PILGRIMAGE, EUCHARIST, AND THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE: EXPLORATIONS TOWARD A
CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE

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By
Mary Katelyn Behan
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Name: Behan, Mary Katelyn

APPROVED BY:

______________________________
Dr. Sandra Yocum, Ph. D.
Faculty Advisor

______________________________
Dr. William Johnston, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

______________________________
Dr. Dennis Doyle, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

______________________________
Dr. Daniel Thompson, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Religious Studies
ABSTRACT

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Name: Behan, Mary Katelyn
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. Sandra Yocum

This project explores the practice of Christian pilgrimage as an embodied, sacramental reality. Taking into consideration theological concerns coming from outside of the Catholic tradition which reveal some controversy as to the appropriateness of the practice of pilgrimage within Christianity, it will address objections to the concept of sacred space by pointing to the anticipatory/not-yet dimension of the Christian faith. Drawing on the methodological approach taken by Roberto S. Goizueta in Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment in which the author uses a specific experience as a source for theological reflection, this project will begin with a particular experience of pilgrimage and, in dialogue with Scripture and tradition, use the experience to examine the practice of pilgrimage as an embodiment of the Christian journey. Drawing especially from Luke’s account of two disciples journeying to Emmaus, it will explore how the Church’s tradition of understanding the Christian life as a journey simultaneously nourished by and culminating in Eucharist may be enriched by an experience of pilgrimage.
It will examine ways in which the practices of pilgrimage and liturgy mutually illuminate one another. Finally, taking this discussion as evidence of the effectiveness of embodiment, it will explore the essential role of embodiment in Christian practice. Drawing on the necessity of mediation to answer objections initially raised against the practice of pilgrimage, it will conclude by positing that the recognition of pilgrimage as a sacramental reality may be an effective starting point on which to build a theology of Christian pilgrimage.
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INTRODUCTION

The practice of pilgrimage has a long-standing history within the Church, appearing throughout Scripture and tradition as both a tangible practice and an image of the spiritual life. In researching the practice of pilgrimage, however, I was surprised to find little material that worked toward a cohesive theology of pilgrimage. Much of the existent scholarship concerning pilgrimage appears to focus primarily on historical and anthropological evidence. I discovered varying opinions among authors as to the origin, nature, and meaning of Christian pilgrimage. Furthermore, sources which do begin to address theological concerns of pilgrimage reveal some controversy as to the appropriateness of the practice itself. Such sources, coming from outside the Catholic tradition, question whether pilgrimage is an appropriate practice for Christians given the revelation of God in Jesus Christ--for if Christ replaced the Old Temple and provides universal accessibility to God, how can we say that God is present in any particular place more than others?

My interest in the subject of pilgrimage and desire to explore the practice despite its history of controversy has grown out of a transformative personal experience of pilgrimage. This experience has become for me an embodied allegory of the Christian life and has caused a fundamental shift in the way that I approach my faith and the Eucharist. Using my very particular/personal experience of pilgrimage in dialogue with Scripture and tradition, this project will examine the practice of pilgrimage as an embodiment of the Christian journey. Drawing in a particular way from the Luke’s account of two disciples on the road to
Emmaus, I intend to show how the Church’s tradition of understanding the Christian life as a journey simultaneously nourished by and culminating in Eucharist may be enriched by an experience of pilgrimage. I will examine ways in which the practices of pilgrimage and liturgy are capable of mutually informing one another, demonstrating that my experience of pilgrimage—one which was informed by the years of liturgical practice which had preceded it—has brought the Eucharistic celebration into clearer perspective. Finally, taking this discussion as evidence of the effectiveness of embodiment, I will discuss the necessity of embodied Christian practice. I will make suggestions concerning the appropriateness of pilgrimage as a Christian practice, and conclude that recognizing pilgrimage as a sacramental reality may be an effective starting point on which to build a theology of Christian pilgrimage.

