

## **Montserrat**

Imagine that you have organized your entire adult life around one worthy endeavor. And you are good at it, and you have achieved recognition, companionship, and even love through it. And then something happens, a catastrophe. You cannot go forward in this path you have chosen. What do you do?

There is a period when you are just laid low. Then you begin to recover. You pick up your head and look around for a new direction. And you are blessed with a vision that points you the way.

So: go to a high place. A beautiful place. A place where pilgrims have come for centuries to look into the inscrutable obsidian eyes of a little mother holding an infant. Go up, and place before her the useless instruments of your former life. When you leave, you are free.

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## **Work Less, Reflect More, and Go on a Pilgrimage**

By Patricia Bizzell

I am not a Catholic, not even a Christian, and I have never been to summer camp. So why would I want to devote ten days of my precious summer research time to the Ignatian Pilgrimage? Well, I have to admit that the prospect of a free trip to Spain and Rome appealed to me! But I had more serious goals too, primarily to deepen my understanding of the religious tradition within which I have been employed for over 25 years, and also to connect with my colleagues in more personal ways. These goals were so well met, and more than met, by my Pilgrimage experiences that I can strongly recommend any Holy Cross faculty member to take the plunge.

First, it is important to realize that the Pilgrimage actually consists of two parts: the trip to Spain and Rome, of course, but also the preliminary seminar, conducted by Tom Landy and Jim Hayes. I have developed great respect for the Society of Jesus through my years at Holy Cross, but have always felt there was a depth of meaning there that was closed to me. As an observant Jew, I could not comfortably participate in the Spiritual Exercises. But the Ignatian Pilgrimage seminar provided an academic focus, a sort of intellectual history of the order, in which I could immerse myself without embarrassment. I feel that I now understand Ignatian spirituality in a new and much deeper way. Going through the Spiritual Exercises in careful detail in the seminar was tremendously helpful, especially as that study was enhanced with carefully selected scholarly sources that we read and discussed. I was especially interested to learn more about the relationships between the early Jesuits and Jewish people (several important early Jesuit leaders were conversos, welcomed and defended by Ignatius, but men of Jewish descent were banned from the order after his death, a ruling not reversed until 1945—complicated feelings for me there!).

Thus I was able to bring some historical and theological knowledge to the sites we visited in Europe. And then, my learning and understanding were profoundly enriched by my actually being able to see the places where Ignatius had his life-changing religious experiences and put the Exercises together. As I write that sentence, so many vivid pictures come to mind: the sunny, airy upper room in Loyola castle, where he recovered from his war wound and we had a Mass; the shady grass in front of the little hospital in Azpetia where he served the poor, and its tiny chapel with the Basque care-taker; the ornately decorated grotto in Manresa, bare rock when the Exercises were actually composed there; and—the highlight of the trip for me—the dramatically sited monastery of Montserrat, and in particular, the hike along a trail to the chapel where the Black Madonna was found, which I took with Rich Matlak and Nancy Andrews. The landscape of northern Spain is dramatic. Why is it that actually seeing the places where the world-shaping experiences of Iñigo took place enhances my understanding? I don't know, but I know that it's true—just as visiting Israel and standing before the Western Wall enhanced my attachment to Judaism, by mysterious means.

And not only did the seminar provide us with a wealth of useful information, enhancing my experiences in Europe, but it also helped us to get to know one another better. The mix of different academic specialties and orientations toward religion among the Holy Cross participants was profoundly generative. To me the group seemed exceptionally congenial.

Some folks I knew, more or less, before we left, and for some I could not have matched a name and face until the seminar, but in getting to know everyone better, I felt drawn to them all. The trip provided many wonderful opportunities for long conversations—I'm thinking of one Cindy Gannett, from Loyola, and I shared in the airport before we left Boston, or one Shawn Maurer and I had in our hotel room, that first night in Zestoa, or one that Gwenn Miller and I shared on the (interminable!) bus ride to Manresa, or the one among Rich Matlak, Nancy Andrews and me as we hiked at Montserrat—but I could give many, many other examples. I feel distinctly bonded to all my fellow Pilgrims.

