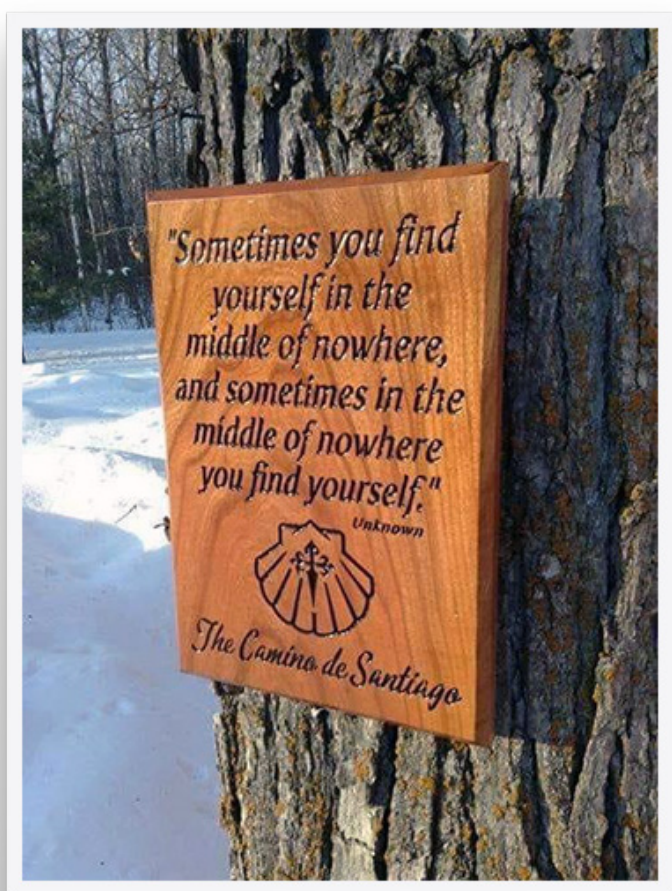
first responders on the front lines as well transit workers, police, fire and grocery store workers have become the true heroes of these sad and tragic times.

We, Marist Brothers, have had our own heroes who have worked diligently to provide loving care and meet the needs of our many retired Brothers living in our retirement houses. We have only to watch any news update to realize how blessed we have been considering what this virus has done to so many in senior living housing. With the help and intercession of Mary, our Good Mother and the continued hard work of our community leaders, nurses, health care aides and staff, may our Brothers continue to be spared and protected.

Like most during these past few months, my travel schedule came to a complete stop and all work quickly shifted to working from home and learning the latest advances in technology, such as Zoom and Gotomeeting. As the weeks quickly passed, I canceled all the bookings for my upcoming Camino as well as work trips to El Paso, Chicago, Miami and Lawrence, MA. I was especially graced during these months to get some time away from the epicenter of the virus in NYC by being able to enjoy several prayerful and relaxing days at our Marist Brothers Center in Esopus. It was especially meaningful to be there for the days of the Easter Triduum and join our ten Brothers and Lay Marists that live on the property, a few local Brothers from Poughkeepsie as well as Henry and Ellen for some sacred and meaningful prayer services and some great meals.

As May grew closer, I knew that I had already blocked out the month to be away so I had very little scheduled on my work calendar. As I reflected on the reality of not being able to travel to France and Spain for the Camino, I decided to attempt a Plan B Camino in two stages that would allow me to stay safe but also respond to some of the yearnings of my heart for solitude, long walks with God and the opportunity to be a pilgrim. We, the Marist Brothers, have a log cabin retreat house and camp on Lake Ossipee in NH. I enquired and found out that the Log cabin and camp would be completely empty during the first two weeks of May. I booked the cabin and began to prepare for my time away by packing some journals and spiritual books I had planned to use on my

Camino. My hope was that at some point in the fall, if travelling were safe, I would utilize my unused airline ticket and then travel to Spain to finish my Plan B Camino by doing the last section from Santiago to Finisterra. What follows in the pages ahead is my spiritual journal from my Plan B Camino days in New Hampshire. I hope that I will add a final chapter when I reach the “end of the world” in Finisterre. I pray that my sharing of these reflections from this experience may assist other pilgrims, who are walking their own spiritual journey.



A Sign Along the Camino De Santiago

“I will not follow where the path may lead, but I will go where there is no path, and I will leave a trail.”

- Murial Strode

Day One May 4th

And so on May 4th, the very day that I was to start my Camino in St. Jean Pied de Port, I arrived at Camp Marist at about noon. I quickly got settled and put away some food provisions that I had shopped for on my way to Camp Marist and had a quick lunch.

By 1pm, I drove to my first trailhead on a nearby trail called, “Castle in the Clouds”. By 1:30pm, I was ready to start. Before embarking, I used Holy Water from Knock Shrine and the following Blessing to begin my Plan B Camino. The Blessing comes from, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, by Christine Valters Painter, which was one of the books I had put aside for these days.

Blessing...

Feet—I bless my feet, asking that they might carry me forward in this season to new possibilities

Hands—I bless my hands, asking that they might help me to give form to creative expressions

*Heart—I bless my heart, asking that it be open to wonder and
numinous moments*

Throat—I bless my throat, asking that I gain courage to speak my truth

Lips—I bless my lips, asking that I take in that which is most nourishing

*Third eye—I bless my third eye (middle of my forehead), asking that
intuition and the wisdom of dreams help to guide me.*

Blessings on the journey ahead!

I wished myself a Buen Camino and I took to the woods...

It was good to finally begin. I slowly added more miles to my daily trek and hoped to get an early start each day to have the afternoons and evenings free for prayer, reading, journaling and simply resting in the loving embrace of our God. Today's hike didn't waste any time in allowing me to quickly experience God's majestic creation with it's beautiful overlooks of nearby lakes surrounded by many mountains, some still snow capped. I have been hungry for this extended solitude for a long time. As I hiked I was reminded of my daily treks, during my last sabbatical in 2009, a one hundred day retreat at Sangre di Christo retreat center in NM. After my ninety-minute hike, I returned to Camp Marist and on the road down to the log cabin was greeted by a ten-point buck (that was absolutely amazing). I stopped and watched him for the several minutes he stood there, until he retreated into the deeper woods.

I began my late afternoon in one of the rocking chairs in the log cabin that looked out at beautiful Lake Ossipee and the surrounding mountains. It is a familiar spot that I have often enjoyed on previous trips and one where it is easy to quietly sit while listening to God and sharing my soul with Him. My first spiritual reading for today came from the *Essential Writings of Thich Nhat Hanh* and the section, "Life is Miracle", which struck an immediate and deep cord within me.

“Our true home is the present moment. To live in the present moment is a miracle. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now.

Peace is all around us - in the world and in nature -and within us”.

My second spiritual reading was from *Soul of the Pilgrim*. Suzanne Luntz, my Spiritual Director, had offered me this title many months ago when I was first planning out my Camino. The themes of the book fit perfectly with the pilgrimage of the Camino. Recently, I was again graced to discover that the author was offering an eight-week online retreat based on the book, beginning after Easter. I signed up for the retreat, enjoyed the first few weeks of exercises and looked forward even more to utilizing the insights from this online retreat during these days of my mini Camino.

As I re-read chapter one, I was again asked, “What is the desire of my heart on this pilgrimage?”

I desired to deeply re-connect with God by actively living each of these days in the present moment and focusing on Him by seeing Him in nature, allowing Him to enter my heart through spiritual reading, journaling, reflecting and listening.

Other aspects of this chapter that stood out for me are the ideas that within each of us there is “an inner pilgrim,” and “inner monk” that call us to leave our normal settings and live for a time in a sacred space. By allowing these inner parts of our being to become alive in us, we also become more open to hearing the voice of God. The very act of making a Pilgrimage allows our entire life to become an “intentional journey”.

It had barely been a full day yet and I already felt that I was embracing the inner pilgrim within me and had entered into an intentional time of finding God and myself in “new ways”. Thoughts and words from other wisdom figures also came to mind as I grew deeper into these days of quiet solitude and reflection. I recalled the words of the Trappist monk

and priest, Fr. Thomas Keating, who once wrote,

“Silence is God’s first language. Everything else is a poor translation.”

I remembered Joseph Schmidt, FSC, who was my Spiritual Director at Sangre De Christo. In his book, *Praying our Experiences*, he writes:

“Contemplative prayer is the name given to the form of prayer that doesn’t primarily focus on reflecting on the Scriptures or the life of a saint, or even focus primarily on expressing our feelings and sentiments toward God. Rather, in contemplative prayer, we simply rest in the presence of God in loving, listening awareness. We are available and open to the reality of union with God and rejoice in that union.”

Lastly, I related to a few words from one of our world’s modern day saints, St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta, who reminds us that,

“God speaks in the silence of our hearts. Listening is the beginning of our Prayer.”

My afternoon quickly turned to evening. I prepared a simple meal of salad with some meat and enjoyed dinner looking out at the tranquility of the lake. After dinner I went for a walk to the other side of the property, the beach area, and took in a beautiful sunset. I used the finger rosary of my good friend, Br. Bob Andrews, on my walk back to the log cabin, remembering him and entrusting many others to Mary in that rosary prayer. Br. Bob died on April 7th from the Coronavirus. He had been in Cabrini Nursing Home for the past fifteen months after a bad stroke. In high school, he was my track coach, but he would also become a great mentor and one of my closest friends in life. Like generations of other “harriers” before me, I can still hear his voice echoing in the back hills of Van Cortland Park encouraging me to “run the crest”. Some of my happiest memories with Bob were all the Christmases that we spent together with my parents and his sister. I am sure my mom was glad to see him arrive in heaven so that she could get him to make some of her favorite cherry cranberry pie.

I spent the remainder of my night writing this journal entry and soon retired for hopefully a good night of rest.

As I prepared for bed, I enjoyed the quiet of the little living room on the second floor next to my room; I lit a candle to close out the day with my Examen prayer. I had much to be grateful for on this first day of my Plan B Camino, most of all the opportunity to have this time of grace and solitude with my God. I again remembered many folks in my life whom I wanted to entrust to God in prayer, especially two of our Brothers in hospital, Patrick McNamara's sister, Maureen as well as my uncle in Ireland who continues cancer treatments.

I closed my night by pondering a question from week one of the *Soul of a Pilgrim* retreat... "What is a 7 word prayer or mantra that I might use for this pilgrimage experience"?

My manta these days will be: "Jesus, allow me to live profound love".



First Sunrise of my Camino.

“Be Still and Know that I am God.”

- Psalm 46

Day Two May 5th

My bedroom was on the second floor overlooking Lake Ossipee. I awoke early this morning and was immediately invited by God to join him for daybreak with what would be a majestic sunrise over the water. I went down to my rocking chair and enjoyed an hour of magnificent and radiant colors. Watching the sunrise, I utilized one of the daily exercises from my online retreat which is a movement meditation exercise similar to Ta'i Chi. The movement meditation I used this morning focused on one of the themes from chapter three of *Soul of a Pilgrim*, namely "Crossing the Threshold". The idea suggests that as one begins a pilgrimage, one must let go and leave behind the world one knows and cross into the unknown. As the sunrise continues to paint the morning sky with fabulous colors, I listen to the Celtic song, "The Deer's Cry", and am struck by the line "I arise today through God's strength to pilot me". I look forward to the day ahead and journeying with and being piloted by God.

Inspired by the sunrise, I prayed a prayer from the Celtic spirituality book, *Praying with the Earth*, by John Philip Newell:

PRAYER OF AWARENESS

*Light within all light
Soul behind all souls
at breaking of dawn
at the coming of day
we wait and watch.*

*Your light within the morning light
Your soul within the human soul
Your Presence beckoning to us from the heart of life.*

*In the dawning of this day
Let us know fresh shinings in our soul.
In the growing colors of new beginning all around us
Let us know the first lights of our heart.*

*Great Star of the morning
Inner Flame of the universe
Let us be a color in this new dawning.*

I drove to the parking area for the trail leading to the Mt. Roberts summit. The drive was relaxing as I listened to and joined in with Taize chants. By 6:30am, I was parked and ready to begin my hike up Mt. Roberts. I paused for a moment to recite a short prayer I had recently read in the book, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, by Esther De Waak:

“Bless to me, O God
The earth beneath my foot
Bless to me, O God
The path whereon I go

I began my hike and quickly realized the terrain was much more difficult than yesterday's trek. I recalled that some of my reflections and readings yesterday from Thich Nhat Hanh focused on the practice of remaining in the present moment. Today's hike was a good workout drill to re-emphasize that concept, as I had to focus carefully on each step since the terrain was rocky, uneven and quite steep. If I looked too far ahead, I would easily fall and probably end my Camino with a bad injury. So I deeply focused on simply the next step, then the next step, then the next, ...

After the first hour of hiking, I reached the first overlook. The views were spectacular and it seemed like the horizon of distant mountains went on forever. I enjoyed again the feeling of my leg muscles burning from tough hiking and looked forward to the feeling of reaching the summit. After two other brief stops to take in the increasing panoramic view, I finally made it to the top and took a few minutes for a quiet prayer of gratitude. I took a few pictures and sent them to my community and a few others, who I knew were praying for my journey and then began my careful descent back to the car.

After returning and getting cleaned up, I enjoyed a late breakfast with an old friend and mentor. Thomas Merton continues to be a great source of inspiration and has been an important contributor on every retreat I've made over the past thirty years. And without fail I am again struck and impacted by his words, this time from *The Wisdom of the Desert*.

“A certain philosopher asked St. Anthony: Father how can you be so happy when you are deprived of the consolation of books?

Anthony replied: My book, O Philosopher, is the nature of created things and any time I want to read the word of God, the book is before me”.

My hike this morning was another excellent chapter in God's book. I remember that during another retreat I made some years ago on Celtic spirituality, I was affirmed when I realized that so much of Celtic spirituality is rooted in seeing God in nature and embracing the earth. Those moments, when I can be alone in nature, are when God usually speaks the loudest to me. I am so grateful for these days to again be at one with my creator. I also contemplate the many similarities that exist between Celtic spirituality and the spirituality of Native Americans. I offer God words of gratitude for my lifetime of Irish connections, as well as the opportunity I had many years ago in Novitiate to work with the Lakota Sioux tribe in South Dakota and learn many of their rich traditions. I offer the names of many from these parts of my history, for God to give them all the graces they need and deserve, in their respective lands.

I spend a little bit more time focusing on *Soul of the Pilgrim* and it seems that I must read this book slowly as so many insights from the book offer me great fruit to ponder. One of the passages of the book that I focused on this afternoon was:

- “There is a story from Abba Moses, one of the Desert Fathers, who when asked by a new monk for a word replied: “Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.” Desert wisdom reminds me that my monk’s cell, which is really a metaphor for the inner cell of my heart, is the place I am called to sit and be present in the moment. When I do, I discover the mystery of myself and of God. This is the place of the holiest of pilgrimages.”

This quote calls me to continue this Camino pilgrimage to go deeper into listening to God’s voice in the inner cell of my heart and to see him in the many gifts and ways he is constantly revealing Himself to me through books, songs, prayer, moments of grace and especially in nature.

I re-read chapter two, which focuses on packing lightly for this pilgrimage and also on the theme of simplicity and living simply. It reminds me to only carry what is essential for the journey.

Q: What can I set-aside during these days in order to travel lighter during my Camino time here?

- Work will be waiting for me when I get home, so leave it there.
- Live simply, enjoy simple healthy meals.
- Unplug from the world: no computer or television.
- Practice living in the present moment, not focusing on future plans, job, trips, etc.

Q: What do I need to carry with me these days?

- Water for hiking, a first aid kit, a phone for taking pictures of nature or emergency.

- A deepened awareness of practicing living in the present moment and paying careful attention to little things such as sounds and sights of nature.
- The intercessions that I carry in my heart as I share them with God during these days of intimate conversation and journeying with Him.

Q: What can I set aside when I return home to lighten my continued life's pilgrimage?

- Simplify lots of areas of my life such as getting rid of excess clutter, like the boxes of old pictures in my room at home, which could all be scanned and put on a storage device, hundreds of books sitting on my shelves that could be donated to folks who may need them, and anything I haven't worn in the past two years that I can donate to our homeless brothers on the streets.

Q: What do I need to carry with me when I return home?

- Continued daily time in nature wherever I am.
- Carving out more personal time for prayer, reading, and journaling.

As I reflect on the question of simplicity from chapter two, I am struck by the passage:

- "When I try to live as a monk, I commit to living my life with as much integrity as possible".

When I think of the Brothers I knew who were the most "real" and who truly lived their lives in a way that witnessed integrity, faith, prayer, hope, and love, so much of it came down to the fact that they were able to really keep it simple. I fondly remember and continue to be inspired by men like Leo Richard, Ron Marcellin, Steve Urban, Regis, John Alexis, Berkie and of course, Alfred George. Each of them had profound influence on countless lives, yet each was the simplest of

Brothers who faithfully lived his vocation joyfully and fully each day. My heart so often desires to live like that, to be a simple presence to young people each day. I miss those days of impacting the lives of young people. Too much of my time is now spent doing mindless, and at times unfulfilling, administrative tasks. Most of my days are taken up with countless meetings, finances, health care issues, lawsuits, travel yet I know this work is important and a service to our Brothers. I have been lucky in the past five years to be able to block out some meaningful weeks that helped sustain me and that proved to be rewarding and deeply life giving. Cooking at our special needs camps in Esopus, working the Molloy track camp in Vermont and my annual service trip to Appalachia are usually the three best weeks of my year. During those weeks it is so easy to live simply and feel like I am being a “Brother”.

I enjoyed a nice simple supper and again went for an evening walk over to the beach side of the property to enjoy tonight’s sunset. I utilized Bob’s rosary once more. When I pray the rosary, I do it a little differently in that I simply name people in my life who are in need of prayers and say a Hail Mary for them. After praying for family members and friends, I entrusted to Mary all our heroes who have kept our Brothers safe during this pandemic. I especially remembered Dominick, Steve, Maria, Sue, Larry, and all our health care aids, housekeepers and cooks at Champagnat Hall as well as Alex, Herb, Greg, Charlie, Danny and our Health Care Aids in Florida. My walk finished before the growing list of people I wished to put into the heart of Mary ran out.

I closed my evening with a lit candle and my evening Examen prayer. I am so grateful for the gift of these days, for my body’s tiredness from today’s hike and for the ease of being able to unplug and not waste these precious days and moments. I pray that tomorrow will continue to be as graced-filled as today. I will continue to go deeper into living in my inner cell and allow God to whisper again into my soul. I close my day again repeating my mantra for these days: “Jesus, allow me to live profound love”.



Trail sign on first full day of Hiking.

*“I took a walk in the woods and came out taller
than the trees.”*

- Henry David Thoreau

Day Three May 6th

I rose early again today to enjoy God's daily morning show which not only featured a multi-colored sky with mirror image reflections on the water, but also the added feature of a calming fog slowly moving across the lake.

