

The Value of Place

The pilgrimage illustrated the value of place in learning, which often occurs at unexpected times. All of us had read *The First Jesuits* by John W. O'Malley, which is a thorough and well-written account of Ignatius's life. I was leafing through the book on our day-long bus ride to find a passage about our destination, Manresa, when I noticed that Ignatius had once traveled the same approximate route. After his conversion, Ignatius decided to travel to Jerusalem. He left Loyola, the place of his conversion during convalescence, for a Benedictine monastery at Montserrat. After a period of prayer and reflection at Montserrat, he planned to leave for nearby Barcelona, where a boat could take him to Jerusalem.

Our bus was traveling from Loyola to Manresa, which is slightly shorter than going to Montserrat. The terrain in this route is best described as rugged; beginning with the green mountains around Loyola castle and quickly turning to a brown, rocky, and arid region that extends to Manresa. Ignatius made this journey on foot with only the company of a donkey, which is detailed in his autobiography. This long journey gave Ignatius an opportunity to reflect on his transformation. At the time, he had barely begun studying his faith, yet he had the conviction to carry out a difficult journey with an uncertain end. As we know now, this journey was an omen for future challenges, such as his troubles with governments, universities, and eventually the Catholic Church. Despite these circumstances, which could have easily created doubt, Ignatius continued down his path.

In Manresa, we went to see the cave where Ignatius created the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius spent much of his time in Manresa in the dark cave, preferring to stay in solitude.

We celebrated mass there, fitting roughly ten people in the cave with the rest looking in from the outside. Several authors document Ignatius's isolation at the cave, but it is difficult to describe on paper the confinement one feels in that small space. While in the cave, I was thinking more about Ignatius's conviction when I noticed a cross carved into the cave wall believed to have been made by Ignatius. The cross is carved into solid rock,

and there is still evidence of the back-and-forth carving motion that Ignatius must have repeated countless times. For me, this was an appropriate metaphor for Ignatius's faith and conviction.