SOME THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned above, my research into the practice of pilgrimage has revealed some controversy over the appropriateness of the practice. This difficulty arises from the fact that the practice of pilgrimage is predicated on the possibility of sacred space, and this at least initially appears to be inconsistent with theological understandings of Christ found in Scripture. This issue becomes a central point of contention in the only resource I was able to find that directly seeks to work toward a theology of Christian pilgrimage. The collection of essays entitled *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* comes from outside of the Catholic Christian tradition and five of its twelve essays point to difficulties in reconciling the practice of pilgrimage with Scripture. In his examination of pilgrimage and the New Testament, for example, Andrew Lincoln points out that “the whole notion of Gentiles making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to encounter Israel’s God has become superfluous,
because it has been fulfilled in the reality of what takes place when Gentiles encounter Israel’s God in the Gospel about Jesus Christ.”¹ Furthermore, he argues, “worship in the time of eschatological fulfilment has as its focus the relationship to a person rather than a place. The goal of pilgrimage, temple worship, has been transformed Christologically. Jesus is the true place of worship”² making geographical pilgrimage unnecessary. Dee Dyas expresses a similar concern in her essay within the same work. She points out the paradox: “how could an omnipresent God be especially available in one location?”³ It seems that in order for these authors to justify the practice of Christian pilgrimage, a Scriptural injunction is required. At the very least, there seems to be a desire to more clearly investigate the origins of the practice, searching for continuity between New Testament writings and the earliest practices of Christian pilgrimage.

Consulting less theological and more historical/anthropological resources, we find that the origin of Christian pilgrimage is indeed difficult to place. Many scholars agree that the practice seemed to blossom following the 4th century reign of Constantine. With Constantine came the legalization of Christianity, and what had previously existed as a grassroots movement gained validity and authority as it was incorporated into the power of the Roman Empire. This development included a process of materialization in which territory was claimed and marked as being specifically Christian. As monuments and buildings were erected to mark sites that had become significant because of their historical or spiritual importance, Christianity gained a substantial physical presence.

²Ibid., 39.
Historian Kenneth Holum discusses the emerging material presence of Christianity during the time of Constantine as a phenomenon that largely resulted from the involvement of the emperor’s mother, Helena. According to Holum, the compulsion to travel to holy places did not become a significant trend in Christianity until the 4th century, following Helena’s journey to Palestine and Jerusalem in 326 which “seems to have been responsible for—at the very least—the official recognition of numerous Christian holy sites, and possibly the supervision of some of her son’s building projects.”

Helena’s pilgrimage and the associated building projects thus helped to “reorganize the concept of space in the Roman empire.” Helena also helped to universalize and formalize the movement to these sites, making her journey a catalyst for Christian pilgrimage.

Although Holum argues that there was no significant travel to holy places prior to the reign of Constantine, other scholars argue that Christian pilgrimage was in fact taking place prior to this time period. Historians John Wilkinson and E.D. Hunt, for example, understand Christian pilgrimage to be an earlier phenomenon which can be traced back to Jewish roots. Hunt points out that “the Palestine into which Christianity was born was already dotted with places rendered sacred to the Jews by their Old Testament past: memorials of patriarchs and prophets which could serve as the focus of veneration and annual festivals.” In this way, the Jewish recognition of holy places set the foundation for the Christian practice of pilgrimage. Hunt points out that the practice is perhaps even evident as early as the writing of the New Testament. Interest in the tomb of Christ, for

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5 Ibid., 77.
example, can be found within the story of Emmaus. Likewise, the specificity of description in the Gospel of John as to the burial place of Jesus and in the Acts of the Apostles regarding the tomb of Stephen make it tempting to speculate that the authors knew of specific spots that were honored in apostolic times.  