I listened to Vince Ambrosetti's "Ave Maria" as the opening song for my morning prayer. My daily reflection from "Everyday Serenity" by David Kundtz, focused on some words of wisdom from a mother:

"How are you today, Mom?"
"I'm fine, if you overlook a few things."

Relationships and life can be so much richer if we can learn to let go of the small imperfections and oddities of those in our lives. How much more joyful we can be when we focus on all the good qualities a particular person brings into our lives or our world and not on the occasional ways that a person may annoy or frustrate us. I reflect for awhile on all the great wisdom my own mom showed in her life and on her ability to always see the best in others, to accept them with all their faults and warts and to be loving to them. In my own life, I ask

for the grace to let go of some built up anger and resentments I have against a few folks in my own life, who have hurt me over the years. In the grand scheme of things, they are trying to be the best people they can and it is not fair for me to judge them because they do not live up to my expectations. This does not mean that I will try to become best friends with them, as that would not necessarily be healthy for them or me. Allowing them to live their lives without my judgments, not only gives them the freedom to be themselves, but frees my heart and mind as well.

I next watch a short YouTube video, “The Great Realisation”, sent to me recently by my good friend, Matt Fallon, about possible positive outcomes that could result for our world after the coronavirus is over.

I will continue to reflect during the day on how I might choose to live differently as a result of these recent times.

I offer prayers to our Good Mother for some folks who come to my mind this morning and close my rising prayer with “It’s a Wonderful World” while I gaze on the lake and listen to the sounds of nearby birds chirping.

I have chosen to hike Mt. Boyne today which is not a long hike, but one that has a steep mile climb up to a highly recommended overlook. I have found the *All Trails App* to be very helpful to me these days. I had downloaded the *Camino App* many months ago to plan out my route across Spain and so it is only fitting that I utilize this one to plan my daily hikes here. Because today’s hike will not be very long and I want to maintain and build up my daily mileage, I decide to do a simple four-mile walk locally before I drive over to the trail entrance.

On the way to the trailhead, I listen to a selection of inspirational and religious music on my phone. One of the songs, “My Own little World” by Matthew West, brought back some good memories for me as was a reminder of my earlier insight from the video how I might choose to live differently or more profoundly after my Camino and when our world opens up again. I had used this song several years ago as part of a Keynote talk I gave at our annual Marist Youth gathering and always

find it to be inspiring and a reminder of how I should focus my life.

These thoughts walked with me today as I began my next trail to gain another perspective and view of God's majestic glory. Not long after starting the hike, I felt like eating my earlier comments about this helpful App. Yes, I'm grateful it allows me to find some awesome views when I get to the top of the trails, but what was supposed to be a pretty simple hike today turned into an almost eight mile and difficult trail. Almost half of it was bouldering and the journey down was worse than the one going up, especially with my knee. Regardless, the view on top was amazing, I stayed safe and I got my daily mileage up faster than I thought I would.

Chapter Three of *Soul of a Pilgrim*, focused on "Crossing the Threshold", a concept which requires one to leave behind aspects of one's life and pass through a symbolic "Threshold" or doorway, which can be a very liminal place opening to a future that is not yet revealed. I very much realize that this pilgrimage has already called me to leave behind and let go of aspects of myself so I can freely crossover into this new threshold in my life to become someone called by God to "live love" more simply, radically, and with greater authenticity. To what and where God is calling me remains unknown. The months ahead shall help resolve some of those questions in relation to ministry. If I must serve as Provincial then I know the road, which will not be easy that would be before me. If I am not elected (hopefully), there is the possibility of many ministry options that could be life giving. But in either case, this pertains only to ministry and ultimately not to the real change that God is calling me to dive deeper into exploring during these days of Camino and pilgrimage.

Some particular aspects of my life that I need to leave behind me as I cross this current and new threshold...

- Over the past two years since I blew out my knee, I have become frustrated to lose the gift that running was for me. It helped me in so many ways, with keeping my weight down, releasing stress, and feeling good physically and mentally each morning after a good workout. Since

my running has now been reduced to slow and short jogs a few days a week, I have chosen some crutches to replace this loss in my life. These have not all been healthy choices. I find myself over-eating and not eating healthy, drinking more than I would when I was training for upcoming races, watching more TV, and at times procrastinating. I desire to leave these aspects of my life behind. In the short three days that I have avoided these habits, I already feel much healthier. I have more energy and no desire to go back to them. Bad choices were numbing internal frustrations I was not taking time to resolve.

I remain patient and happy to allow these days to unfold slowly and continue to listen to where God is leading me.

While reflecting on chapter three of *Soul of a Pilgrim*, I am struck by some of the challenges one might face while on pilgrimage such as the temptation to not fully engage in embracing all that happens during the journey. Will I have the perseverance to keep on this path or will I revert to familiar ways of “self-numbing” so as not to be fully aware of possible ways that God may be leading or moving me?

Reflection: My most recent form of self-numbing has been wasting countless hours watching TV, often even movies or programs I have previously seen. I will fast from watching TV and utilize this time for hiking, watching nature, journaling, reading and praying to allow God to move profoundly into my life these days of Camino.

Other questions raised for me in this third chapter are examining, “on which threshold am I now standing? At this time in my life, what am I leaving? Where am I about to enter?”

Reflection: At this time in my life, I feel I am leaving a time period when ministry and success are key motivating factors in my life and am now moving toward being free to focus not on what I want or need, but rather more reflectively on what God wants from me and needs me to do. I have always felt God has called me to active ministry, but with a contemplative stance towards life. I have often placed too much

emphasis on areas of apostolic ministry at the expense of not being as contemplative as I might have been. If I had, it would have allowed me to be more productive and draw greater meaning from my apostolate.

Another exercise outlined in the book is a writing exploration through Midrash, the ancient Jewish way of sitting with passages of scripture and putting oneself in the selected story or passage. It would be similar to the Ignation exercises. Each chapter of *Soul of a Pilgrim* closes with a scripture passage to apply this practice. Chapter three suggests using Midrash to explore the story of Miriam and Moses just after they cross the red sea (*Exodus 19-21*).

- “When Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen went the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam, the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them: Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea”. (*NIV Version*)

A short passage of my personal Midrash reflection on the above passage:

- As I sit around a fireplace talking with Miriam, she tells me that there will be many days ahead that are unknown, both for her and the tribe of Israel, as well as plenty more days filled with struggles, frustrations, grief and anguish. She explains that is why it is so important to appreciate the present moment and God’s blessing in our lives. We will only rejoice and dance on the day we arrive in the Promised Land, only if we have practiced dancing when brief moments of joy and God’s saving grace come into our daily lives.

In the time of the threshold that will follow this virus as the world begins to re-open, who will be the Miriams of today to lead dancing and rejoicing in proclaiming, “Sing to the LORD, for he is highly

exalted; the terrible coronavirus he has hurled into the sea”?

I also spent some time reading from the book, *With an Eagle's Eye: A Seven Day Soujourn in Celtic Spirituality*, by John Miriam Jones. It talks about “thin places” which are often referred to in Celtic spirituality as places where the “veil” between our world and the world of our ancestors is very “thin”. I reflect on the following passage:

“Pray about your own ‘thin’ places and times. Where and when does God permeate the membrane for you? There are spots and moments which cause all of us to gasp in wonder: a burnt-orange sunset, snow shining on a mountain top, the marvel of music, the roaring waves of a sparkling blue ocean, a communion encounter. But each of you has your own unique and special times and places where the holy has met you at least once and where encounter may seem likely again.”

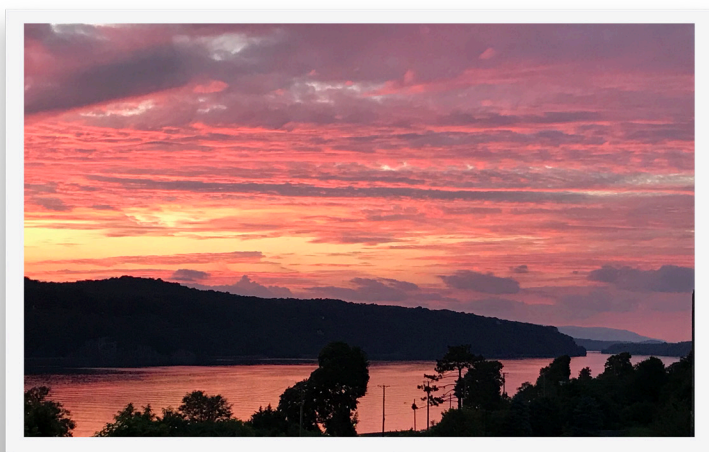
As I reflected on “thin” places that I have encountered, I remembered times when I felt deeply connected to God, all creation and to many of my own “saints in heaven.” Some of these occasions included when I took long walks along the Cliffs of Moher, delighted in some of the majestic views while hiking in the Rocky Mountains, was awed by the beauty of the Grand Canyon and the evenings I watched the sunset over the Na Pali coast in Kauh’i.

Throughout the day I continued to ponder my earlier questions from the morning in regards to my reactions to the video and song I used as part of my rising prayer. I too am hopeful, as the video illustrated, that many people as a result of this shutdown may come to realize that much of what consumed their lives prior to the virus may not or should not be a major priority. God willing, they may choose to live life with a greater commitment to making time for the people in their life they love and be inspired by front line heroes, so they may live with more gratitude for others and more generosity towards those in need. Likewise, as I continued to recall the words of the song, “My own little World”, I thought of simple ways that I could ensure that I don’t miss the most important things in life and ways I want to help others. I started putting some of those insights into action this afternoon by

buying a stack of birthday cards for people in my life with upcoming birthdays. I have never been a great person at keeping up with cards, but it is a great, simple resolution to show the people who matter most how important they are to me and how grateful I am for their presence in my life.

My evening routine of having a simple supper followed by a rosary walk continued although rather than walk the road to the other side of the property, I checked out a trail into the woods near the cabin. The trail was rustic, but I discovered three ticks on my legs upon my return. Luckily, I got them before they could do any damage. I am really enjoying my evening rosary walk for people in my life. It brings back memories of my parents and a number of the older Brothers I knew, who had a lifelong daily commitment to this Marial prayer. I remember my summers as a kid in Ireland when I stayed with my cousins and how the entire family would gather for the rosary many nights before bed.

As evening dusk turns to dark, I write today's journal entry and light my prayer candle to close out my day with my Examen Prayer and my Camino mantra, *"Jesus, allow me to live profound love."*



One of the best Sunsets ever.

*“And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and
find my soul.”*

- John Muir

Day Four May 7th

I awake during the night and find it hard to get back to sleep even though I know my body is physically tired from the past few days of hiking. The words of St. Augustine come to mind, “My heart is restless O God, until it finds rest in you.” Initially, I try to use my Camino mantra as a way to fall back to sleep:

Jesus, allow me to live profound love...

Jesus, allow me to live profound...

Jesus, allow me to live...

Jesus, allow me to

Jesus, allow me

Allow me

Allow me to rest in you

Allow me to let go of those things in my life that hold me back from living the life you desire for me

Allow me to continue to enter this new threshold of my journey

Allow me to go deep into the inner cell of my heart so that I might drink from your deep well of wisdom, compassion, love, and peace.

Allow me to surrender to the future plans you have for me
and be content as that mystery slowly unfolds.

By 3:00am I know that my twisting and turning is to no avail and so I decide not to fight it, but rather to get up and spend some time with our Lord in prayer. I grab a blanket, light my retreat candle and settle into some quiet prayer time with Jesus in the second floor living room.

For part of my prayer, I read a section from one of my favorite books, *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It is the part of the story when the little Prince meets the Fox.

“It was then that the Fox appeared.

‘Good Morning,’ said the Fox.

‘Good Morning,’ the little prince responded politely, although when he turned around he saw nothing.

‘I am right here,’ the voice said, ‘under the apple tree.’

‘Who are you’ asked the little prince, and added, ‘You are very pretty to look at.’

‘I am a fox,’ the fox said.

‘Come and play with me,’ proposed the little prince. ‘I am so unhappy.’

‘I cannot play with you,’ responded the fox, ‘I am not tamed.’

‘What does that mean – ‘tame’?’

‘To establish ties,’ said the fox.

‘To establish ties?’

‘Please tame me,’ said the fox.

‘I want to very much,’ the little prince replied, ‘I have friends to discover and a great many things to understand.’

‘One only understands the things one tames,’ said the fox.

‘Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend tame me.’ ”

I believe this section of *The Little Prince* is filled with great wisdom. I ponder. What areas of my own life do I need to “tame” so as to better understand them? I also reflect on how the fox might be Jesus, who is inviting me to come to a greater understanding of Him and into a deeper friendship with Him.

I feel I have settled into a comfortable prayer rhythm during this “liminal time” of my Camino retreat. I am happy to let go of my world for these days and not think much about what’s next, but simply enjoy the present moments and quality time alone with God.

One of my dearest friends who walked the Camino several years ago, emailed me yesterday to wish me well on my Plan B Camino and to share a prayer she’d found posted on a wall in Santiago while she was getting ready to complete her Camino by walking on to Finisterre.

A Prayer for the Way

By Fray Dino

“Though I had food and water,
A bed and a shower
Though I had been assisted in my needs ...
If I had not discovered God’s love in all this
I have gotten nowhere.
Though I had seen the peaceful river
And walked in the quiet woods,
Though I had been greeted in other languages
And enjoyed the company of my friends,
If I had not found who the maker of such beauty and peace is...
I have gotten nowhere.
If, from today, I did not continue walking in your ways,
Searching and living according to the wise.
If, from today, I do not see in every person,
Friend AND enemy, a companion on the way.
If, from today, I do not recognize God

The God of Jesus of Nazareth,
Who travels with me always
as I journey towards wholeness
I have gotten nowhere.”

My desire and hope is that as I continue along the way of this Camino, I will know that this journey will not lead me “nowhere”, but exactly where God intends me to go. I offer a prayer of gratitude for Maureen, for her prayer offering as well as the many sacred moments I have shared with her on pilgrimages, retreats, and mission trips that we have coordinated together for many young people over the past sixteen years.

By 4:00am I decide to move downstairs to my rocking chair, to continue my prayer time and watch the night sky slowly give way to dawn. To remain in solidarity with the Brothers I live with in our community in Forest Hills, I read the Morning Prayer for today from, *Give Us This Day*. I know they will be using this same prayer later in the morning and will be praying for me at that time. As I read today’s morning psalm, a number of the lines jump off the page and reinforce many of the reflections and insights I had been pondering and praying over the past few days:

The first comes from Psalm 16:

“It is you yourself that secures my destiny.
I will bless the Lord who gives me council,
Who even at night directs my soul.
You will show me the path of life.”

The second thing that comes to me from my Morning Prayer reading is from the daily reflection offered at the end of the prayer. It raises good questions to carry with me and ponder during my upcoming walk.

“But rather in the ever transforming grace of God, who am I becoming? Whom do I love? Whom do I care about?”

As the night sky slowly turns to soft shades of light, I listen to the song, "Make Me What You Will" by David Kauffman and again let Jesus speak to my heart through the words of this great song.

"Take my Heart, make me what you will
Take my hands, make me what you will
Take all that I am and all I will be
I place myself at your altar."

As I continue today on my Camino, I place all that I am and all that I will be at the altars of Jesus and Mary.

The morning sky is cloudy and does not allow for the splendid spectrum of colors I enjoyed the previous two mornings. Still, I savor these few hours of slowly watching this new day come to life with Jesus.

I finish my morning prayers and begin my walk for today. I will drive fifteen minutes to the start of the Cotton Valley Rail Trail and cover ten miles of what I hope will be relatively flat terrain. My legs feel as if I did hike the Pyrenees over the past few days so some flatter ground will be most welcome.

Before I begin my hike, I decided to pray a Native American prayer composed by the great Lakota Sioux leader, Chief Seattle. I pray this prayer in the tradition of Native American spirituality by facing in the four directions as I recite the prayer:

"Great Spirit of Light, come to me out of the East with the power of the rising sun. Let there be light in my words, let there be light on my path that I walk. Let me remember always that you give the gift of a new day. And never let me be burdened with sorrow by not starting over again.
Great Spirit of Love, come to me with the power of the North. Make me courageous when the cold wind falls upon me. Give me strength and endurance for everything that is harsh, everything that hurts, everything that makes me squint. Let me move through life ready to take what comes from the North."

Great Life-Giving Spirit, I face the West, the direction of sundown. Let me remember everyday that the moment will come when my sun will go down. Never let me forget that I must fade into you. Give me a beautiful color, give me a great sky for setting, so that when it is my time to meet you, I can come with glory.

Great Spirit of Creation, send me the warm and soothing winds from the South. Comfort me and caress me when I am tired and cold. Unfold me like the gentle breezes that unfold the leaves on the trees. As you give to all the earth your warm, moving wind, give to me, so that I may grow close to you in warmth. Man did not create the web of life, he is but a strand in it. Whatever man does to the web, he does to himself.”

My hike is everything I am hoping for, a beautiful quiet trail with easy terrain and relatively few hills. I am able to walk a solid eleven miles. The walking time passes quickly each day when I reflect on various questions I wish to explore and ponder.

I commenced today’s walk with the last questions raised during my earlier morning prayer.

“But rather in the ever transforming grace of God, who am I becoming?”

I do feel that I have certainly let go of some excess baggage I was carrying when I began my Camino. In a symbolic way, my “backpack feels lighter,” so my sense of being the recipient of God’s transforming grace is real. I don’t yet have a clear image of who I am becoming, since I do not want to rush through this threshold too quickly and think about life after my Camino. I am really enjoying just living in the present moment for now, knowing that this question will be more relevant by this time next week.

Whom do I love?

This could be a very long list, but I try to keep it simple. First and foremost, I am keenly aware of my love for God and His great love for

me. I cherish these opportunities for “*kairos*” time with him and wish they could occur more often.

As Br. Leo told me back in freshman year of high school, “If you don’t love yourself, why should anyone else?” I do love myself enough to allow myself to carve out certain parts of my world that will nourish and feed me and allow me to be the best person God intends. Some of the basic ways I must love myself are by blocking out time every morning for exercise, usually walking or jogging in nature. It helps to keep me healthy and rooted in God’s creation before my day starts. Prayer, spiritual direction, an annual retreat, taking time to enjoy the company of family, close friends and my Marist Brothers, taking a good vacation each year, trying to eat well, making time in my yearly calendar to stay connected to young people and not get lost in the trivial aspects of my job, spoiling my Godchildren when I can and not being afraid to laugh at myself are some of the little ways that allow me to love myself.

Whom do I care about?