Having these conversations, so deeply satisfying, underscored for me how impossible it has always seemed to be to have them during the normal course of the school year. Twenty years ago, one could go to that second-floor lunch room in Hogan and sit down at any table, with folks from all over campus, and get to know them. Now few people take time for a lunch break away from their desks and if you want to see someone, you have to make an appointment. We are all working harder and harder, it seems to me. Well—as I told Dean Ainlay in my report on the Pilgrimage—as a result of the Pilgrimage, I have resolved to work less! Or, let me put that another way: I have resolved to regard building personal, multi-faceted, in-depth relationships with my colleagues as a crucial part of my work.

In my department and across campus, we are crushed by the hurry-up world. We are trying to revise our curriculum and keep Holy Cross as excellent as it should be without sufficient time to really get to know one another and discuss, in depth, the matters that need to be discussed to form a backdrop to the more obviously professional discussions we need to have. When confronted with knotty curricular or personnel matters, so many of us have little good will or understanding “in the bank” with our colleagues—not that we are necessarily on the outs, but we are out of touch. That must change, at least for me. And I dare say that being present to one another, as we were sometimes able to do on the Pilgrimage, is a value that should be honored in any Ignatian community.

So, as I've just explained, I sincerely hope that the Pilgrimage will permanently change the way I interact with my colleagues. Its effects on my teaching are a little harder to gauge. I understand more now than I did before about *cura personalis*, the Jesuit philosophy of teaching the whole student, but the more I learn about it, the more I feel that this philosophy matches the way I undertake to relate to my students anyway. So I'm not sure that the Pilgrimage experience will dramatically change my attention to them, although it certainly confirms me in my way of doing things.

One specific effect on my teaching may be this, however: I want to teach a course in Jewish literature to Holy Cross students. During my sabbatical this year, I have enrolled in a Masters program in Judaic Studies at Hebrew College. I'll be pursuing this degree part-time over the next several years. Eventually I hope to put together a course that presents a half dozen or so key texts ranging from books of the Bible to medieval disputations to Enlightenment philosophical debates to literary responses to the Holocaust and the advent of the state of Israel. Now that I'm Speaker of the Faculty, there isn't room in my teaching schedule for this course in 2006-2007, but I hope to be able to offer it eventually, enriched by my further study.

My determination to offer this course connects to my Pilgrimage experience in that the Pilgrimage made me "come out of the closet," as it were, as a person to whom spiritual matters are deeply important. It's never been a secret that I am an observant Jew, and I have even "gone public" with my beliefs on several occasions, for example by speaking in the "How Can I Find God?" series, but I think that teaching a course in Jewish literature would "out" me even more dramatically. I get the closest to my students and show the most, and I hope the best, of myself, in the classroom.

In case you are thinking that what I've just said reveals that the Pilgrimage is "way too religious" to suit you, let me say this: while I doubt that you can go on the Pilgrimage and remain untouched spiritually, it can be as explicitly "religious" as you want it to be—or not. Jim Hayes and Father Charles Borges, joining us from Loyola of Maryland, took great care in their Masses to include non-Catholics. I was very moved by seeing my Catholic colleagues have the chance to take communion in places that must be very meaningful for them—I felt privileged to accompany them there—and I was also touched by those moments in the Masses when the priests invited all of us to share thoughts and feelings about the Pilgrimage. I felt privileged to hear these reflections of my fellow Pilgrims. Most memorable for me was the last Mass of the trip, in the tiny upper room behind St. Ignatius Church where the "boy saint" Aloysius Gonzaga lived. It was early evening, the light in the red-upholstered room was mellow, and the dozen or so of us there heard Rich Matlak ask for prayers for his dying mother.

I urge you to consider these matters as part of your professional life.