The very debate as to whether the practice of pilgrimage arose prior to or during the reign of Constantine reveals differing conceptions of the term among those scholars studying the historical practice. Holum’s conception of pilgrimage is clearly predicated on a practice which is well-established and fairly institutionalized by imperial Christianity. Hunt and Wilkinson show a more fluid, less formalized understanding of pilgrimage which recognizes the reality that the term pilgrimage was not in existence at the time that it may have been taking place. Given the historical fact that much of Jerusalem lay in ruins after its 2nd century destruction and that Christianity was illegal to practice before the reign of Constantine, it is no surprise that we find little evidence of the formal practice of pilgrimage prior to the 4th century. In addition, the understanding of pilgrimage that is applied by modern scholars to travelers of antiquity is likely informed by a later, post-medieval understanding of the term:

It may be granted that there is no indication that these early travelers ‘took to the road as a form of asceticism or penitence, or to secure therapy for body and spirit’; nor did they go in search of holy relics, nor in large numbers to some collective demonstration of pious enterprise. But this means no more than that they were unlike later, medieval pilgrims, not necessarily that they were not pilgrims at all. . . .

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Not only was the Jewish temple destroyed in the first century, but the city of Jerusalem was plowed under by the Romans in A.D. 135, to the point that an early 4th century Roman magistrate “did not recognize the name Jerusalem when a Christian identified it as his home.” See Robert Louis Wilken, “A Christian Jerusalem” in The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 109-110.
There is something which may be legitimately termed ‘pilgrimage’ already at work in these second- and third-century forays to the Holy Land.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition to the developing practice of visiting holy sites in Jerusalem, the honoring of Christian martyrs also began to appear as a motive for travel. Christian persecution left in its wake a cult of martyrs to which Christians became devoted. Although celebrations to commemorate the martyrs were primarily local, they nevertheless came to serve as a journey’s end.

Examining the writings of early Christians themselves further nuances our understanding of pilgrimage in the early church and brings to our attention the truth that many of the theological concerns raised by the contemporary authors mentioned at the beginning of this section were in fact already being raised by their early Christian counterparts. While I lack the time and space to describe in depth the views of any particular author, it is worth noting that consultation of early Christian writings generally yields an assortment of views on pilgrimage which express a variety of tensions. These tensions emerge between “local sites of pilgrimage on the one hand and Jerusalem on the other, as well as earthly sacred journeying to encounter the divine versus interior journeying to an inner space.”\textsuperscript{12} Historian Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony understands these tensions to illustrate the struggle of a society in the process of shaping its identity\textsuperscript{13} as it works to move past a period of instability. Thus contemporaneous social, political, and ecclesial tensions play an important role in determining the views of early Christians on the practice of pilgrimage.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 5.
While views range from full-fledged rejection (as in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa), to advocacy for the practice to be adopted as a religious obligation (as in the writings of St. Jerome), there emerges a consistent struggle with the theological implications of pilgrimage. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, draws from the New Testament’s rejection of the need to worship God in any particular location, using its de-emphasis of locality to argue against pilgrimage. Even St. Jerome is unable to avoid the by now familiar controversy over contradictions between Christian pilgrimage (which by default recognizes the existence of holy space) and the New Testament Scriptures which point to Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Temple and thus seem to universalize sacred space.

What we find in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome—and also see in later monastic writings which emphasize stability and the inward spiritual journey—are deep controversy as to the appropriateness of Christian pilgrimage. The ultimate question which emerges during this period and among these authors is whether a divine presence may exist in a defined locus. This question was taken up again by Reformers following abuses of pilgrimage during the Middle Ages; and as we have seen, this question remains contested in Christian theology today since views on sacred space remain inconsistent between varying denominations of Christianity. In examining the origins of Christian pilgrimage we are

14 See, for example, Acts 7:48-50 and 17:24.
15 Ibid., 92-93. Many scriptural passages can be cited to support this notion. Chief among them are Paul’s references to Jerusalem in his letters to the Galatians and Romans; Jesus’s high priestly role in Hebrews; and the Gospel of John in which Jesus is depicted as “embodying in his own person the significance invested by the Jewish people in the Jerusalem temple and the festival pilgrimages that has that temple as their goal.” See pg. 37 and following of Andrew T. Lincoln, “Pilgrimage and the New Testament” in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, Bartholomew and Hughes eds., (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 29-49.
16 Ibid., 5.
ultimately confronted with tension between how Christ has begun to be understood—that is, as manifesting God’s *universal* presence—and the advent of sacred geography, which understands divine presence to be defined in a *particular* location.