When I pray my evening rosary, I always try to remember those I most treasure in my life. I start with my family in both the USA and Ireland, the Brothers and Lay-Marists around our Marist world, my ‘85 Molloy Teammates and Brothers, my Godchildren and their families, former students and young people who impacted my life and numerous close friends in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, West Virginia, Kentucky, New Mexico, Ireland and Australia. Most of all I remember, in solidarity, too many unknown adults and children who struggle for life itself and who are cruel victims of atrocities in our world such as refugees, migrants, those sold into human trafficking, and those helpless victims of war, violence and, often, natural disasters.

The next concept I explore during my walk is an idea I read last night in Chapter Four of *Soul of a Pilgrim* about “Following the Thread”. It basically is an exercise to discover certain threads that have been weaving through a period of one’s life.

The thread of my journey I decide to examine today centers around the impact of Mary our Good Mother, on my life and how she has quietly and always been present and a force in my life. I recall my earliest images of Mary and remember again the great devotion both my parents and all my aunts and uncles had to her. Both my parents would say the rosary daily and my mom would always be praying a novena to Mary for someone's intention. Thankfully, they never forced those practices on me. It was their personal daily devotion and they believed I needed to grow into my own practices. My cousins all grew up saying a family rosary almost daily. I was often a participant when I stayed with them. My aunts in Ireland would make pilgrimages to the Marial shrine in Knock every August 15th and often on other Marial feast days during the year. My parents tried to bring me there at least once a year for Mass. I remember I during my years in grade school, the procession and prayers of the annual May crowning of Mary were always a huge school event with everybody singing "Immaculate Mary." My parents often took me to other Marial shrines such as Lourdes. But the image that remains with me most for as long as I can remember, is the love my parents and all my uncles and aunts had for "Our Lady's Holy Well," located near our old family home in Cork. The well dates back centuries to penal times in Ireland when the ruling English government banned Catholicism. Like many ancient Catholic sites hidden around Ireland, it was originally a hidden place where Catholics could practice their faith in secret from the ruling English. Over the years, the shrine continued to be a popular place of worship and Marial devotion. My parents' house was across the road from the well and my uncle's farm was only another few hundred yards down the road from it. It was almost a daily practice for all members of our family to walk to the well, say a quiet prayer and drink some its holy water. My dad was notorious for leaving late to go to any airport. But no matter how late we were when leaving Ireland, he could not pass the well without going in for a quick prayer and holy water. He believed that as long as he stopped at the well nothing bad would happen like missing our plane.

As I moved onto high school this thread of Mary's presence in my life continued to follow me in quiet unassuming ways. My first day at Molloy, I learned that six of my teachers were Marist Brothers as were my guidance counselors and track coaches over the next four

years. The Brothers in those years never talked about their spirituality or Marial devotion directly, but somehow everyone knew they had great love for and trust in Mary. One impactful memory was formed during my senior year with Br. Leo, who was a counselor, mentor and great friend in my life. He saved thousands of kids dealing with every issue from drugs, suicidal thoughts, parental problems with alcohol and physical abuse to all the other “regular” teenage issues like self esteem, sexuality, life drama, etc. I remember on one occasion being in his office, called the “cave”, when a very intense peer group counseling session took place. I was amazed at his patience and how he made every single student who walked into that cave feel totally loved and accepted for who they were as a person. When the day ended and everyone had cleared out of Leo’s office at about 4:30pm, he started to lock up and head upstairs to the Brothers’ residence on the fourth floor of the school. As he was getting into the elevator to go up and as I was about to walk downstairs to go home, I asked him “Leo, how do you do this everyday, manage so many tough situations and never get upset and moreover have everything always seems to work out?” He said, “Come on up to the fourth floor and I will show you.” No student ever got to go up to the Brothers’ Residence so this was pretty special. We came off the elevator, and turned right, and I followed him down the hall a short distance to the Brothers’ chapel. We went in, and he walks over to a statue of Mary and tells me that everyday when he comes off the elevator after work, he comes directly here and simply tells Mary that he did what he could for “his kids today.” Now it was up to her to make it all happen so things would work out. He said in all his years, she never failed to answer his prayers.

After high school, I moved to Ireland for college but would return to NY at least once or twice a year to see friends, some of the Brothers and go to Esopus to work at least one of the special needs camps. One summer during my college days, I got to work on the grounds keeping crew with Br. John Berchmann, an “older” Brother, who probably had run maintenance in Esopus since the day that God created the universe. Over the course of my days working with this amazing wisdom figure, I saw him do many crazy and dangerous tasks. He would change the light bulbs in the gym by putting up scaffolding that never locked and was shaky, then a ladder on top of the scaffolding and then a chair on

top of the ladder to reach the ceiling. I told him “Berkie, you’re going to kill yourself.” His response was always the same, “Ahhh, Mary will protect me.” I heard that phrase from him so many times over the years that followed that I, at times, wondered whether he had some special pact with her. His faith in her as a protector was all-encompassing.

When I returned to the USA in 1990 and began my journey into the formation program of the Marist Brothers, I gained an even greater understanding and appreciation of Mary’s role and thread in my life and the lives of all Marists. Obviously, the very word Marist was created to honor Mary’s name. Marcellin, Colin and the other seminarians who pledged at the Marial shrine of Fouvriere to create a Society of Mary. That pledge would become a major stepping-stone for the foundation of four Marist religious orders that would greatly impact the world and countless lives.

Prior to entering my Novitiate years, I had the grace to make a retreat with Don Bisson at l’Hermitage of our Lady in France and got to see, for the first time, all the Marist Places that were part of our origins and history. Staying in l’Hermitage and knowing that Champagnat and the early brothers actually built it, helped me from my earliest days in the order feel a real connection to our Founder. What struck me most during that first trip to l’Hermitage was discovering the story of the Mary statue in the chapel there. In Champagnat’s day, he had a heart shaped locket placed around her neck. He would visit the statue every night and literally put the names of Brothers, family members, students and parishioners that he was concerned about into her heart. His total dependence on Mary, and his belief that as a member of her society, she would protect us was remarkable. One of his many famous quotes to his brothers was something to this effect, “If you have a difficulty, do your best and then put it into Mary hands. This is her project and if it fails, it will be her fault, not yours.” He truly trusted and believed that she was our Good Mother and would watch over us always. Champagnat’s deep trust in Mary was handed down through many generations of Marists. I experienced it through Leo, John Bechmann, Fred, Steve Urban and countless others. It is now my turn to witness for the next generation, one of our most important threads, the role and impact of Mary in our lives.

I finish my “Follow the Thread” experience by offering this simple prayer:

My Good Mother, I first came to know and understand about you through the lived example of many people in my life, but now you have weaved yourself into my life so deeply that I can fully claim you as my own “ordinary resource”. I know you will be by my side to offer me comfort and to take all the challenges that life will present our Marist works, or me to your son, Jesus, so that this Marist project will continue to bring young people to know and love Him.

The day flew by while I did a good bit of reading and journaling with a short break for lunch and to go to the post office to mail some cards. It was 7:00pm before I started to get supper together. After a little fish and salad, I continued my new evening tradition of going on a rosary walk to remember and pray for those in my life.

I returned a few phone calls and then headed up stairs to relax and read. I began reading the

Paulo Coelho book, *The Pilgrimage*. In the book he writes,

“The journey, which prior to this was torture because all you wanted to do was get there, is now beginning to become a pleasure. It is the pleasure of searching and the pleasure of an adventure. You are nourishing something that’s very important—your dreams.”

This quote resonates with me because so often in my life, I have worried and rushed to meet a deadline or to get to a particular destination and have not always allowed myself time to enjoy the journey itself, which can be more important than the actual arrival at a destination. I need, at times, to slow myself down and savor every part of the journey of my life, just as I have been doing on these sacred days of my own pilgrimage. When I rush through life, I miss out on so many graces and gifts that I don’t take the time to accept or realize, which are often right in front of me on my path. When I can remain grounded in Nature and

in tune with my innermost feelings, then I can travel my path so much more alive and hopeful. It is at times when my dreams seem to be real possibilities and not hopeful wishes or impossible tasks.

I light my nighttime prayer candle and pray my Examen prayer with a grateful heart for the many blessings, insights and joys of this day.



Part of my nighttime prayer space.



Plan B Trip Italy 2019 with family, friends and godchildren.

*“Lovely days don’t come to you,
You should walk to them”*

- Rumi

Day Five May 8th

I awoke a few times during the night to the sound of heavy rain outside; I figured that my sunrise routine would not be very promising and that I would be in for a wet journey on my daily Camino walk. The weather forecast for Friday had been mostly rain with possible snow later in the day. I rose at around 5am to the surprise of crystal clear skies and the potential for the most spectacular sunrise of the week. I quickly moved downstairs to my rocking chair to pray and enjoy God's developing sky show.

I didn't need many words this morning as my prayer was simply listening to the music of the birds, watching the currents of the lake slowly move, gazing at the subtle changes in the color of my horizon as I patiently waited for the sun to come up over the mountains before me. I watched a family of ducks waddle across the area in front of the cabin and observed how God's love lives in all families, no matter the species.

After sunrise, I drove to another portion of the same rail trail I had walked yesterday. My legs were still feeling the results of the past four days and I wanted to avoid any more hikes that might be dangerous for

my knee.

I put in a steady ten miles on the trail and was amazed at how quickly the time passed as I reflected on two questions, one on the way out on the trail and the second on the way back. The questions were:

- Who are the saints in my life that I want to remember with a grateful heart?
- Who have been the inspiring young people who have touched my life over the past thirty years of my Marist journey?

The first question allowed me to feel an immense sense of gratitude to so many people who have influenced, graced and deeply impacted my life. I recalled, sometimes with tears, so many incredible memories and moments with each of the many names that came into my stream of consciousness. As I reflected on each person, I took as much time as needed to remember our best memories together, to recall how they affected my life and to offer a sincere prayer of gratitude for each one of them. A few of my Family Saints included my parents, my Aunts Peggy, Abina, Anne, Smitty, and Kathy, my Uncles Jimmy, Patsy, Jerry, Vincent, Hughie, and Maurice as well as Jim, Pidge and Antonio Kelly. The large number of my Marist Saints who fondly went through my mind included: Regis, Leo, Bob Andrews, Alfred George, Steve Urban, Ron Marcellin, Berkie, Roaul, Owen, Patrick and Joe DeBenideto. Lastly, I recalled close friends who have been like Saints to me including Kevin, Marty, Damian, Noreen Kelly, Andy and Noreen O'Callaghan, Carol and Bill (RIP), Ed Kennedy, Maureen and Pat Hagan, John Allen, Brian Yuska, Matt Fallon, Loretta Metz, Rose Ann Wodusky, Roxzann McCulley, Jodi and Courtney(RIP) Block, Denny and Brenda Bieter, Jim and Cookie Welsh as well as four of my teammates, Dario, Volpe, Wesley, and Scott, all who died too young.

My pondering on the second question, in a similar way, provided an equally rich and prayerful journey back to the parking area. Some names of young people who graced my life and came to mind today were: Finola, Rose, Deirdre, Katie Barry, Hurley, Cathy, Jameson,

Chaci, Angela, the Corriganes, Brian Hogan, Rob Delay, Joe Forgione, John Bethge, Joe Arevalo, Melissa, Diezal, Matt Beiter, Danielle (RIP), JoBeth (RIP), Katie Beiter, Ellen, KC, Megan, Steve Patricco, Opal, Newton, Kenny Stillwell (RIP) and my young cousins Bernie (RIP) and Eileen (RIP), who both died too young from cystic fibrosis.

After returning and getting cleaned up, I took care of a few phone calls and pressing emails and spent the rest of the morning doing journaling, as well as research on the *All Trails App* to find new paths to walk in the days ahead.

In the afternoon, I read and reflected on the fifth chapter of *Soul of a Pilgrim*, which focused on our need to allow ourselves the practice of being uncomfortable. We must be willing to welcome and stay among the rough edges of our lives if we are to truly grow in our spiritual life.

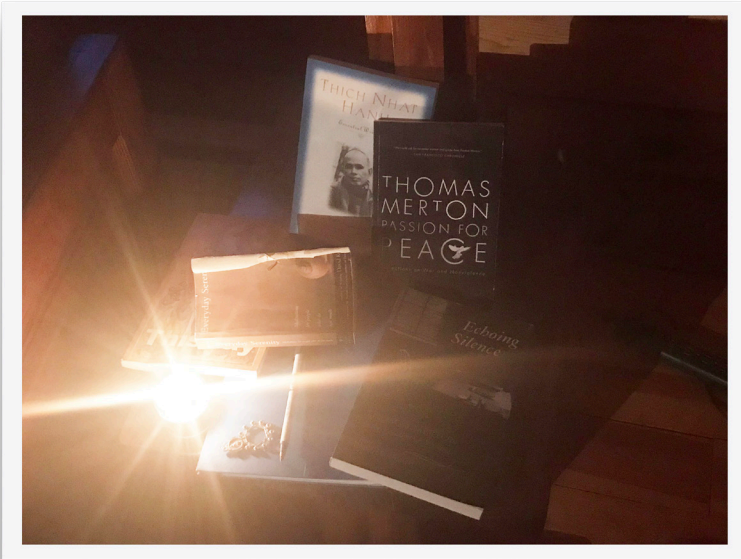
- “While on pilgrimage, time for silence is essential. I need this anchor, this connection to Source, to remember everything that I am...In the silence, I remember that my life is not wholly good or bad here. The discomfort and the exhilaration are both essential to my experience.”
- “What are the uncomfortable parts calling to you for some welcome? What are the voices which hold you back from this generous act of hospitality?”

My Camino retreat has been everything I was hoping for up to this point, but maybe I have crossed enough of the threshold of this experience to begin to explore difficult areas of my life that need to be welcomed into my prayer. Much of my prayer so far has focused on gratitude and remembering the intentions and needs of those I know and love. Maybe it is time to go deeper into my soul and start praying with those areas or parts of my life that need healing or attention, to eventually be ready and open to surrender to who God is truly calling me to be.

So what are the parts of my life that I need to welcome in and share with Jesus while I have this time alone with Him? I can recognize and identify these:

- My grief over the past fifteen months, watching Bob Andrews suffer after his life was radically uprooted and destroyed as a result of his stroke on December 20th, 2018.
- An even deeper sense of grief after having journeyed with Bob at the nursing home for so long and not being able to see him when Cabrini Nursing Home was locked down after the coronavirus. Just knowing that on all those days when we couldn't visit he was crying out for either Brian Yuska or me to help him, and that he may have felt that we abandoned him or stopped loving him, continues to eat at my heart. The fact that in his last days Brian and I couldn't convince anyone at Cabrini to allow us even five minutes to talk to him on one of the nurses' phones, so we could say our goodbyes, continues to break my heart.
- Fears of being elected provincial, which would mean loss of the potential to work full time with young people. If I were elected next year, I could be sixty years old when I finish the term. Will I still have the energy at sixty to fulfill the many dreams I have now?

As the evening starts to fade, I leave those questions for the days ahead. I take my rosary walk and return to the cabin to start a fire. The temperature is dropping with a forecast for snow later tonight. I spend a good two hours just relaxing, listening and watching the fire. I say my night prayers and retire for the night in gratitude for another great day on my Camino.



Some of my spiritual readings for my Camino Retreat

*“I go to nature to be soothed and healed,
and have my senses put in order.”*

- John Burroughs

Day Six May 9th

After a good night's sleep, I again wake early to gladly find that the predicted snow fall must have only been for the mountains. There's not a trace of snow here by the lake. It is a gray wintry-looking morning with a light rain falling, yet so very peaceful and quiet.

The last line of today's daily gospel reading has Jesus saying to his apostles, "If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it." I have asked so much of our Lord and His Mother over the years and they truly have answered all my prayers, even my unspoken ones. Jesus knows the desires and troubles of my heart, even before I do, and patiently waits for me to allow Him to journey with me in resolving them.

The falling mist turns to a heavier sleet and I will be in for a wet day as I embark on my Camino walk. Memories of my many summer and winter days in Ireland come to mind. It is often raining and dreary outside there, but it never seems to stop the people of Ireland from getting on with their daily routines.

I drive to a nearby trailhead and commence my walk with the sleet having since turned to snow. A good bit has fallen here in the higher

elevation; it seems unusual to see snow falling in May. However, I prefer this cold and snow to a day of walking in high heat and humidity.

As I began my morning walk, I listen to the Province video of a daily novena. We were asked to pray during these days to ask our Good Mother to continue to protect all those we know from contracting the coronavirus as well as all those on the front lines saving lives. I also listen to the song “Hail Mary, Gentle Woman” as a way of entrusting my day to her. A few lines from the song become a mantra for my next few miles:

“Gentle Mother, peaceful dove,
Teach me wisdom; teach me love.”

As the miles continue, I focus on imagining that I am walking with Jesus on this trail and we begin to talk. I listen carefully to his responses to the things I share with him from my life.

D: I have enjoyed these days of walking, but being on trails like this makes me realize how much I miss running and what a loss it and sports have been in my life.

J: I know how much you loved running and all the years of other sports that you played when you were younger. You were pretty lucky to have enjoyed so much success over those years, but remember all the great friendships you made and still have as a result of your years as an athlete. Your competitive days in sports are over, but the friendships remain and are far more valuable, than what you are missing.

D: I am truly grateful for all the joy I took from sports and even more so for those many deep friendships that grew out of being on many teams over the years. My closest friends in life continue to be my Molloy track teammates, who have been like Brothers to me, since we were Freshman back in ‘81.

J: Who else came into your life from sports?

D: My closest friend from college, Andy, who I played with at UCC and Jim Kelly (RIP), who was a father figure to me during my college years. I first got to know Jim when he was chairman of the hurling club I played for at the time. As we became friends, we played golf almost weekly and those games and the friendly bantering are among my favorite memories of him.

J: Sport gave you some special gifts over the years. Do you still enjoy working the special needs camps at Esopus every year?

D: I will always love working them. In some ways, they were a major influence that helped lead me toward Brotherhood and serving You. I still try to cook for at least one camp each summer.

J: Think for a moment of all the children that you worked with over the years at the camps, many of them physically disabled in wheelchairs and all of them with some level of mental, emotional or other physical needs. How many of them would have loved to enjoy just one day of running or playing other sports?

D: All of them I'm sure. And yet they each share their love so willingly with all of us lucky enough to work with them at camp. They are among the happiest people I have ever known and they have such an amazing capacity to bring joy and smiles to the hearts and faces of all who meet them.

J: Who else are some of the happiest people you have known?

D: I remember the children of the orphanage I worked at on the island of Jamaica. Those children had little more than a change of clothes, a toothbrush and a bowl for their meals

and yet they were always smiling. When we first got there to work, I watched many of them playing soccer in their bare feet on an old, rocky, grass burnt field. They owned no shoes or sneakers. They used a coconut for a soccer ball; they didn't have a real one for their games. Over the six weeks I lived with them, I witnessed children who laughed and were grateful for the simple things they had at the orphanage, especially the genuine love given to them by the Sisters, who ran it. For many of them, the orphanage was an incredible gift compared to the poverty, misery, and often the abuse they had known before arriving there.