This tension forms the milieu into which this thesis project will be entering and engaging. Although the primary thrust of this project will not involve a direct investigation into the possibility of sacred space, I will be discussing an experience of pilgrimage and its relationship to liturgy and the Eucharist—realities which very much presuppose a belief in sacred space. I will take my particular experience of pilgrimage and its effect on my perception of the liturgy as an illustration of the value of embodied practice, exploring the necessity of physical mediation in coming to know that which is infinite. We will see that the concerns which have hitherto been expressed as regards the problem of sacred space insist on an immediacy which proves incongruent with the Catholic Christian sacramental understanding of reality.

**PURPOSE, CONTENT, AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS PROJECT**

As previously mentioned, research into the practice of Christian pilgrimage reveals no singular origin account. The development of Christian pilgrimage appears to be rather convoluted, complicated by various contexts and motives which have developed for undertaking a pilgrimage. This project will not endeavor to address in any specific capacity the myriad motives which have developed in the Christian tradition for going on pilgrimage (which include but are not limited to historical exegesis, the rise of the cult of martyrs, the quest for holy persons, and the performance of penitential acts); nor will it attempt to address the complex issue of abuse in the practice of pilgrimage. Furthermore, it will not attend in any manner of depth to the somewhat recent phenomenon whereby pilgrimage
routes and pilgrimage sites are seemingly coopted for a kind of religious tourism or secularized journey. Because of its encumbered connotation and the impossibility of navigating such a multifaceted understanding in a manner that is meaningful to the purpose of this project, and furthermore because a fundamental argument that I will make for the value of Christian pilgrimage lies in the experience of particularity, I will take as my starting point one particular experience of pilgrimage.

In starting from experience, I will draw on the methodological approach taken by Roberto S. Goizueta in Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment. In this project, Goizueta provides a narrative account of a particular Holy Week celebration at San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas and subsequently uses this account of human experience as a source for theological reflection. In the first chapter of this project, I will provide a selected narrative of my experience walking El Camino de Santiago from the fifth of September to the seventeenth of October, 2011. This experience of pilgrimage functioned as a practiced microcosm of the Christian life and has subsequently served as a source for theological reflection on the liturgy.

Chapter two will explore the relationship between pilgrimage and liturgy, examining how the two practices are capable of mutually enlightening one another. Working from the narrative provided in chapter one, I will discuss ways in which this particular embodied experience of pilgrimage has enriched my understanding of the liturgy, particularly the Eucharist. I will discuss aspects in the theology of the Eucharist that are now illuminated by my experience of pilgrimage. Conversely, I will also show that the practice of liturgy informed and enriched my experience on the Camino.
This portion of the project will take Emmaus as its starting point, acknowledging the story as an archetypal account of the Christian journey and subsequently as a context in which to discuss the interrelatedness of liturgy and pilgrimage. I will discuss how spoken word and shared meal emerge as salient features of all three events (Emmaus, Camino, and liturgy) and point out that these actions facilitate an experience within each event that leaves its participants altered and compels him or her to live life from a changed perspective. The Emmaus story will also serve as a basis from which to begin exploring the work of sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet as it relates to this project since Chauvet proposes a three-part framework for the Christian identity which he derives from the Emmaus narrative. As we will see, the three elements of Scripture, sacrament, and ethics suggested by Chauvet also categorize the salient features of the liturgical and pilgrimage experiences that were initially described. Chauvet also uses the Emmaus narrative to illustrate the necessity of mediation—a concept which forms the heart of his sacramental theology and which will become central to the work of this project.