J: You still think losing running or sports is that great a loss in your life? Only for the grace of my Father, you could have been born into a life like any of the children in those experiences you shared. You have forgotten more good times in your life than most of them will ever know in theirs. Stop wasting precious seconds of your life regretting things you have lost and replace those moments looking for ways to let others, especially young people come to know who I am. If you miss being on a team, remember you are on My team. I need you to be at your best because as you won medals and games in your youth, you can help Me save lives and win souls for the rest of your life.

D: Damn, you are a hell of a coach!

I finished my eight-mile trek and looked forward to a hot shower to warm up. After breakfast, I spent the rest of the morning doing journaling and continuing to read from *The Essential Writings of Thich Nhat Hanh*. A number of passages reinforced my conversation with Jesus earlier this morning.

“A lot of joy and happiness comes from getting away or leaving something behind.”

“There are many things we are unable to leave behind us, which trap us. Practice looking deeply into these things. In the

beginning you may think they are vital to your happiness, but they may actually be obstacles to your true happiness, causing you to suffer. If you are not able to be happy because you are caught by them, leaving them behind will be a source of joy for you.”

I am slowly growing into the realization that the more I focus my thoughts, efforts and life on looking at ways to authentically serve Jesus moment by moment, day by day the more I will find inner peace, joy, happiness and a sense of deep purpose in my everyday living. Yes, thinking ahead and planning for the future are essential parts of life. Looking back and remembering can often be a gift. But I still can only embrace life in this present moment, and in the here and now.

I also spent time writing thank you notes to some folks who have been on my mind. One of the cards is to Ellen and her husband, Josh, in KY. Ellen has become one of my true heroes, someone whose inspiring story I have utilized many times when speaking to young people on retreats or conferences. I met Ellen when she was a freshman at Roselle Catholic High School in NJ, where I was teaching, coaching and involved with their Marist Youth Group. She was one of those young people who did not take long in beginning to put her footprint on our world.

While in high school, she was very committed to our school's "Bridges Program", which was an outreach program to our homeless brothers and sisters living on the streets of NYC. After one of the trips to bring needed clothing and food to our friends on the streets, she asked if she could have some space in the large three car garage that is under the Brothers' house on the property of the school. She raised some money through writing letters to family and friends and earned enough to build a large storage area complete with sufficient shelves to hold more than one hundred large plastic containers. Her storage space became the "RC Bridges Closet" and is carefully organized into sections for all types of clothing, jackets, underwear, hats, and gloves for boys, girls, men and women and for all sizes. There is also a section for children's books, toiletries and needed supplies for each trip such as sandwich bags, etc. The closet is still being utilized today.

After high school, she continued to stay involved in Marist projects through her commitment as a leader in the Marist Young Adult Program. She led retreats and Marist Youth Gatherings, attended a pilgrimage to l'Hermitage and attended numerous other prayer and service activities.

After graduating from Villanova, she followed her call to live the Marist Charism in a deeper way by becoming a two-year volunteer with the Marist Missionary Sisters in Senegal, Africa. While on assignment there, she came to discover that most of the children of her village did not know how to read because they had no access to books. She wrote for grants, secured the funding and literally built a children's library for the village. Most people would not accomplish in their lifetimes as much, in terms of dramatically impacting the lives of the poorest of our world, as she had done by the age of twenty-three.

Her Marist journey continued after she returned from Africa. She completed her Masters Degree at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where she met her future husband, Josh. After they finished their studies, they were hired by the Diocese of Lexington, KY to become the first lay administrators and Parish Life Directors of Holy Cross Parish in Jackson, KY. The parish is in the poorest county in the state. Apart from running the parish, she and Josh also purchased and moved onto a beautiful fifty-acre farm. Their vision is to turn it into a Catholic Worker Farm to serve many purposes. They converted an old barn on the property into a place that can now host meals for the local community and are renovating the upstairs of the barn to be a temporary shelter for women and children. There is no such facility in their entire county.

They plan to eventually host volunteers to work on an organic farm and also host retreatants who may wish to enjoy the many trails on the property and stay in one of the hermitages they hope to build. To help them convert the property into a place for people to come to pray, my annual band of volunteers and some Marist Young Adults traveled down last year to build a chapel in the woods on the property. It was an amazing adventure and the chapel was dedicated in honor of St. Marcellin, our founder.

On Thursday, Ellen called to share the humbling news with me that they had started construction on their first hermitage. They had hoped it would be completed when our group arrived this June so they could surprise me and, with our Marist Group present, officially dedicate it as “Br. Dan’s Place”. She shared the surprise early since all mission trips had to be cancelled because of the virus and our Marist group wouldn’t be travelling there this June.

I am so lucky to have played a small role in the life of this incredibly inspiring woman of faith who, with Josh, finds ways to live the gospel most authentically every day.

As my afternoon continued, I enjoyed periods of simply sitting and listening to the howling wind and the many echoing sounds of nearby birds, watching the currents flow across the lake and breathing in the rustic-scented smell of my cabin. I realized that on my walk this morning I did not pass or see a single person other than Jesus and will live these twenty-four hours in complete solitude with Him. I am reminded of the words of my old friend Merton, whom I’d read earlier in the week:

“Let me seek, then, the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude,
where everything I touch is turned into prayer:
where the sky is my prayer, the birds are my prayer,
the wind in the trees is my prayer, for God is in all.”
—Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

Brian Yuska called to check to how I was. I invited him to come up for two nights to be part of my Camino, and to have time together to do some fishing. He is a master fisherman and I have only fished twice in my entire life. We were going to answer “the call of the wild” together this summer, along with Matt Fallon, to camp, fish, hike and see the great Northern Territory of Alaska. I have been blessed to know Brian for almost 25 years. He and Bob were in AA together and were best friends. They had hoped to go to Alaska to fish together one day and sometime last year when Brian told me that, we agreed we would go in honor of Bob. In the nursing home when we told Bob we were going, he asked us to catch and bring him back an Alaskan salmon. During

the journey of accompanying Bob through the difficult last part of his life, Brian and I grew closer as friends and would alternate the days we visited Bob to ensure he had company on as many days as possible. Brian is a divorced father and one of the hardest working people I know. He remains dedicated to his lovely daughter and has been incredibly supportive of his ex-wife, who has undergone serious health issues over the past years. While Brian may be a layperson, I believe through his friendship with Bob, that he lives our Marist Charism in many real ways and often better than some of our own Brothers. I look forward to having him with me for part of this experience as it may allow both of us to slowly make peace with the recent loss of one of the most influential mentors in both our lives. It also seems providential that I will with Brian when he is here, since one of the joys of the real tradition is the bonding and sharing that takes place with people one gets to walk with on the Camino. I believe that after our time together, both our “backpacks” will be a little lighter, as we continue to go through the process of grieving our close friend.

After a simple dinner, I went for my rosary walk and then returned to finish a few cards and read the next chapter of *Soul of a Pilgrim* to be ready for Monday’s online retreat based on the book. Each week focuses on one of the eight chapters of the book. I also read some more of *The Pilgrimage* by Paulo Coelho. It is a great story of the writer’s journey on the Camino de Santiago. He writes that, “we must never stop dreaming. Dreams provide nourishment for the soul, just as a meal does for the body. Many times in our lives we see our dreams shattered and our desires frustrated, but we have to continue dreaming. If we don’t, our soul dies...the good fight is the one that’s fought in the name of our dreams. When we’re young and our dreams first explode inside us with all of their force, we are very courageous, but we haven’t yet learned how to fight. With great effort, we learn how to fight, but by then we no longer have the courage to go into combat. So we turn against ourselves and do battle within. We become our own worst enemy. We say that our dreams were childish, or too difficult to realize, or the result of our not having known enough about life. We kill our dreams because we are afraid to fight the good fight.”

I also read a little from *A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living*, which similarly challenges us to live the “warrior’s approach” in pursuit of achieving the life we are meant to live.

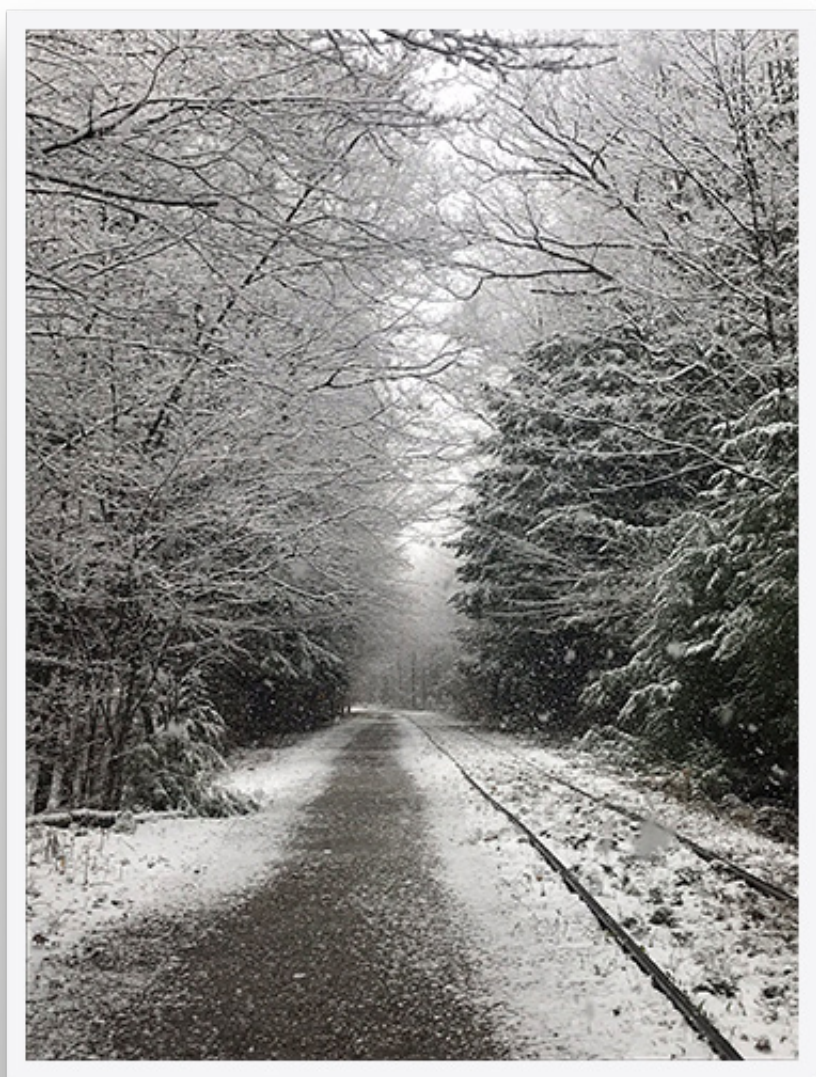
I hope in the days ahead on my Camino that I may be “warrior” enough to be open and say yes to the “life that is waiting for me” and that I may fight the good fight in realizing and pursuing my dreams.

For my evening prayer tonight, I light my Camino candle and read the words of another poem by Thomas Moore that Maureen Hagan sent me for these days:

Threshold

“There are places in the world that are neither here nor there
neither up nor down,
neither real nor imaginary.
These are the in-between places,
difficult to find and even more challenging to sustain.
Yet, they are the most fruitful places of all.
For in these liminal narrows,
a kind of life takes place that is out of the ordinary...creative...
and once in a while, genuinely magical.
We tend to divide life between mind and matter
and to assume that we must be in one or the other or both.
But religion and folklore tell of another place,
one that is often found by accident,
where strange events take place and
where we learn things that can’t be discovered in any other way.
It requires a degree of holy foolishness to seek one out.”

I pray that as I continue forward in these special days of life which have already been “genuinely magical” that I may use “holy foolishness” to discover the pathways that the Lord is inviting me to encounter. Amen.



A snowy day on the trail.



Our Marist Volunteer trip to help Ellen in Kentucky in 2019.

*“There are far better things ahead, than
the ones we leave behind.”*

- C.S. Lewis

Day Seven May 10th

I rise early again to watch a new day come to life from behind the mountains and see the rays of light dance on the tranquil waters of Lake Ossipee. I am struck on this Sunday morning that most of the faithful of our Church around the world are still unable to join together as a Christian community to celebrate the Eucharist. These weeks of lockdowns, social distancing and isolation will hopefully result in a greater appreciation by many for the gift that being part of a community is in our lives. I am grateful this morning for the many communities of faith in my own life, but especially my home community in Forest Hills as well as my adopted community in Esopus. Over these past few months they have both been a great source of strength to me and I have been graced to share in many significant moments of communal prayer with them during this time. To be in solidarity with our Church I reflect on the readings of today's Mass. Today's gospel from John recounts the story of the apostle Thomas asking the Lord, "Master, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus responded, "I am the way and the truth and the life".

As I begin another new day and set out on the next walk of this Camino journey, I prayed that I will always look to Jesus to lead to choose on

the correct path to travel in all my journeys ahead. I recall the words of Lewis Carroll, the author of Alice in Wonderland:

“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. “Which road do I take?” she asked.

“Where do you want to go?” was his response.

“I don’t know,” Alice answered.

“Then,” said the cat, “it doesn’t matter.”

I hope when I encounter a fork in the road, my response will always be that I want to take the road upon which Jesus is leading me.

My morning trek was another ten-mile walk along the nearby rail trail, but the most beautiful part is having lakes on both sides and great panoramic views of the mountains. An African proverb says, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” I decided that I would not walk alone this morning but would journey the first half of the walk with Jesus and the return half with Mary, His Mother. Some of our conversations included:

D: Jesus, thanks for your pep talk on our last walk. Wow, this trail is beautiful. Your Dad did a great job in His creation of all this and so much more.

J: Yes, He’s pretty proud of all He created and most of all humankind that He made in His likeness. As you have often heard in the lines of your favorite musical, Les Miserables, “to love another person is to see the face of God”.

D: True, but He must be disappointed to see so many in our world who do not love each other or care for His planet.

J: Things are certainly difficult in your world during these days, but there have been challenges at all times in history. Many people have risen up to face those challenges and restore justice and peace just as they are doing now.

D: Sometimes it seems like a losing battle, especially with some of the political leaders we have in our troubled country.

J: Trust me, there were bad political and even religious leaders, as well in my time on earth. They did some terrible things. There will always be struggles and many difficult days, but remember the starfish story that you often tell to young people on retreats. You can't do everything, but what you can do makes an incredible difference in the lives of each person you impact. So the challenge is to make a difference in the world one person at a time and remember that every person you meet is a reflection of my Father.

D: Lord, I have really enjoyed spending time with You this week and growing close again through the reading of Scripture, watching and appreciating Your Dad's creation, spending quiet time with You and allowing You to speak to my heart either during my prayer times or on these walks. But most of all, I've gotten so much out of journaling again. It is a practice that has been a great resource for me over many years. I've even been thinking that because this Camino retreat has been so rich and insightful, maybe I might share my journal notes with some people in my life. What do You think?

J: I think it could be a great idea. There are lots of people in this world with whom you are connected and who trust you. Some are on the edges of their own spirituality and maybe might find reading your prayer thoughts a way to give them a boost in growing closer to Me.

D: My only fear is that I've never been a real writer. I don't want to come across sounding foolish or pretending to be a spiritual guru, which I'm not.

J: How could you sound foolish when you are sharing your faith? Anything you do to give glory to my Father, Mother

or Me can never be foolish. This world badly needs more prophets and mystics willing to risk going deeper in sharing their faith. As Marists, you are all called to be prophet and mystic in your own world and your own time and way. Don't be afraid to be what God, my Father, is asking you to do or be. Even your founder, Marcellin, said it should be the goal of every Marist to attempt to become a saint. What are you waiting for?

D: It seems like You always had a special place in Your heart for children when You lived among us. How is it there are so many children today, who are suffering in this world? What can we do about it?

J: You are so right. I've never seen a time in history this bad. Children are now even put into cages and separated from their families. These are troubling times. You as Marists have such a great opportunity to be a voice for so many of My children who need your help. Don't be afraid to be a prophet for those children in these times.

D: How?

J: There are many things you can do. Continue building up solidarity efforts around the Marist world and stay connected to all those people who are doing great things already for so many of these children. Remember the faces of all the children who have left footprints on your heart like the street children of Colombia, the orphaned children of Jamaica, the poor children of Senegal you've met and the forgotten poor children of Appalachia. You have impacted many of these lives and you can continue to impact the lives of many more.

D: Yes, I do believe that as Marists we can make a difference.

J: Like yourself, one of the most important people in my life is my Mom, who as Marists you happen to be named after

and to whom you have a great devotion. I have a great love for Marists because they honor my Mom. Why don't you talk to her for a while about all that you are carrying in your heart and She will keep me posted about what you may need to help the children of our world or with the ongoing Marist mission.

D: Hi, Mary. Thanks for walking with me on this part of my journey. You must get tired of me and so many other Marists, constantly bombarding and imploring your help in so many situations.

M: Marcellin had it right when he said that I will always be your "ordinary resource". You can always come to me. My Son can never say no to me, so whatever you need to help others, especially my children in this world, know that I will bring it to Him.

D: Speaking of children, your heart must break these days given all that's happening in our world particularly with all our refugees and migrants and all the children being sold into human trafficking?

M: Yes, my heart does break. It was in some way much the same in my time. Joseph and I had to flee our country with the hope of raising our child in peace. But peace didn't come in the way I expected. I had to watch my child suffer and die. Yet, He was the one who would bring peace into this world. Thankfully, so many have received that message and continue to live it. My heart does break particularly for the young mothers who are refugees today and have seen their children caged like animals. I walk with them in solidarity and I know their pain.

D: We as Marists have tried to bring honor to you by making your son, Jesus known and loved. What more should we be doing in today's world as members of your society?

M: The calls of your recent General Chapter would be a good place to start because those five concerns would impact so many people, especially children in need and in terms of finding ways to care for our good earth.

D: Mary, I very often remember the trip I made with my own mom to your shrine in Medjugorje. That was probably the best trip we ever took together. It was also a time when I felt so grateful to be part of your society and a time I felt a real call to go deeper into my call as a Marist. I'm sorry that sometimes it takes me more time to answer my call. I often allow life to get in the way.

M: When you heard me calling you during that trip you did respond after you went home and back to West Virginia, and at other times as well. There is never only one "Yes". In this call to be a disciple of my Son, you will be called to say "yes" often. My Son, his Father, and I will continue to call you to go deeper many times in your life.

D: Thank you for the assurance of listening to our prayers. Know that I may put you on speed dial as needs continue to arise in our world.

M: The other day when you were praying you reflected on the ways that I was a thread throughout your life from the time you were very young. It is now your time to be a similar thread for many more people in allowing them to come to know my Son and me. Think of all the young people in your life and how you could be an influence in sharing faith with them as your parents, aunts, uncles, the Brothers and other significant people did for you when you were young.

D: You're right and I will try to be a thread for all those amazing young people that I am graced to have as part of my life.

M: Before we finish our walk together this morning, is there anything that you need from me?

D: Well Mary, we as Marists are your society. We need more young people to respond to the call to follow your Son the way you did as a disciple, by saying, "Yes". I ask you this morning to give us more vocations, both for more Marist Brothers and for Lay Marists, so that we may continue to make your Son known and loved for future generations and also to help the many young people of today who are entrusted to our care.

M: My Son will not let you down. Remember that the night is darkest right before the dawn and a new brighter day for all Marists will be coming.

On my way back, I stopped to pick up food for the coming week. I have enjoyed being able to eat simply these days. During these lockdown months, I have savored my time in community in Forest Hills and Esopus; but it seemed like every night we ate bigger and more fancy meals as folks, including myself, had more time to prepare nicer dinners, cakes, and appetizers than normal. We would not have had the time to prepare such meals with our normal hectic work schedules.

After returning to the cabin and getting cleaned up, I spent the remainder of the morning reflecting on some of the documents from our General Chapter in 2017. Mary reminded me of them this morning, so I thought I would pray with them again. The Message of the General Chapter which encompasses the five calls to all Marists is...

"Transform us Jesus, and send us
as a global charismatic family, a beacon of hope in this turbulent
world,
to be the face and hands of your tender mercy.
Inspire our creativity to be bridge-builders,
to journey with children and young people on the margins of
life,
and to respond boldly to emerging needs."

I believe that we, as the USA Marists of Champagnat, have made good strides in beginning to answer these significant challenges for our Marist World. Our Province is continually growing into a deeper appreciation and understanding of what it means to be a Global charismatic family. Our efforts to collaborate more effectively within our Marist Region of Arco Norte have resulted in many positive steps forward. We have, in the past three years, increased our solidarity efforts to boldly respond to many of the emerging needs of our world, such as our commitment to start our new project with Refugees on the Texas border in El Paso. We have utilized our network of USA schools to raise significant funds for many of the children and young people on the margins of life. Equally important we have helped raise awareness of the needs of our Refugee Brothers and Sisters for our USA students and helped educate them about what we as Marists are doing to respond to these urgent needs.

One of the things that I will always remember from my experience attending the General Chapter in Colombia was how impacted I and all who attended were by the young people we met at various times during the Chapter. In small groups, we had an immersion experience to help us come to know the realities of many of the local poor children and some of the ones who were most victimized. I met children that day, as young as ten years old, who were forced into lives of prostitution. Their faces and tragic stories will forever be imprinted on my heart. Another significant gathering during the Chapter meeting was when a group of young people from the Province of Norandina (Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador) joined us for a full day of sharing their stories and their dreams, and challenged us as Marist leaders to be a needed voice in their lives. Our response to the challenges that they presented to all of us as Marists is vital if they are to have a future and if the Marist dream is going to continue. They will be the very ones who will be entrusted to answer the call as future Marist Leaders. Part of their challenge included this:

“Our reality as young people is not submitting to a culture of death, to a society where war and violence has destroyed our hopes and dreams, where many of us do not have an opportunity to raise our voices against the injustices of our world. Today’s world has denied us of the opportunity to live

our childhood and adolescence, leaving us to feel as slaves in a world that proclaims freedom. The social environment has cornered us into a game where we have lost the ability to be the protagonist of our own life, where poverty has hindered our potential to build and where addictions have become the escape of our everyday life. We feel that the guarantee of Human Rights has become a utopia and that it is found only on paper, distancing itself more and more from us instead of providing us with opportunities and a just world.”

We must continue to walk with them on their Camino of Life and ensure that we give them the opportunities to rise above this “culture of death” so many of them face and allow them to be part of a world that will not judge their past or their circumstances of life. Instead we must simply accept them with profound love and compassion and offer them hope for a real future.

My good friend, Brian, arrived around lunchtime. We spent a good hour just sitting around and talking. He had been to the log cabin four or five times before on trips with Bob Andrews and he shared some of those memories. We then took a great scenic drive for the afternoon to scout out some hikes and fishing spots for the next two days. I look forward to our time together. I made a little dinner and we sat for hours laughing and shedding a tear or two in reminiscing about some of our classic Br. Bob memories.

Before going to bed, I have a chance to catch up on some of today's journal writing and then light my prayer candle and pray my nightly Examen. I am filled with gratitude for another great day on my Camino journey. God's grace came into my life today in many ways through nature, exercise, praying with imaginary dialogue, journaling, scripture, music, spiritual reading, two calls from friends, the arrival of Brian, and lastly a chance to appreciate all these gifts in just one day. I do feel a movement or shift in my prayer; I believe I have made it through a threshold of this experience. While I am still filled with immense gratitude for the graces received during this first week of my Camino, I am also moving into being at ease and accepting of whatever

paths God may invite me to follow. I am not worried about the “nuts and bolts” or details of my future, but rather I am feeling a profound call to ensure I embrace any future roles with deep authenticity and a willingness to actively do all I can in areas that will promote our Marist mission.



One of the many great views from my Pilgrimage Camino

*“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams!
Live the life you’ve imagined.”*

- Henry David Thoreau

Day Eight May 11th

I awoke before 5am and was tempted to roll over and go back to sleep. I was still feeling tired. But once I looked out my bedroom window and saw a sky filled with glowing and vibrant red and orange magnificence, I knew I couldn't waste an opportunity to watch this morning's sunrise. I quickly dressed and went down to my rocker to watch God work His morning magic. I thought about how many times in my life I chose extra sleep and am thankful that I did not utilize that option this morning; as today's sunrise is among the most spectacular I have ever witnessed. Each moment seems like a perfect professional photo that has been digitally enhanced to capture almost an impossible array of colors. Those vibrant colors and silhouette of the landscape are perfectly reflected in a remarkably still lake that offers a mirror-like reflection of God's limitless beauty.

So many times in my life, I chose to take the easier trail or the "path of least resistance". Extra sleep today would have been appreciated. I had no time commitments that required my getting up early, but unless we at times sacrifice a little, we will never enjoy the gift of fully being alive and encountering God in real and unexpected ways. There will be plenty of mornings back in the realities of everyday life when that

extra sleep will be a good option, but these days are not “ordinary time” for me. Each moment is “*Kairos*” time or “sacred time with God” and I need to not waste even a moment of it.

As part of my prayer this morning, I use a little daily reflection book titled, *The Art of Pausing*, and open to a random page to read the entry, “God, the Magnificent”. After flipping through the book quickly, I am drawn to the title because of the magnificent sunrise God has just given me. The little reflection for the day shares a story about a person making a retreat at the Abby of Gethsemani in KY. Instantly it brings me back to my own quiet days of retreat at this same monastery, home to Thomas Merton, my favorite spiritual writer. Could God’s hand be in the little choices we make, like my picking this particular page in the reflection book today? Is it just a mere coincidence that I chose the one story in the book linked to Merton, who has special meaning for me, or is it God’s confirmation that He is quietly orchestrating every moment of my Camino retreat time, even the readings I “randomly” select to reflect upon?

I took to a new trail this morning and covered a little less mileage than my previous days as I knew I would be doing a second hike this afternoon with Brian. I enjoyed my drive over to the trailhead with the accompaniment of some of my favorite religious music, including the song, “Morning has Broken” which perfectly aligned with my sunrise experience today.

My hike took me up a well-treked mountain path. I ascended and I sensed a familiar smell. I looked into the forest around me and noticed swampish land, but also lots of heather bushes. These purple colored heather bushes are the same ones that grow wildly on the bog lands in Cavan, Ireland, where my uncle’s old cottage was located. I remembered walking often across that same bog with him in my youth. My uncle Jimmy lived almost his entire life in the same simple Irish cottage that had only an open fire, to serve as both stove and the heating system for the house. I fondly recalled so many happy summers and other holidays staying there with him. There was no running water in the house in those early years, but instead a water well two fields away where we would go daily to pump and bring back enough water for the

day. The cottage had no bathrooms, sinks, showers or any of the other comforts of modern living, but it held things that may not be found in the biggest and most exclusive mansions in our world. In the simplicity of that home, my uncle cooked amazing meals on the open fire that would rival any five star restaurants. That same fireplace, surrounded by some chairs and a couch, was a place where everyone who entered always encountered great love, joy and sometimes late nights of deep laughter and the sharing of stories. My uncle knew the things that were most important in life. None of them were material objects such as cars (he never owned one) or expensive vacations (he only made two trips away from that cottage during his entire life; both trips were to NY to see my mom). When he died, his funeral was one of the biggest ever in the county since very few people did not know and love him. He was an incredible reflection of God's love in the life of anyone he knew. In my room I still have a bag of "turf" from his bog. Every year at Christmas, I burn a piece of that "turf" to remember the many sacred days I had with him around that fire while the sweet smell of turf crackled late into the night

Today's morning walk continued to be a walk of remembrance and reminiscing about some of the gifts and graces of my childhood and all the love I was given in those years by my family in both Cavan and Cork. I can still feel the excitement I had as a young child, getting to drive a tractor for the first time on my Uncle Maurice's farm or milking cows. Thanks to him, I really believed in the leprechaun tree he would bring us to see on long walks. I recalled my summers staying in Freemount with my other cousins and playing countless games of hide and seek in the local creamery at all hours of the night, games of "Dracula" in the nearby Brennan Woods, and tormenting passing cars with homemade but real looking dummies placed on the side of the road late at night. Cars would stop to investigate as we hid in the adjoining ditches and laughed for hours. Sometimes I am saddened that children of today, with all their iPads and video games, often never get to enjoy such simple childhood games that brought such pure joy and laughter.

God comes to us during our lives in many ways; I have been lucky enough to encounter Him. As I travel my Camino, some hikes are easy to follow and others need trail markings or guideposts to point the

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way or direction. I realize what a metaphor that is for my own spiritual journey. Sometimes, like during these days, my connection to God has been easy to find and follow, but at other times I've needed spiritual directors or mentors to point out where God might be leading me. I prayed in thanksgiving for the many great Spiritual Directors and mentors I have had the blessing to work with, including Bill Draebeck, Sr. Assumpta, Sr. Joan, Don Bisson, Steve Urban, Leo, Alfred George, Joe Schmidt, Carl Sword and for the past few years my current spiritual director, Suzanne Luntz.

I returned from my morning hike and walked into the cabin, greeted by the great smell of bacon. Brian had cooked up a great breakfast for us and we laughed many times recounting more stories of Bob. I spent the rest of the morning enjoying time for more reading and journaling.

Around noon we were both too full from breakfast to eat any lunch, so we headed out for our afternoon hike. About 4 miles into our hike, it rained and thundered. Walking back through the heavy rain and getting totally drenched made this Plan B Camino experience even more genuine. I probably would have faced these conditions if my original Camino plan had manifested. After a change into some dry clothes, I enjoyed a quiet late afternoon, relaxing to the sound of rain hitting the roof while I prepared some supper. I was happy that my mileage totaled almost fifteen miles today.

After supper the rain stopped for a while, so Brian and I went for a walk to the beach. On our way back, Brian got a call from his daughter. I said my rosary and prayed for some folks who needed prayers like our two Brothers in the hospital and a third having surgery later in the week. When we returned I found an email from a cousin, Siobhan, who sent me a great video, a new version of "Amazing Grace". I watched the video and reflected on the many "amazing graces" in my life, especially those of this Camino.

I again closed out my night with my prayer candle to quietly end the day as I prayed my Examen. I headed to bed early after a long but satisfying day and recited my Camino mantra, *Jesus, allow me to live profound love...*



Sunrise as the morning fog moves over the lake.

*“In every walk with nature, one receives more
than he seeks.”*

- John Muir

Day Nine May 12th

I woke very early, not feeling as tired as yesterday, and looked forward to going down to my rocking chair for an extended period of prayer time. As I gazed on the water of the lake, I thought of the many mornings I walked down to the river at Esopus to watch the sunrise there. I am so grateful for the grace and gift that Esopus has been in my life for almost forty years. It remains the one place that has consistently fed my spiritual life. Most recently, it gave me another impactful gift. For the past number of years, since my parents both died, I have been looking out for my cousin, Brian. My parents helped raise him and we grew up like brothers. He suffered the presence of many demons in his life and lots of ups and downs, but in the early 2000's turned away from his life of addictions and was living in Georgia. Unfortunately, he developed a number of health issues and by 2009 was given a short time to live. My parents did not want him to be alone or in need and so invited him back to NY to live with them. My mom quickly helped get him to the best doctors in NY, and with some changes to his medication and thanks to her cooking, his health dramatically improved. He has outlived them both and since their deaths, I have been helping to oversee his ongoing affairs as he continues to live in my parent's condo. When coronavirus first hit NY in early March, I was deeply concerned that it would get

much worse, as it sadly did for so many families in NYC. I was fearful because Brian was a person with many underlying health issues and thus, was among the most vulnerable group. I believed if he stayed in the city, he would contract the virus and possibly die. Another cousin of mine, Tomas, has been working full time in Esopus since October and so I asked him and the community on the property of Esopus, if Brian could live with them until the virus in NYC was resolved. It has been an incredible blessing for everyone, especially Brian. In usual Esopus fashion, he was warmly accepted and quickly became a member of the Esopus family. I believe it has also given him new life as he fully engaged with the community in every way, joining them for prayers, meals, work and lots of laughs. Knowing that he has been in one of the safest and most isolated places during this coronavirus has been a most welcome gift of relief to me.

As a way of again being in solidarity with my community in Forest Hills and all our Marist communities, I use the daily prayer book, “Give us This Day”, to pray today’s morning prayer and reflect on the mass readings of the day. It is reassuring to me this morning to know that thousands of our Marist Brothers around our world are praying their morning prayers in a similar way and millions of Catholics around the world will follow the readings of today’s Mass. Hopefully the day will soon come when we all can again enjoy celebrating Eucharist in churches and as a united Christian family. I pray also for our local morning Mass community in Forest Hills and look forward to celebrating Eucharist with them soon.

Nearby bird neighbors offered me a “good morning” with their singing as I watched the first streaks of red begin to paint the sky. I noticed the two fishing rods on the porch that Brian brought up yesterday and not only looked forward to getting practice in learning how to fish later today, but also to our upcoming Alaskan adventure this summer. I prayed that my heart would allow the many scenes of natural beauty and wildlife which we will encounter there to again revitalize and deepen my spirit and soul. I spent a few moments choosing the best pictures I had taken since I began my Camino and put them into an album on my iPad. I then used the automated slideshow feature that neatly presents all pictures in an album in a real cool way set to music. Watching the

slideshow allows me to again be filled with gratitude for these graced filled days of Camino. Before I finished my morning reflective time, I decided to reward my performing bird choir with bread. I broke up three slices and scattered them on and in front of the porch and then returned to my rocking chair to watch the feast begin. Blue Jays, robins, a cardinal and many birds types I don't know all came to enjoy my offering of appreciation to them.

After prayer, Brian and I headed a little north for this day's hike today to climb Peaked Mountain trail, which had amazing 360-degree views from the top. These days with Brian are incredibly helpful to both of us as we continue to mourn our friend, but also remember many good times with and funny stories about Bob. On the top of the mountain today, we both took twenty minutes to just savor the views before our descent back to the car. While I was sitting on one of the large boulders at the top, I reflected a little on Mary's life and how she had to watch Jesus, her Son, suffer terribly and die a cruel death. Those experiences did not stop her from going on to help the apostles form the early church. I imagined the many ways that she quietly encouraged those apostles and first believers not to give up hope and to put their trust in her Son. I took solace in her ability to overcome such sadness as watching her Son suffer and die. My parents both had their own long tough journeys in Calvary Hospice before they died. Bob had fifteen months of suffering from his stoke before dying alone with no one around him. Having witnessed these sad losses in my life, I take my strength from the example of our Good Mother and live in hope knowing those I mourn are with Jesus. Furthermore, I too like Mary must live as a person of faith and work to bring others closer to her Son. Our Marist mission is to "Make Jesus Known and Loved" and I pray that I may continue to deepen that mission each day.

On our way down the mountain, which was quite steep, I had to be mindful to remain present to every step of the trail. It allowed me to remember a quote from a great book I had read many years earlier. The book was *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* by Dan Millman. In the book, a young man named Dan is on a spiritual quest and he is guided and mentored by an old service station attendant named Socrates. Throughout the book, Socrates tries to get Dan to live in the present

moment by repeatedly asking him the same two questions: “What time is it?” and “Where are you?” The young warrior eventually comes to understand that the only two appropriate answers to those questions are simply “now” and “here”. As I continued to descend, I repeated those questions to myself.

“What time is it? Now.
Where are you? Here.”

We were happy to return to the car after our three-hour trek in the woods. We stopped to pick up supplies for dinner before heading back to the cabin. After getting cleaned up and grabbing a little lunch, I took to the second floor living room for a quiet and relaxing period to journal and do some spiritual reading. Similarly to previous days on my Camino, I returned to the book, *Everyday Serenity* for a daily insight. The reflection I randomly chose to read today was about “Living Spirituality”.

“It is when you really are living in the present ...that you are
living spirituality.”

After my morning hike and its emphasis on staying present and being aware of each step, this quote and passage seemed a perfect fit for today. I realize that during these days, the more razor focused I can be to actively living and remaining in the present moment, the deeper I will experience the presence and love of God. I will continue my attempt to carefully notice the many gifts he is laying before me at all times. I see His grace in the gifts of simple practices like watching a bird, appreciating a sunrise, sharing and laughing with a friend, savoring a meal, listening to His words in scripture and in the many times these days that His voice is echoing in the chambers of my heart.

Later in the afternoon, I fished off the dock with Brian down by the lake. It was good practice for Alaska; hopefully, I will have more success in catching one up there. Still we enjoyed a nice fish dinner and our last evening together. At one point we went for a walk to smoke cigars, which is something we often did together with Bob. We also enjoyed a nice fire after returning on a pretty chilly night. I’m grateful Brian got

to spend these two nights here. I think our time together also helped him in dealing with the loss of his best friend.

Before bed, I carved out a little more quiet time on the second floor. As I prayed my Examen or “review of the day”, I was humbled by how God has enriched and blessed my time with Him on this Camino and again today by speaking to me in so many ways. I felt His presence today most strongly again through nature. My morning prayer routine of being quietly attentive to His creation and using simple spiritual readings or these of the day’s Mass and reflecting on them has been very centering. My silent morning prayer period has allowed me to see God in so many more ways throughout the remainder of the day because I’m already centered in Him. This practice of silence allows God to reveal Himself to me in all things. As the great Irish writer, John O’Donohue, once wrote, “Nothing in the universe resembles God more than silence.”