Taking into consideration the particularly important role that the Eucharist plays within each of the three experiences discussed in the first part of chapter two, I will move into an exploration of the Eucharistic encounter. I will examine the way in which Chauvet’s sacramental theology departs from the instrumentalist approach of classical Thomistic theology. Chauvet proposes an alternative model which understands the sacraments as a symbolic gift exchange. This more relational approach allows the Eucharist to be understood as a location of interpersonal and interactive encounter. For, in the liminality of the Eucharist, we encounter the actualized kenosis of Christ. We meet that which is other and experience our own self--emptying as we are attentive to the one we encounter.
Through this *kenosis*, we grow to more closely image Christ. In this way, our experience of Eucharist is formative; for our Eucharistic encounters draw us to more closely image Christ, and in this way we more fully and authentically manifest the identity we received in baptism. Since we act out of our identity, the Eucharist forms and informs the way that we live. Thus, as we are more fully brought into our baptismal/Christian identity through Eucharist and act from within this identity, the liturgy—indeed our very life—becomes a journey from font to altar. We journey toward greater union with Christ, and as each member of the Body of Christ moves toward a more complete state of *theosis*, the Church itself moves toward God’s Kingdom. In other words, the Pilgrim Church is one which journeys toward the Heavenly Jerusalem, by Christ’s ever-increasing permeation into his mystical body. In this way, the Eucharist is a catalyst for our Christian pilgrimage, serving as both source and summit of our journey.

Taking chapters one and two as evidence of the effectiveness of embodied practice, the third chapter will explore more closely the role of embodiment in Christian practice. I will use Scripture to show that embodiment is at the heart of Christianity. I will also use the work of theologians Louis-Marie Chauvet, Roberto Goizueta, Anthony Godzieba, and Wendy Wright to discuss the necessity of mediation and the role of particularity in coming to know that which is infinite. Furthermore, I will explore the role that the body plays as a particularity in receiving and mediating the spiritual. Building on this discussion, I will consider the role of embodiment in the practices of liturgy and pilgrimage, examining the expressive and formative dimensions of embodiment in each practice. Although I recognize that pilgrimage is not a *necessary* Christian practice, I will suggest that the actual, embodied practice of pilgrimage can be a formative experience which concretizes the concept of
pilgrimage and become a useful paradigm through which to approach the Christian journey, as nourished by Eucharist.

Returning to the original question that concerning the possibility of sacred space (and therefore as to the appropriateness of pilgrimage as a Christian practice), I will use Ratzinger’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy* to address the immediacy implied by this question. I will examine the “already/not-yet” dimension of Eucharist and pilgrimage, reasoning that both exist in liminal time and space. In this way, pilgrimage is situated in the realm of the intermediate—an embodied entity which makes real that which is beyond itself. I will conclude by suggesting that understanding pilgrimage in this sacramental manner can be a starting point for a theology of pilgrimage.
In September of 2011, I was very fortunate to embark on one of the most profound and impactful experiences of my life. For six weeks I trekked through the beautiful countryside of northern Spain and the landscape of my soul as I walked the pilgrimage known as *El Camino de Santiago*. The decision to embark on this journey was a long and careful process. In fact, my discernment took place over the course of a more than a year. I was in the midst of the most difficult and broken time of my life when the seed of calling was first planted. Feeling overwhelmed and depressed one day, I turned on the television to distract myself from my troubles. I was not intending to be engaged in what was on TV; I only planned to have it on in the background to divert me from my thoughts. I happened to be flipping through channels when one caught my attention, so I stopped. I could tell the program was already well under way, but it did not matter; I was captivated. The host of the show was talking about some kind of journey. It took me a few minutes to catch on, but he was somewhere in Spain and wherever he was looked absolutely gorgeous. As he continued to explain, I learned that he was showcasing an ancient pilgrimage called *El Camino de Santiago*.

Despite my general unfamiliarity with the concept of pilgrimage at the time, I could tell that this particular journey provided the opportunity for a very reflective experience. I did not understand Spanish but I eventually gathered that the title *El Camino de Santiago*...
translated to mean “The Way of Saint James”. I learned that the Camino was a journey that was undertaken on foot (or was originally intended to be, though now it can be biked or driven) and followed a well-marked trail until it arrived in a city called Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. Here in the city’s cathedral were thought to rest the remains of St. James the Apostle. More emphasized than the destination, however, was the journey itself: the walking. I pictured having vast amounts of time and space to myself and was struck by how amazing this gift would be. To be in a place so completely outside of my norm and to have no responsibilities or cares except to put one foot in front of the other seemed like a great way to extricate myself from the suffocating weight of everything in my life and breathe freely again. It also seemed like a good opportunity to allow myself to encounter my struggles on my own terms.