I thank God for the many insights and blessings today; I invoke both Him and Mary to intercede for people in my life, a number of Brothers and all those affected by the coronavirus. Lastly, I ask God to forgive me for all the times that I have failed to “live profound love” and for the strength to make that “mantra” a sustainable characteristic of my life.



The Red Valley Rail Trail.



Hiking with my good friend, Brian.

*“Wilderness is not a luxury, but a necessity of
the human spirit.”*

- Edward Abbey

Day Ten May 13th

I slept well, but woke by 4:00am. I decided to rise and go down to my morning prayer spot, the rocking chair, so I could silently watch and enjoy this new day coming to life.

I utilized “Give us This Day” to pray the Psalm for today’s morning prayer and to read the Gospel for today’s Mass. I was struck by a passage from each one as if God chose them directly for me today.

In today’s Psalm, I read the lines:

“I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have hoped in your word.
My eyes awaken before dawn
To ponder your promise”
What “cry for help” do I ask of the Lord today?

I entrust to Him to watch over Owen, one of my closest friends among the Brothers, who will be having surgery today. I ask Him to ensure that Owen’s surgery may go smoothly and to guide all the doctors and medical staff that they might fulfill their gifts in helping him. I

prayerfully remember Christina, whose birthday is today and ask the Lord to continue to bless her and all in her life. I pray for Brian who will be leaving later today, so God may continue to allow him to live “one day at a time” with continued integrity, strength and peace. I pray for all those suffering from the coronavirus; all those mourning loved ones they have lost to this virus; and all the front line workers that risk so much in trying to save so many others from it. Lastly, I beg Jesus to watch all the refugee and migrant children, who must be suffering even greater difficulties over this world pandemic.

Today’s Gospel readings is the story of God as the vine grower and Jesus as the true vine. A few lines stand out and speak loudly to me as I watch the sky slowly turn from night into day:

“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it shall be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become [one of] My disciples”.

I prayed with a grateful heart knowing that Jesus has always answered my prayers, even my unspoken ones. I remembered and prayed the words of a prayer that was found in the pocket of an unknown Confederate soldier during the Civil War:

“I asked for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for
but everything that I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered,
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.”

I also prayed the last line of that Gospel passage, “that you bear much fruit and become (one of) my disciples”. Today is the tenth day of my Camino and I realized that I am about two-thirds of the way across this pilgrimage retreat. I know that as time points towards my return to the world on Sunday, I will need to spend some quality prayer time listening to Jesus speak to my heart about the ways He may want me to continue to walk with Him as one of His disciples. What other “fruits” might He be calling me to “bear”?

I am blessed these days to have a front row seat to enjoy God's daily sunrise painting of His sky. While there will be many sunrises as beautiful as today's, there may not be too many more beautiful than the spectacle of brilliance I watched this morning. The accompanying silence and occasional music provided by my bird friends simply added to making my morning prayer a blessed ritual of appreciating God's creation.

Brian and I leave by 6:00am to again head north to climb Mt. Willard in the White Mountains. It is a beautiful day with clear skies, but pretty cold at twenty-nine degrees. We get to the area of the trailhead, but all the parking areas for this hike are closed off and so we move to Plan B. We drive about five miles to another trail that allows for parking. As usual, Plan B turns out to be an even better option than Mt. Willard. It is a tough hike. Stages of it have over a foot of unexpected snow. I think about previous snowshoeing adventures with my good friend, Ed Kennedy, climbing Mt. Marcy in winter months and wish I had a pair of his snowshoes on this trip. The long slow journey to the end of this trail is well worth our efforts as we were rewarded with a majestic 140 foot waterfall. We spend twenty minutes at the falls just to take some quiet time and admire its beauty. I think about Melissa, another very special person in my life. We had gone on vacation to Kauai a few ago with her mom. During that trip, the two of us hiked a torturous eight-mile mud filled trail that ended at the famous waterfall that was used in the filming of Jurassic Park. Although we were able to swim under the falls in Hawaii, I think it would be impossible for anyone to attempt swimming here as the temperature is below freezing.

Starting our hike back down the mountain, I thought about two Gospel

stories that involved Jesus and his apostles taking a hike or walk. The first was the story of the Transfiguration. I recalled how some of the apostles climbed a high mountain with Jesus, and how they wanted to pitch tents and remain on that mountaintop with Him, but He led them back to an imperfect world to help spread His Gospel. The second Gospel story that came to mind was the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Although they did not at first recognize Jesus walking on the road with them, they wanted this stranger to stay. After Jesus revealed Himself to them in the breaking of the bread and then disappeared, they recalled how their hearts had burned within them while they walked and talked with Him on that road. After this encounter with Jesus, they too ran quickly back to Jerusalem to begin to spread His Gospel. These two stories came to mind not only because they were stories of Jesus hiking and walking with the apostles, but also because I know that Jesus is likewise leading me down the mountain of my Camino to return home and continue to spread His Gospel message. During these days of my Camino, I too have felt my heart burn as He walked with me on this journey.

Continuing our descent, I returned to reflecting on a question that stayed with me from my morning prayer: What other “fruits” might God be calling me to bear?

So with imaginative prayer, I asked:

D: Jesus, what do you want me to do when I go home and finish this Camino?

J: You need to continue to bear fruit for my Father’s kingdom. Certainly continue, as you have to inspire young people on Encounters and youth gatherings with talks about Me and their being open to following My call in their lives. For the younger Brothers and Lay Marists in your Province, be a friend, mentor and a witness of leadership to them as they are the ones who will continue to lead my Mother’s society in the years ahead. Remember how mentors like Leo, Fred and Berkie were so instrumental in your own life’s journey?

Well, now it is your turn to be that same inspiration to all those coming behind you.

D: I will, but what else can I do to ensure I always know that I am bearing the fruit that you want me to and not the fruit of my ego or for some other worldly reasons?

J: There will be many more ways you will continue to bear fruit in the years ahead. Don't worry about all those details now. They will become clearer to you as we continue to journey together and talk. I tell you that from now on, you no longer need to try and find the time to pray so that you might find Me, but instead know that I will be with you and in your heart for as long as you are open to it. When you rise and pray each morning, let us simply pray as one, so that we can plan and live the day ahead together. As you go through your day and meet the challenges that arise, allow My voice to be heard in your response to those challenges. When people frustrate or disappoint you, allow the compassion of My heart to take over for you and respond to them. Likewise, know that I will be with you in all things that you do and all places you go. I look forward to taking long walks on the beach with you this summer down at Long Branch, as well as allowing you to see some of my Father's most beautiful work when you travel to Alaska. I will be walking with you when you finish your Plan B Camino in Spain, whenever that may happen. I will be with you on all the days until then and on all the days that follow it.

After Brian and I finished the most beautiful hike of my Camino up until now, we drove back to the cabin, stopping off at a Dunkin Donuts for coffee on the way. After getting cleaned up, I had a little soup for lunch and spent some time journaling. Brian leaves in the early afternoon to return back to NY. I am incredibly grateful he made the trip up for these days. It was so enjoyable to hike together, but most of all to share good times and help each other overcome our recent loss. We know that Bob doesn't want us to live in sorrow, but wants us to live with the same joy that he brought into the lives of so many others,

especially us. He will continue to live in us and be cause for us to laugh often as we continue to share stories and treasured memories of him. Before Brian leaves, he shared a poem with me that was one of Bob's favorites.

THE TRAIN OF LIFE

“At birth, we board the train and meet our parents,
and we believe they will always travel by our side.
As time goes by, other people will board the train; and they will
be significant, that is our siblings, friends, children, and even
the love of our life.
However, at some station our parents will step down from the
train,
leaving us on this journey alone.
Others will step down over time and leave a permanent vacuum.
Some, however, will go so unnoticed that we don't realize they
vacated their seats.
This train ride will be full of joy, sorrow, fantasy, expectations,
hellos, goodbyes, and farewells.
Success consists of having a good relationship with all
passengers requiring
that we give the best of ourselves.
The mystery to everyone is: We do not know at which station we
ourselves will step down.
So, we must live in the best way, love, forgive, and offer the best
of who we are.
It is important to do this because when the time comes for us
to step down and leave our seat empty we should leave behind
beautiful memories
for those who will continue to travel on the train of life.
I wish you all a joyful journey.”
(Author Unknown)

After Brian left, I spent a few minutes walking down by the lake and offering a simple prayer to Jesus that He would allow my “train ride of life” to continue to be one filled with many graces and much joy.

I had an afternoon Zoom meeting with Chris and Craig from Molloy. It was one of the few commitments that I kept on my calendar during my Camino days because it wasn't really work related. We had been planning a memorial Mass and pizza event to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of my great mentor, Br. Leo Richard. His actual anniversary is today, so it was an opportune time to be planning a way of remembering his legacy. The event was supposed to happen at Molloy on June 13th, but we are in the process of now making it a virtual memorial service for all of us old "cave" dwellers. It is not easy to find words worthy enough to describe this modern day saint. Leo was the single most loving, compassionate and inspirational force of nature that generations of Molloy students will ever encounter. Two memories that briefly capture the essence of Leo came to mind:

During my junior year at Molloy, I was in the "cave" on a typical afternoon. The room was filled with lots of kids, laughter and the occasional period of quiet when Leo would ask someone a personal question or suggest how they might be able to help others if they were willing. While the "cave" to an outsider or an administrator might have seemed chaotic, it was heaven on earth for teenagers. There were two guaranteed outcomes for anyone who entered the "cave". First, every single person was unconditionally loved and accepted as soon as he entered. Secondly, everyone who ever entered was transformed into a better person simply by his or her meeting this incredible force of nature and man of God.

On that particular afternoon, a quiet but angry kid was sitting in one of the corners of the room. A friend of this young man persuaded him to try the "cave" for one day. At one point when things grew quiet, Leo stood in front of the young man and pointed his finger asking, "So kid, what's your story?" The young man cleared his throat and spit into Leo's face, responding with a loud "F**k You". You could have heard a pin drop. Every one in that room wanted to jump out of his chair and put a fist to this kid for dishonoring the most loving man we all knew. Leo simply wiped his face and softly said to the young man, "Don't worry kid, that's just your pain talking." The young man broke down and wept before revealing and sharing the horrible tragedies and abuse in his life. Leo hugged him and guaranteed him that he would walk with him

to tackle and overcome each problem he faced. That young man did overcome his issues. Within months, he was one of Leo's experts in talking to younger kids with anger issues.

My second memory of Leo was that he not only convinced me during my senior year to attend college in Ireland so I could pursue my dream to play hurling there, but he even traveled to Ireland to come see me play. I was not a very strong academic student during my high school years and had my doubts, about whether I could ever make it academically in college. I can still picture Leo telling me, "O'Riordan, so what if you fail out, at least you will have lived your dream and played in college for one year. If you don't go, you will regret it everyday for the rest of your life." I can't image not having had those years of college sports and all the friendships and life lessons I learned during those years. Thanks to him, I have those memories and so much more.

These two memories for me sum up Leo. He loved everyone as they were with incredible compassion. Once he was in your corner, he would remain there to support you in every way, even if it meant traveling three thousand miles to watch your game.

As the afternoon turned to evening, I received the good news that Owen's surgery went well. I said a prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus and his Good Mother for watching over him and his medical staff. I cooked a simple supper and looked forward to a quiet evening of reading, journaling and prayer. I began, sitting in my rocker and just savoring the quiet beauty that surrounded me: Snow capped Mt. Washington looked like a perfect post card, the waterfall I viewed this morning, the red striped squirrels that ate nuts I left on the porch, and the loon birds that often floated by on the lake with their unusual eerie calls. They were all reminders to me of how easily I connect to our Creator when I am in nature and take the time to appreciate His creations. I remember two quotes that I had read in the week to which my spirituality immediately made connections. The first came from the book, *Anam Cara* by John O'Donohue.

"Since the Celts were a nature people, the world of nature was both a presence and a companion. Nature nourished

them; it was here that they felt their deepest belonging and affinity.”

The second came from the writing of Pope Francis in “Laudato Si”.

“Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each . . . and which also unites us in fond affection with Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother River and Mother Earth.”

As the evening drew on, I took my Rosary walk over to the beach area so I could also enjoy tonight’s sunset. So many people came into my memory and thoughts today and I offered an “Ave” for each of them.

I returned to the log cabin and enjoyed time on the second floor reading and journaling. As a way of celebrating the life of Leo on this twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, I watched two videos produced by Molloy. One of the videos included Leo, Regis and the other legends of the SMILE program sharing reflections. It was great to hear Leo’s booming voice come to life again. Few days in my life pass when somehow I don’t include making reference to him or asking myself, “What would Leo have done?” It had been a full day of much grace and joy. I closed it by lighting my Camino prayer candle and praying my Examen.



My reward at the top of the hike.



Br. Leo , my mentor and friend.

“Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt.”

- John Muir

Day Eleven May 14th

My morning routine of waking at pre-dawn and sitting in my rocking chair continued today. I don't believe I have ever gotten out of bed this early on so many consecutive days in my entire life. I do not feel tired on these mornings, but rather am filled with a renewed energy and excitement over allowing God to enter my day and come into my life. My bird friends, the loons, offered their loud "good morning" as they passed across the mirror like lake below a pink horizon. From Everyday Serenity, I read a passage titled, "Still Time". It challenged me to look for moments each day when "time stands still". These moments of stopped time can be among the most "real moments" of all those in my day. These quiet peace filled mornings of waiting for the sunrise have been filled with not only still time, but also moments of deep listening to my own inner cell and a keen awareness of the awe that can be captured by stopping and noticing God in creation.

As the morning continued to approach sunrise, I read today's Gospel in which Jesus tells his apostles, "I have told you this so my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete...it was not you who chose Me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit that will remain." These days have allowed me to recognize the joy that

comes from Jesus and completes my life. I feel affirmed that the Gospel reading today emphasized again the fact that I have been chosen and appointed to “bear much fruit”. As I continue my descent down the mountain of this Camino, I will continue to question and challenge myself to find more ways in my life that I may “bear fruit”.

I headed out by 6:00am and drove back to the White Mountains. I wanted part of my Plan B Camino to be on the Appalachian Trail, which is our country’s most famous hiking trail. As I drove up to the parking area for the Appalachian Trail, I listened to a sermon from Rev. Cari Patterson. I had found it yesterday on the website of Holy Cross Monastery, next to Esopus, while I was looking at some upcoming online retreat offerings by the Monastery. I was amazed that her sermon was a reflection of her own travels on the Appalachian Trail and some lessons she learned while on it. I remembered a line from the book, *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield, which states that there are “no coincidences in life”. Many little things keep coming together in sync each of these Camino days so I am more and more convinced that God is truly orchestrating my journey and dropping these confirmations that I am on the correct path.

My time today gave me a deeper appreciation and respect for all those who are able to complete the two thousand mile journey from Georgia to Maine that is the Appalachian Trail. I had previously walked day segments of it in WV, PA, NJ, NY, and VT, but never experienced the level of difficulty and ruggedness that today’s hike offered. My four hours in the White Mountains today were breathtaking and exhausting as I slowly traversed the steep ups and downs of this segment of the Appalachian Trail. During my hike this morning, I reflected on the Gospel that I had read earlier and asked Jesus the question, “What are some other ways that I might ‘bear fruit’ in the days and weeks ahead?”

Jesus responded to my question in the quiet of my heart and said:

“There are ways you can bear fruits everyday if you choose.
How about some of these for a start:

1. Make a video wishing Fred a Happy Birthday and tell him what a gift he has been is in your life. It's ok if you also want to poke a little fun at his favorite team, the Red Sox. He has been one of My greatest servants so he deserves all the happiness anyone can give him.
2. Reflect and make the video as you've been asked to do by Molloy for their seniors, who will be unable to have a graduation ceremony because of the coronavirus. Allow this video, which will be part of their online commencement, to tell each graduating senior that My Mother and I will always be with them to guide them, protect them and to love and help them.
3. Share this journal of your Camino with some of the people in your life who it may impact. If it helps even one person draw closer to Me, then isn't that good fruit?
4. Use your old Molloy videotapes and pictures from the '96 Championship Teams to create a video of that special season so you can share it next year on the twenty-fifth anniversary of that winning team. It will also be a special way for that team to remember Bob, who was such an instrumental part of that coaching staff.
5. Create a prayer service to be used for the upcoming virtual memorial for Leo's twenty-fifth anniversary so it might remind all who partake in the prayer that Leo only wanted each of his “cave dwellers” to be the best they could be and make a difference in this world. He had a great devotion to My Mom. Remind people of that and that they should also entrust their concerns to her.

6. When you have time in the upcoming weeks, since you will not be traveling much for work, take some time to write the book that you have been hoping to do for years about the inspiring lives of young people in your own life. Sharing a book like that among your Marist Youth kids might lead some of them to likewise follow Me and be a disciple of Mine in their own way.
7. Make videos of your Camino and your upcoming Alaska trip so as to share my Fathers' incredible creation and natural beauty that you will have seen. Those videos could be used for prayers that focus on nature and creation.

These are some simple fruits that are now ripe for use. There will be other fruits not yet ready to be used and some that have not yet even been planted in you. Just be open to bearing the fruits that I give you when they are ready to be harvested and don't worry about the next season."

On my drive back to the cabin, I began to dwell on how I might accomplish bringing the suggestions offered by Jesus to fruition in the weeks ahead. After showering and some lunch, I worked on this journal for an hour.

In the early afternoon, I decided I would enjoy a different type of prayer ritual. I have loved the game of golf most of my life. I love it, not because I ever snagged a "Hole-in-One" or ever won a tournament, but rather because it has very often provided a chance for me to spend significant time with some of the most important and memorable people in my life. Today as a way of remembering and honoring those special folks, I decided to try "Playing and Praying Golf". During my nine-hole round, I stood on each tee box and spent a moment in quiet prayer remembering and being grateful for the gift and grace each particular person has been in my life. The exercise was enjoyable and at times even sacred. It gave me a deep recollection of some extraordinary people who have been a major part of my life's journey. I don't remember my golf score today, as I rarely keep track of it anymore, but I can easily recall the folks I prayerfully remembered with a grateful heart.

- On hole number one, I prayed for my Uncle Jerry, who was a dedicated and faithful priest. He was the first to introduce me to the game when I was very young. Each summer, he would take all of us, his young nephews, to Charleville Golf Club near our home in Ireland to enjoy a day out together. Years later, playing golf with many of those same cousins would become some of my most enjoyable outings. As I grew older, I had the privilege of spending a number of other days with Jerry on golf courses and while the golf may not have always been great, the conversations always were. Since Jerry died from cancer in 2012, my cousins and I have tried to remember him annually with a simple family golf outing dedicated to his memory.
- On hole number two, I prayed for my cousins, Donal, Tomas, Diarmuid and Liam. Over the years, I have grown much closer to them and have enjoyed numerous days of great bantering and even some cheating on the course. Donal, Tomas and I have planned several vacations golfing together and they have all been memorable trips. We have enjoyed golf outings to WV, a trip to Mexico, one to Hawaii and many rounds in Ireland. My single greatest day on any golf course was in 2017, the year of my twenty-fifth Anniversary as a Brother. Donal, Tomas, Diarmuid and I travelled to the home of golf at St. Andrews in Scotland to play a magical round. Everything about that day was perfect from the weather, the company, decent golf scores by all of us and a final celebratory cigar on the famous Swilcan Bridge on the final hole. I often look at that picture, that now sits on my office desk, and am always filled with gratitude for the gift those crazy amigos are in my life.
- On hole number three, I prayed for Jim Kelly, who I still deeply miss. I prayed that there will be a golf course in Heaven and that we will get to play one last round together.

- On hole number four, I prayed for two great members of a unique Molloy club, the FEA. Ray DiStephan and Kevin Budzinski are two fellow disciples of Leo who continue to live the principles of SMILE in their lives. Ray even brought Leo's design for peer group counseling to the public schools. In the years we worked together at Molloy, we enjoyed many rounds of golf, but also helped carry on Leo's legacy after his passing.
- On hole number five, I prayed for Linda Kaspar, an amazing gift in my life during my Roselle Catholic Days in the Development Office. We ran many RC golf outings together. If every person had a friend like her, they would be among the luckiest people in the world. I also prayed for all the great alumni of RC that I connected with in those years around the golf outing: Tom and Mernie Libonate, John Jago, Marty and Diane Pribush, and Bill Trelease.
- On hole number six, I prayed for Carol Yarnell and her late husband Bill. I enjoyed many memorable rounds of golf with Carol in NM, WV, CO, HI and Ireland. I am eternally grateful that she and Bill came into my life during my WV years. She was a member of the first graduating class of Bishop Donahue and was a loyal and most generous supporter of the school. She is a tremendous woman of faith and has proudly served our country with honor. She was the first female commander of a U.S. military base in our nation's history. I fondly remember our trips to Ireland, Hawaii, D.C., Esopus and all the bantering and enjoyable nights of playing Farkle. I am also grateful for the many great people who has come into my life because of her and Bill, especially John and Donna.
- On hole number seven, I prayed for my good friend, Bill Niklaus, who is also Molloy's Hall of Fame golf coach. I entrust him and all the staff at Molloy to good St. Anne and remember the repose of Mike Harrison, who was lost

to the coronavirus.

- On hole number eight, I prayed for Jerry Dunworth, the current chairperson of the Marist Brothers Center in Esopus Board. Over the past year, we have gotten out to play a few rounds in both NJ and FL. I am grateful for all he has done to help foster the Mission of Esopus. I also remembered all those connected to the Esopus family, especially all the campers who will not be able to attend the camps this summer due to the coronavirus. I prayed for the families of the four campers who recently died from this terrible pandemic.
- On hole number nine, I prayed for my former student and good friend Diezel in WV, who I enjoyed many rounds of golf with over the years. I prayed that his wedding to Nicole can be rescheduled after its recently having been postponed because of the virus. I also remembered the many blessed days of golfing with other good friends in the Mountain State, such as Travis Tellotocci, Tom Wise, Mike Oliver and Troy Krupica, who were all part of the West Virginian leg of my journey.

Lastly when I finished my round, I looked at the mountains and trees. I offered a silent prayer of gratitude for the scenes of natural beauty that the game of golf has allowed me to witness, from spectacular sunsets looking over cliff-lined ocean shores to vibrant autumn days with their magnificent, colorful trees.

While I ate a simple dinner, it struck me that every part of my incredibly enjoyable day, had been a prayer. My morning of admiring nature and reading scripture was obviously prayerful, but so too were my hike and golf game. How amazing would it be if we could allow all parts of our lives and activities to be a form of prayer? I find confirmation of my thoughts in reading, *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, by Esther De Waal. In the book, she shares that Celtic prayer teaches, “that there was no separation of praying and living; praying and working flow into each other, so that life is to be punctuated by prayer, become prayer.”

After supper, I went for my evening rosary walk. Upon returning, I read another chapter of *Soul of a Pilgrim*. I took care of a few necessary phone calls and emails and went up to the second floor living room for a quiet night of prayer. For prayer tonight I imagined that Jesus and Mary were sitting in the surrounding chairs in my living room with me. At first, I simply watched them as they interacted in a most loving and compassionate way. They were laughing, happy and very engaged in talking about our world.

Mary says to Jesus, “There are a few things I need for you to do for me today”.

Jesus smiles saying, “I was thinking you were going to ask again.” Mary tells Jesus about some of the people she has entrusted to herself and their needs.

Jesus responds “Anything I ask of my Father will be done and so shall all of these intercessions you ask of Me.”

It is consoling to think that our prayers, needs, worries, troubles could so easily be taken care of by simply trusting in our Good Mother, knowing that she will bring all our needs to her Son.

In my imaginative prayer, I join them in conversation for a while and they are happy to have me join.

I ask them “What gives you both such joy and happiness?”

Jesus responds saying, “There are so many great people here in heaven with us now, including many of your own saints who have completed their journeys on earth and have taken up their well deserved place with us.”

Mary adds, “Here we are all simply one family and only the best characteristics of any person return home with their souls. All grief, sadness, anger, sin, bitterness and disappointment are all left in those graves on earth, while a person’s soul returns to Heaven as perfect as when it first was created. All the tarnish and rust that attach to souls

while on earth are removed before coming home.”

I asked them if they could give some people messages from me, since I would like to thank so many who are with them, who have shaped and influenced my life and helped make me who I am.

Mary responds. “All of those people you love and are thinking about are here in heaven and already know the gratefulness in your heart”.

I ask Mary, “So how can you intercede for so many constantly seeking your refuge?”

She assures me that all our prayers are answered. She and Jesus focus on the most critical needs first, but they are not the only ones who can answer prayers from Heaven.

She explains, “All those people in your heart who you wanted to thank are still very involved in helping you. They are always going to be with you to assist, guide and protect you. When people die and come to Heaven, it does not end their relationships with those they left behind. It only changes it. In many ways, they are able to do more for their loved ones now than when they were with them on earth. When someone arrives in Heaven, we allow them the ability to help watch over those they love. This is one of the ways that so many prayers can be answered, as not every prayer has to be answered by my Son or I. Many of your prayers are answered by those you love who continue to watch over your life”.

I am again reassured and feeling deeply connected to Jesus and Mary. I finished my day by once again lighting my Camino candle and saying my Examen prayer. I went to bed grateful and joyful for another great day of my Camino.



One of our many Pilgrimages to L'Hermitage in France.



The Four Amigos at St. Andrews in 2017.

*“An early morning walk is a blessing for the
whole day.”*

- Henry David Thoreau

Day Twelve May 15th

By 4:00am, I was back on my rocker to quietly and prayerfully await and watch the coming of this new day. I began my morning with another random reading from, *Everyday Serenity*. Today's reflection, titled "Time Runs Out", shares the insight that too often in our world, "people die with their music still in them". Life is short, we all have a song to give this world and we must not keep putting our sharing of that song off for another day. My "song" or "songs" will be the "Fruit I Bear" in allowing others to know the love of Jesus through the witness I will give to others, especially young people.

In reading today's morning prayer from "Give us this Day", I am again comforted by the scripture reading from Isaiah, which says:

"You are my servant, I chose you,
I have not rejected you - Do not fear, I am with you;
do not be anxious for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, I will help you;
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

As the time grows closer for me to return to my world, I know that I will not be traveling home on my own and that Jesus, my constant co-pilot, will be walking with me and guiding me on whatever trails follow after this Camino.

As these days quickly pass, I feel incredibly connected to all the people I know, but particularly this morning to all Marists around our world who are working hard each day to live our Mission. I prayed this morning for those many Marists around the globe who have graced my life. I prayed for Ernesto, our Superior General in Rome, who has tirelessly dedicated his life to promoting all things Marist. I fondly recalled our summer together many years ago, when he joined Fred and me on a Mission trip in Wheeling, WV to improve his English. I am also grateful he invited me to be part of our first International Commission for Brothers Today. Serving on that committee connected me to many of our Brothers from around the world who are still often in touch with me. I prayerfully remembered our General Council, particularly our own Ben Consigli, that our Good Mother will give them the energy to continue to accompany and link all our Marist Provinces. I prayed for the many “student Brothers” from Mission countries who have lived with us here in the USA, while they earned their graduate degrees from Marist College. In particular, I asked God to bless Danny Taylor from Liberia, Stephen from Cameroon, Jude Mary from Nigeria, Alex from Madagascar, Jesu from India and Mike Dewais from Sri Lanka. I continued to think of all the Brothers and Lay Marists I have encountered and realized how my life has been deeply enriched by them. I asked God to continue to bless John Pierre, Neville and Georges, who were part of the first International community at L’Hermitage when it reopened. I was blessed to have led four pilgrimages there and to have come to know that community. International Marist Youth Gatherings in Australia, Brazil and Canada allowed me to expand my appreciation of how far and wide Champagnat’s dream has travelled. I joyfully recalled April 18, 1999 when our founder was canonized as a Saint. Seeing over a million people that day in St. Peter’s Square was inspiring; as all were waving their “Champagnat Scarves” and chanting his name. On that day, so many of us did not speak the same languages, but we were all able to communicate by waving our scarves and knowing we were united as Marists. Our General Chapter

in Colombia, two and half years ago, continues to call us to prayerfully respond to the Calls of that Chapter and the spirit we lived for those six weeks. More recently, our collaborative work with the Marists of the Arco Norte Region calls us to move closer together to support each other as our Marist Mission continues to unfold in our part of the world. I closed my prayer asking Mary to be with all our young men around the world who are in Formation to be Brothers so that they might be our future, continuing her society to make her Son known and loved.

My hikes over the past three days, each with amazing views, were difficult and left my legs feeling sore. I decided today that I needed some recovery and no major hills, so I returned to the Red Valley Rail Trail for ten easy miles of pretty flat terrain. Over the course of the hike I reflected on what I would say on the videos for Fred's birthday and to the Seniors of Molloy. I was happy with the ideas I came up with for those videos. As the miles on the trail continued, I recalled with gratitude some other great days of hiking in my life. I remembered how each one left me with a feeling of awe in being surrounded by such beauty and incredible landscape. Some of those hikes were in the Ballyhoura mountains in Cork, Mt. Brandon and other mountains in Kerry, the Swiss Alps in the summer of '92, the "Canyon of the Gods" in the Rocky Mountains near Colorado Springs, the Grand Canyon, the mountains and hills of Sangre de Cristo, the Mohonk preserve near Esopus, Coopers Rock and other mountains in West Virginia, the hills of LaValla in France, the Blue Mountains of Jamaica and the Three Sisters Mountain range in Australia. I have been so blessed to have traveled so many extraordinary trails on the Caminos of my life.

Before finishing my hike today, I video called Brian and Eileen O'Neill in Scotland. They are both life-long Marists and have spent more than twenty years working at Camp Marist during their summers. I have grown close with them over these past few years and had been thinking of them these days while staying at the Camp. When my cousins and I travelled to Scotland in 2017, Brian led us on a day of hiking in the Scottish Highlands. It was good to briefly chat and catch up with them. It also reinforced the grace and intention of my prayer this morning in gratefully remembering some of my fellow Marists around the globe.

After my hike, I began to take steps towards a few of the suggestions offered to me yesterday by Jesus during prayer. I spent about an hour creating a video that captured many of the outstanding sunrises, trails and other pictures of Nature from these Camino Days. Next week, with a little technical help from a friend who knows how to send videos, I will offer this video to friends I prayed for this week with a note telling them that they were remembered often in my prayers as I made this pilgrimage retreat. I also created a humorous birthday video that I will send to Fred for his 91st Birthday next week.

I spent a few minutes journaling until my phone alarm went off to remind me of the midday Marist Memorare that Matt Fallon began several months ago. There are now several hundred Marist Young Adults and others around our country who pause each day at noon to pray this Marial and Marist prayer. Its words have even deeper meaning when I realize that I join in solidarity with so many other Marists in praying it at this very moment.

REMEMBER, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen

At 1:00pm, I joined an online Zoom Retreat offered by Holy Cross Monastery. It is a three day retreat for one hour each day on “Life as a Spiritual Journey” given by Erica Murphy. Today’s opening session again synced with many of the themes of my own pilgrimage days. Erica reflected on the Hero’s Journey as developed by Joseph Campbell. It really was a great accompaniment to my retreat and her journal questions at the end will be helpful as I begin to transitioning for my return home.

I spent time quietly reflecting on one of the questions from today’s online retreat which asked, “What is your life’s quest?” This question very much connects to my earlier reflection around the theme of how I

might “bear fruit” in this world as I continue on my life journey. As Erica pointed out in her sharing, the whole purpose of the “Hero’s Journey” is to return home, but only after being transformed so as to be “at-one-with” God and to serve Him in a deeper and more meaningful way. Some additional reflections that Erica provided to further explore this question of discovering our “life’s quest” or deeper mission included:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about what arose?
- What might you need to change about your life in order to fulfill your quest?
- Think about what resources you might need to fulfill your quest, both internal and external.
- What are those resources? If you don’t have them, how can you get them?

After journaling, I went for a walk to clear my head and get some fresh air. My bird friends offered me a free concert of their singing. Upon returning, I finished the last two chapters of *Soul of a Pilgrim*. Chapter eight focused on the “Journey Home” and the need for a re-dedication of one’s life. In that final chapter, the author, Christine Valters Paintner states:

“I knew that was why I’d come to this place: to rededicate myself to this path, to deepen into stillness, to commit again to the contemplative way in the midst of life. This is why we embark on pilgrimage, to rediscover what it is we already know most deeply within ourselves. This is a kind of coming home.”

I also read a chapter from the book, *40-Day Journey with Joan Chittister* in which she says: “Silence is the element of monastic spirituality that begs for re-discovery in our time”. Both passages speak to my desire and need to embrace my “inner monk” during these days of solitude and rediscover how God constantly dwells in my heart and how He is leading me to maintain a more contemplative stance as I approach and live each day. I am again struck by how easily all connections

from various resources during my retreat all flow and weave together, leading me exactly where I need to go.

I went down to the kitchen to prepare a simple dinner of fish and salad. As I cooked, I thought back on other significant retreats in my life that have also helped me to find my way “home”. These included: my Encounter as a senior in high school, which was the first time I contemplated the possibility of Brotherhood; my retreat at l’Hermitage de Notre Dame with Don Bisson prior to entering Novitiate, my Ignation thirty-day silent retreat in Gloucester, MA just before I professed my Final Vows as a Marist Brother and my one hundred day sabbatical retreat at the Sangre De Christo retreat center in NM. Each of these were sacred retreats in my life and were times when I “rededicated” myself to following Jesus more closely. They were key stepping stones on my journey of faith and each one, combined with other lessons in my life and mentors who guided me, allowed me to go deeper into my renewed resolve to follow Jesus as a disciple in today’s world.

As I thought about these stepping stones in my life that allowed me to rededicate myself to becoming a disciple of Jesus, I recalled another passage I had read earlier in the day from the book, *Into His Likeness: Be transformed as a Disciple of Christ*, by Edward Sri. In this book, the author describes the difficulties of this journey toward discipleship:

“The process of being conformed to Christ is not an easy one. And it doesn’t happen overnight. Through the course of life, we slowly learn what it means to live like Jesus, how to follow Him, and how to be more virtuous and grow in holiness. And all along the way, we learn a most important lesson: the whole process of being changed into Christ’s likeness is ultimately God’s work.”

This passage also reminds me of a few lines from the great spiritual master, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who once wrote, “Above all, trust in the slow work of God.”

By the time I finished supper, a heavy rain had set in over the lake, so I did not go for my evening rosary walk. Instead, I sat in my rocker and

prayed a rosary. I prayed for each of my godchildren and all my little cousins and the children of close friends. I get to often enjoy life with them as their “Uncle Br. Dan”. I think of the many “no rules” weekends in Esopus, where the kids have enjoyed unlimited ice cream, zip lines, hikes and lots of laughs, while their parents and I celebrated life and our many years of close friendship. My Esopus “annual weekend crew” are a great blessing in my life and I am graced that we get together often and not only one weekend a year. Our trips to Ireland and Italy were epic, but their constant love and “staying in touch” are a stabilizing rock and force in my life.

The days were passing too fast now as another day of my Camino came to an end. I moved upstairs to the second floor and finished my daily journaling, while thoughts were still fresh in my mind.

I read a little from the Anthony deMello book, Wellsprings. In a section titled, “The Surrender”, he writes:

“If you now wish to communicate with God
 within this silence
 imagine that you surrender, let go,
 each time you breathe out
 –that each exhalation
 is our way of saying yes to God
 Yes to what you are today
 -to the kind of person God has made you,
 the kind of person you have become.
 Yes to the whole of your past.
 Yes to what lies in store for you in the future.”

Soon after, I lit my prayer candle and prayed my Examen. Another satisfying and sacred day on this Camino was behind me.



Mt. Washington in the distance.



Br. Fred and me at a Yankee Game.

“I could never resist the call of the trail.”

- Buffalo Bill

Day Thirteen May 16th

I awoke early for what would be my last full day of this Camino. I began as I had done these recent dawns, on my rocking chair to watch the last of night become a new day.

As part of my morning prayer, I read the Mass readings for this coming Sunday and was struck by lines from both the second reading and the Gospel. In the second reading, Peter writes:

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.”

The Gospel from John then tells us,

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to be with you always, the spirit of truth...in a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me, because you live in Me and I in you”.

As I draw closer to finishing my pilgrimage time tomorrow, I am comforted by these words. They both challenge me to be a gentle

witness of God's hope and love in this world and to also know that I will not be doing it alone, but that Jesus will continue to live in my heart and His Spirit will be guiding me along the many roads ahead.

The sky slowly turned from darkness to lighter colors. I tossed some bread outside, so I could watch the birds gather and feast on their breakfast. I enjoyed gazing on another majestic sunrise and then headed out to a new trail for my hike today.

The Pine Barrows Nature Preserve was a real treat. It offered three hours of great hiking and time to begin thinking of some next steps as I prepared to finish my Camino. Thanks to modern technology during my hike, I used the voice note recording feature on my phone to list some goals for myself from this retreat as I journey home tomorrow:

- To live a more healthy lifestyle with regards to eating better, and planning more personal prayer time, exercise, worktime, and time for family and friends.
- To find ways that I may continue to live my life with more profound love in response to my call as a Marist Brother.
- To be a witness and a reflection of God's love for young people and to help inspire them to listen to and respond to God's call in their own lives.
- To do all that I can to help promote and build up our Marist Charism, both here in the USA Province and around our Marist world, as we are a global family.
- To continue to be a positive role model in the lives of my many young cousins, children of close friends and my godchildren.
- To share my faith in ways that will allow others to realize that God can call anyone.