I was becoming intoxicated by the overall impression I was beginning to form of this journey. Maybe it was the age of the structures and pathways that meandered their way across the screen, or the powerful imagery of pedestrians flanked by such overwhelming natural beauty. Perhaps it was the ancient-sounding music that surrounded the narration like book ends. Whatever the case, I began to get the sense that there was something very unique about this journey…and something very deep. It was mysterious and other-worldly, and somehow innately spiritual. I felt as if someone had cast a hook into my spirit and was gently tugging me. I have never felt so quickly or strongly drawn to something in my life.

After doing some very preliminary research, I learned that St. James was thought to have preached in Spain during his lifetime. In the 9th century a shepherd miraculously discovered the remains of the apostle when a vision of stars pointed out the spot. It is from this somewhat legendary account that the cathedral name Santiago de Compostela, or “St.
James of the Field of Stars” is derived. The cathedral holding the relics became an extremely popular site of Christian pilgrimage, rivaling Rome and Jerusalem in esteem during the Middle Ages when the practice of Christian pilgrimage reached its height in popularity. I discovered that although the trip lost ground for a long time, it had been experiencing a resurgence in popularity over the past quarter century. Travelers received a “Pilgrim’s Passport” when they began the journey which proved their pilgrim status and allowed them to stay at hostels or albergues. These passports collected a unique stamp at each albergue and were presented at the end of the trek to receive one’s ‘Compostela,’ or official certificate authenticating the pilgrimage. Modern pilgrims still walked from village to village along one of many possible routes. The most well-marked and well-traveled route was known as the “French route,” which began in France and made its way through northern Spain to the cathedral. A traditional starting point along this route was a small French village at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains called St. Jean-Piet-du-Port. It was over 500 miles from Santiago de Compostela.

Although the pilgrimage had immediately attracted my interest, I very quickly dismissed the whole idea as completely impractical. I had not done much traveling and had absolutely no experience traveling alone. I could not speak a word of Spanish. I was unemployed and could not afford to take such a financial risk. I had never backpacked and had failed just about every physical challenge I had ever attempted. My parents would probably disown me. The list of reasons why I should not go to Spain seemed endless. Over the course of that year, however, the idea of pilgrimage would not leave me. It kept surfacing often and in unexpected places. As I spent more time in prayer, events began to transpire which made apparent the fact that pilgrimage was exactly what I was being called
to do. And not just any pilgrimage—this particular pilgrimage. As one who generally avoids risk-taking at all costs, I felt terrified by the prospect of this journey; however, one by one each obstacle that I had foreseen seemed to disappear, and at some point it simply became easier to say yes than no.

I had been extremely anxious about travelling alone, but (in one of the aforementioned instances of obstacles disappearing) my former college roommate had called out of the blue in July and asked if I was still considering going to Spain that fall. I shared that I was still thinking about it but that it seemed crazy, terrifying, and unlikely to happen. She told me that she was planning a trip to see her family in Belgium in early September and had also planned to visit a friend in Germany, but recently learned that her plans for Germany were going to fall through. Since she now had a few days available in Europe, she generously offered to meet me in France and help me get started on the Camino. And so I found myself in the tiny village of St. Jean-Piet-du-Port less than two months later, backpack and trekking poles in tow, trying to figure out whether I felt more excited or terrified.

WEEKS ONE AND TWO: STRUGGLING

Liesbet and I had rather miraculously managed to meet up the day before in Lourdes, France, with only the name of an inconspicuous hotel as a meeting point and no means of contacting each other should either one of us be late or lost. I had been scheduled to arrive well before Liesbet but was beginning to feel concerned when she was still nowhere to be seen hours after her anticipated time of arrival. Not knowing what else to do, I wandered down to the train station to see if I could ascertain whether there were any problems with the train schedule. At the exact moment that I approached the entrance
to the station, I found Liesbet walking toward the same entrance from the platform, having just arrived. We walked toward each other and embraced as if the exchange had been planned all along.