- To always try to be a servant leader and not be afraid to “wear an apron” as that was the only vestment that Jesus put on during his ministry.
- To continue to see God’s glory each day in the beauty of creation and nature that is all around me, wherever I am at any given moment.
- To actively work for the promotion of all Marist vocations, especially the call to Brotherhood.
- To actively promote Marist Solidarity, to help raise awareness and be a voice for the underprivileged and suffering children of our world, especially through our Marist International Projects. To work to secure grants and to find someone who will help us in this area. Grants could greatly assist in providing needed funds for Marist Solidarity projects on the periphery of our world as well as funding for important USA projects such as the MBCE, Marist Evangelization Programs, a Marist volunteer program and our work with refugees in El Paso.

After my hike, I did a little cleaning of the house and some laundry so I could pack up my stuff tonight. I joined the MYA midday Memorare, had a little soup for lunch and thought about the many graces I received on this retreat. This sustained time for solitude, prayer and serenity has been an incredible gift. Brian’s visit allowed both of us to mourn Bob’s recent death and to look for ways that we can keep his spirit alive. The retreat has allowed me significant time to reflect on spiritual reading, to journal and most of all to see God each day in nature, which is for me the best way to stay rooted in my spirituality. This pilgrimage has allowed me to grow healthier physically, spiritually, emotionally and has renewed my energy for the road ahead.

At 1:00pm, I joined Erica and about twenty other participants for the second session of the Zoom retreat. Today’s session focused on how the practice of meditation can assist us with our intent to experience a deeper spiritual quest. We need to see our contemplative practice as

a sacred and essential part of our journey and give it the prominence it needs in our lives for it to lead us on our true path. During the retreat session, we practiced two styles of meditation. The first was a twenty-minute focus on mindfulness, being fully conscious of our breathing. The second was a shorter meditation, using the Mantra “Om Namah Shiviya” which translates as “O salutations to the auspicious one”. I enjoyed both practices and was glad I had signed up for the retreat. It struck me that in the past week, I joined many other spiritual pilgrims during the two Zoom retreats in which I participated. There are over one hundred people who join the Soul of a Pilgrim retreat each Monday and there were over twenty on today’s Zoom retreat. It is encouraging to know that many others walk this road seeking to deepen their spiritual path.

The afternoon’s weather was spectacular and near seventy degrees, so I decided to drive over to Foss Mountain for another short hike and it was very much worth it. This was possibly the most scenic view of my entire Camino. The top of this mountain provided a full 360-degrees of view. I was reminded of the story of the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine after the couple had run out of wine for the guests. When the master of the feast later tasted the “new” wine, he was shocked that the groom would save the best wine for the end. Today’s second hike made me question, “Did God save my best hike for the end as well?”

After returning to the house I prepared my last dinner while I listened to an array of reflective music. I shared the last of my unused food supplies with the birds and enjoyed watching them finish it off quickly. I walked over to the beach one last time to watch tonight’s sunset and prayed a rosary for a number of our Brothers who were currently sick. I also remembered to Mary so many people affected by this virus around our Marist world, especially those on the front lines who are connected to our USA ministries and a number of my closest friends.

As I began my last night of these sacred Camino days, I wanted to have extended time for prayer so I could offer sincere thanksgiving for the many blessings and graces received during my hours solitude, of re-discovering, of letting go, and of looking forward with hope as the

mystery of life unfolds. My prayer was one of immense gratitude for all the people and major events that have helped shape my life and faith until now. As I had done in another prayer earlier on this Camino, I recalled names of people and some events that greatly impacted my life and I offered a sincere prayer of gratitude for each one of them by name. I lit my Camino candle for the last time and prayed for the following:

- All the living and deceased members of my family both here in the USA and in Ireland, especially my parents, Jerry, Jimmy, Patsy, Peggy, Kathy, Maurice, Anne, Abina, and all the O'Riordan, Hayes, Keane, McCarthy, Fitzsimmons and Smith families. I look forward to when the world again opens up so that we can all reunite in Ireland. I especially remembered Tomas and Brian, who are in Esopus these days, as well as my cousin, Siobhan McCarthy, who is living in the city. I hope that Tomas, Brian and I will be able to meet up with Siobhan at our favorite Irish pub, DJ Reynolds in NYC in the months ahead.
- All those who influenced my vocation story and planted seeds that grew into my being a Marist Brother. I warmly remembered those members of my family who likewise chose to follow the path of a religious vocation and were a great witness to me. My Uncle Jerry was a diocesan priest, my cousin Sr. Margarete Maloney is still going strong as a ninety two year old Josephite sister, my cousin, Joe Riordan was a Jesuit priest and baptized me; and lastly, my cousin, Nealie O'Keefe, was an Irish Christian Brother. All of them showed me that one could live a dedicated life with great joy and accomplish many great works along the way.
- All Marist brothers, particularly those who have been a significant part of my journey. I pray for our global Marist family and ask Our Lady to allow the calls of the General Chapter to come to fruition in the lives of all Marists so

that we may continue to live our mission of making her Son known and loved.

- All my Molloy teammates from our '85 track team and the members of their families, the Wingerts, Eardleys, Shianos, Abruscis, Sullivans, Bluemles, Flanigans, Wohlfahrts and Phelans.
- All those I have worked with in Esopus over many years of working camps and retreats. From my days of working maintenance and fixing screen doors to LaValla weekends, Foundation Stones and Esopus Runners, I have been continually blessed to have a spiritual fountain in my life to which I can return to nourish my thirsting soul.
- For the gift of my years in Ireland during my childhood and for the five years I lived there after high school. For the enjoyment of sport and the many lasting friendships it gave me as well as all the dinners and great times at my aunt Abina's, especially during my college years when a home cooked meal was most appreciated after weeks of college food. I remembered each of the Kelly family, especially Noreen, and asked Jim, Pidge and Antonia to watch over young Darragh and Breen. I entrusted to Mary all the needs in the lives of Andy and Noreen, Tom and Ger, the McDonnell Family, my old girlfriend who was my closest friend at that time and for all those in University College Cork that I played with and coached in those years.
- For my early years at Roselle Catholic High School and the amazing family spirit that was part of that school and my first Marist community, both of which were so instrumental in my decision to continue on the path to Brotherhood. For the Kropa, Kolibas and Shultie families as well as the RC Soccer Team who were a major part of my life at that time and especially Alfred George, as it was during this time period that we first met.

- For the gift of my Novitiate years which were a distinct period of sustained grace and many blessings. I prayerfully remembered Newton and the children of the orphanage in Jamaica, Ruben and all those still living on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation. I lifted up in prayer the needs of Steve, Don, Mike, Todd, Jeff and Joe (RIP) who helped make those years so meaningful for me, as well as the Women's Soccer team at Marist College which I had the privilege to coach.
- For the years I returned to Molloy as Campus Minister, teacher, councilor and coach and for the many great people who entered my life during those days such as colleagues like Ray, Budman, Carl, KK, Madylm, Frank, AJ, Joe D, the Francos, Mary, Dorothy, Jim, Maryann, Bill, Rich Lally and Jeff. I prayed for all the young people I worked with during those days, both in Campus Ministry and on the Track team. I especially remembered those young people who continue to be a great blessing in my life including Hurley, Chaci, Jameson, Gray, Joe, Bethge, the Corriganes, Hogan, Harrison, Trainor, Adamski, Baginski, Gerard O'Sullivan, Brian "McNugget", Bobby and Eric and all their families.
- I next prayed in thanksgiving for my years at Bishop Donahue in West Virginia, which were probably the single most rewarding ministry and period of my life. During those years, I lived with an incredible Marist community of Brothers and Lay Volunteers including Dave Cooney, Marty Ruane, John McDonagh, Rene Roy, John Bird, Billy, Brett, Lisa, and Beth. Bishop Donahue HS, while it might have been small in numbers, it had a great family spirit and lived Marist values as well as the biggest Marist school in any country. I fondly remembered so many of the BD family. I asked God to bless Loretta Metz and her family. Those days of working so closely with her in cleaning out drugs out of the school culture, creating many events and programs like the musical, the choir, retreats, service days,

the Hall of Fame and especially the day to day impact on so many kids were a blessing. I remembered Tom Wise and all who worked so hard in the rebuilding of the school at that time. I prayed for Sr. Theresa, Fr. Ray (RIP) Marybeth, John Durdines and all the other great teachers and folks involved with the school. I thanked God for my Molloy connections that made so many things happen and for all their help and for our BD Marist Youth group, shoebox Santas, our BDHS track team, the many retreats at Lantz farm, Marty Wingert and other volunteers who gave up years of their life to serve those in need. The greatest gift during those years was coming to know and love four inspiring young people, nicknamed, the Four Musketeers. Melissa, Jobeth, Danielle and Katie remain inspiring heroes in my life. My heart still breaks knowing that Jobeth, Danielle and Danielle's Dad, Courtney were so tragically lost in that fatal plane crash in 2005. I often pray to them to continue to watch over all of us who will forever mourn their passing, especially Jodi and Bob. I also prayed in gratitude for all the amazing families that will forever be with me such as the McCulleys, Beiters, Blocks, Gross family, Jim and Cookie Welsh, the Rohrig family, the Polus clan, the Tellotocis, Krupicas, Twiggs, Stropes, Bryan "Blinky" McCann, Valerie Campbell and my old faithful friend, Kenny Stillwell (RIP), as well as all those who painted handprints on the walls of my classrooms and in my heart forever.

- I continued my prayer by naming those who came into my life when I returned to Roselle Catholic, especially Owen, Roaul, Moe and Pat, Ed Kennedy and family, John Allen, the Kropa Klan, the Skreks, Paul Irwin, Linda Kaspar, Matt and Christina, Ellen, KC Murray, Megan Friedman, Steve Patricco, Mark O'Grady, Kristina and Matt Shipe, Don and Cindy Readlinger, Kevin and Maureen Brady, Tom and Mernie, Marty and Diane Pribush, Billy and Linda McGraine, Bill and Kathy Trelease, Dick Sweeney, Tom Sloan, Bernadette DeLaurie and especially all our

RC Marist Youth. There were many events in those years that were incredible gifts such as bringing our Marist Youth to the first international Marist Youth Assembly in Australia, our yearly mission trips to WV, two pilgrimages to l'Hermitage, the summer service days and the building of the Labyrinth.

- I remembered my years in vocation work and how they allowed me to travel to all our other schools in the Province and get to befriend so many committed Marists around our Province. I recalled with gratitude our “House of Prayer” community in Esopus during part of that time. I prayed for Sam Amos, who will make his final vows this year and for Luis Ramos, who professed his first vows last summer. I also asked God to bless Al and Brian, who are directing our Province vocation efforts now, as well as to give Ryan, Joe and Dittus the courage to persevere in their vocation as they move into our postulancy program this fall.
- I prayed in thanksgiving for all the enjoyment, good times, laughs and special days I have been blessed with when spending time with the great group of people who know me as “Uncle Brother Dan”. The love and joy they bring to my life is one of the greatest gifts I have ever received. My band of crazy rugrats include: Liam Eardley, Thomas, Matthew, Megan, Anthony, Alley, Nicole, Liam Wingert, Grace, Patrick, Lauren, Catherine, Amanda, Diarmuid, Muiris, Lilly, Gearod, Tomas, Elizabeth, Josie, Roisin, Ciara, Cillian, Terry, Ryan, Emmie, Joey, Matt, Vincent, Kayleigh, Thomas, Darragh, Breen, Connor, and Madison.
- Lastly I prayed for Patrick, Tom and Al, who make up my current community in Forest Hills. These past 5 years have not always been easy ones with some of the challenges of work, but coming home to community makes it all possible. I also entrusted Sean, Owen, Rob and Hank, the

remaining members of our Provincial Council team, to the heart of our Good Mother. Their collective wisdom has helped shape the future of our Province. Finally, I prayed for the blessing that Esopus continues to be in my life, both spiritually and communally. I remembered Owen and Donnell and the many great nights I have enjoyed with them in the gatehouse of Esopus as well as in Ireland.

My prayer of thanksgiving lasted almost two hours and it seemed like only ten minutes. Simply reflecting on all those special people and graced filled moments, simply brought joy to my heart and a continued realization of how God has always placed the right people and events in my life whenever I needed them.

Before closing out my night, I spent a few minutes reading from *The Genesee Diary* by another great spiritual writer, Henri J. M. Nouwen. I was attracted to this particular journal because he wrote it while at the Trappist monastery in Genesee, NY. I made a retreat at this same monastery in the early days of my Novitiate and fondly remembered those days as a very sacred time and the monastery as a “holy” or “thin” place. In his journal, Nouwen writes, “Is there a quiet stream underneath the fluctuating affirmations and rejections of my little world? Is there a still point where my life is anchored and from which I can reach out with hope and courage and confidence?”

I have again come to know that Jesus is the constant quiet “stream” that flows through my entire being and that if I allow myself to be still and embrace His presence in my life then I can feel “anchored” and thus live “with hope and courage and confidence”.

I close out my night by praying my Examen prayer and again asking my Lord to allow me to manifest my mantra of “living profound love”.



My '85 Molloy Teammates and Brothers for Life.

*“It’s your road, and yours alone.
Others may walk it with you, but no one can
walk it for you.”*

- Rumi

Day Fourteen May 17th

I arose early on this last day of my Camino. These past two weeks had been more than an amazing birthday present, which I will celebrate today. I made my way down to my morning prayer spot to savor one last morning of watching the night become a new day. I read a few emails of birthday wishes from friends and sent two of my own to Melissa in WV and Henry in Esopus, who share my same birthday.

For my morning prayer, I began by again listening to the Celtic song, “The Deer’s Cry”, which is really the prayer of St. Patrick. It is a most beautiful prayer that celebrates a God who completely encompasses our lives by being with us in all circumstances and on all sides. As the song plays, I pray its ancient words from the depth of my heart:

“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down”

Then I watched and reflected on an incredible video sent to me this morning as part of a birthday wish from Noreen, my Irish “Anam Cara”. It was most uplifting with beautiful pictures to go along with a poem written by Kevin McCorrmack, titled, “If This Time”. One part

of the video that was especially meaningful illustrated this section of the poem:

“If this time has taught me anything, it is this
HOPE matters
and we cannot live without it.
This time has taught me that HOPE is
not a wish, nor a desire for things to be different.
It is a course of action,
a combination of mind and heart.
The future can be better and can be brighter,
and we each have the power within us to make it so.
There will be challenges to face along the way,
to which there are many solutions.
There is a source of deep resilience
deep within us all.
If this time does not teach us that time itself is precious,
then we will have missed the lesson.”

This video helped me to once more realize that our world greatly needs “Hope” and that each of us must do all we can to be that “Hope,” each day, for all those in our lives and in our world.

The idea of God saving his “best wine” for the end of my journey lingered as I witnessed and embraced a most memorable sunrise. I thanked God for the incredible beauty of His creation that fed my soul over these past two weeks. I prayed that our world would make greater efforts to respect our common home. Today the Church began a weeklong celebration of the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis’ document on the environment, *Laudato Si*. I used one of the prayers from this week’s materials to be in solidarity with all those working tirelessly to save our planet.

“Loving God,
Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them,
You created us in your image and made us stewards
of all your creation, of our common home.
You blessed us with the sun, water and bountiful
land
so that all might be nourished.
Open our minds and touch our hearts,
so that we may attend to your gift of creation.
Help us to be conscious that our common home
belongs not only to us, but to all future generations,
and that it is our responsibility to preserve it.
May we help each person secure
the food and resources that they need.
Be present to those in need in these trying times,
especially the poorest and those most at risk of being left
behind.
Transform our fear, anxiety and feelings of isolation into hope
so that we may experience a true conversion of the heart.
Help us to show creative solidarity in addressing
the consequences of this global pandemic,
Make us courageous to embrace the changes
that are needed in search of the common good,
Now more than ever may we feel that we are all interconnected,
in our efforts to lift up the cry of the earth and the cry of the
poor.
We make our prayer through Christ our Lord.
Amen.”

As today was my birthday, I spent a few moments thanking God for my parents and the gift of life, for all those who have been part of my journey and for the many graces of this Camino. I closed my prayer by listening to John Michael Talbot's version of "Salve Regina" as a way to connect in solidarity with all our Marist family around this great world.

For my last hike of this Camino, I decided to again take the very first trail I walked called "Castle in the Clouds". It was different than the first time, fourteen days ago. Today I walked it a little wiser, a little

more peaceful, a lot more hopeful, and this time I did not walk it alone because I knew Jesus was walking it with me. I took a few minutes on the overlook to practice Ta'i Chi and take one last look at the views. As I finished my hike, I paused in the very same spot where I had offered a prayer on my Camino, fourteen days earlier. I looked to our heavens and thanked my God for all the blessings that He showered upon me during my Camino Pilgrimage. I closed my journey with the hope of my Camino mantra, that Jesus “will allow me to live profound love”.

This part of my Plan B Camino is now behind me. I hope later this year, I will complete the final chapter or leg of my Camino in Spain. But in the meantime, the journey goes on in a real way. My Camino that ends today, similar to Marist Youth Encounters that also end on a Sunday morning, is not finished. The real challenge is to keep the spirit alive. On our Encounters, it is called “living the fourth day” for the rest of one’s life. So today I commit myself to living the fourteenth day of this Camino for the rest of my life. May it continue on whichever roads, paths, and trails this journey may lead me. I closed my Camino by remembering the immortal words of Americas’ greatest distance runner, Steve Prefontaine, who once said:

“To give anything less than your best, is to sacrifice the gift.”

I believe those words are also true for the “race” or journey of life. And so I commit to giving nothing less than my best self as I journey on in my life’s Camino.

To all those who will follow me as pilgrims, on this journey of life, I simply wish you a “Buen Camino” and Godspeed on your pilgrimage.

Amen.



Top of Mt. Foss.

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“The Deer’s Cry” by various artists.

Sing to God. Taize

About the Author



Br. Dan O'Riordan, FMS, a Marist Brother, and currently Vice Provincial for the USA Province shares his prayerful reflections of his own Camino pilgrimage in this, his first book. He graduated from Archbishop Molloy High School in NY, University College Cork, Ireland and earned an MA at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY.

He has served as a teacher, coach, counselor and campus minister at numerous Marist High Schools around the USA. He also served his Province as their Vocation Director.

He has coordinated more than one hundred mission service trips allowing many young people the opportunity to serve the least favored in many communities. He has also led numerous Pilgrimages for young people and continues to be a featured speaker on youth retreats and youth gatherings, where he encourages young people to find ways to answer God's call and use their gifts and talents in responding to the many needs of our world.