The following morning we took a train from Lourdes to St. Jean-Piet-du-Port, disembarked, and made our way to the pilgrim’s office. We waited our turn in line and filled out our registration. We were subsequently given a map, advice for crossing the Pyrenees Mountains, and our official pilgrim’s passport. Since the first leg of the journey was particularly long and it was already well into the afternoon, Liesbet and I decided to find a hostel in the village and put off our start until the following morning. It seemed wise to enjoy a good night’s sleep so that we could be well-rested for what looked to be an extended and difficult day of walking.

As we left the hostel the next morning and found our first waymark I vividly remember thinking to myself: well, here we go! I felt exhilarated, but my exhilaration very quickly turned to exhaustion as the path took an almost immediate turn uphill. That first day of walking was grueling. It was roughly fifteen miles up a mountain, and midway through our climb a cold, misty rain began to permeate our clothes and make us feel chilled to the bone. At our first break, Liesbet and I stopped just off the path to drink some water and were joined by another girl who heard us talking and asked if we were Americans. She revealed that she was from California and introduced herself as Alyssa. As she asked us about our travel plans I explained that Liesbet was only able to accompany me for three days. I mentioned how nervous I was about not being able to speak Spanish and expressed that I was glad someone else from the states was doing the pilgrimage since I had yet to meet any other Americans. We would be in the struggle together. She kindly informed me
that she actually spoke Spanish fluently since she had lived and worked in Barcelona for a year. I felt a little silly for my assumption and apologized, while making a mental note that I hoped we would be friends. She got up, wished us well, put her backpack on, and was on her way again.

Not wanting to linger long since we still had a ways to go before nightfall, Liesbet and I continued on soon after. Liesbet was and is a very experienced hiker and kept us moving at an extremely brisk pace. As it began to rain, our pace picked up since we both felt eager to reach shelter. We only stopped when absolutely necessary, and never for longer than just a few minutes. I felt as if I was trying to catch my breath and catch up to Liesbet throughout the entire afternoon. When we finally arrived cold and exhausted at the village, I forced myself to resist the temptation to collapse in my assigned bed for the evening. Somehow I mustered the energy to shower, hang my damp clothes to dry, and wander around the village in search of something to eat for dinner. When my watch alarm went off the following morning and I began to hear the loud shuffling of other pilgrims packing up their things in the dark, I found myself wondering how in the world I would overcome my physical exhaustion and find the strength to push myself through another grueling day of walking. I can recall rubbing Vaseline into my feet at around 6:30 a.m. (a remedy that I had been told helped prevent blisters), pulling my muddy boots out of a designated pile, and stepping out into the crisp air minutes later to face a road sign that read: *Santiago de Compostela- 790 kms*.

Somehow seeing the distance in kilometers made Santiago seem even further away. I can remember thinking that I had no idea what 500 miles (or nearly 800 kilometers) could possibly be like. I had no idea how that time and distance could possibly pass by and what it
would look like. I was quickly distracted from my pondering, however, by my effort to stay caught up with Liesbet. I can recall wrestling quite a lot with pacing those first few days. Liesbet pushed me and talking to her kept me distracted from the difficulty of the task before me, especially since this stretch of walking was particularly intense due to the mountainous terrain. Yet my effort to keep pace with Liesbet and the group of pilgrims that we now found ourselves in company with meant that I was constantly distracted either by my physical discomfort or conversation with others. I had felt a very strong calling to embark on this pilgrimage and wanted it to be a very deep spiritual experience. This was not quite turning out to be the quiet, intensely reflective experience that I had pictured. I found myself wondering whether I was setting the wrong tone for my journey by walking with Liesbet. Had I romanticized what this journey would be?

The afternoon of our third day of walking, Liesbet and I arrived in Pamplona. It was here that we were to separate—she was to head to Madrid and then Belgium, and I was to continue walking. I settled into a hostel and cleaned my clothes as Liesbet confirmed her transportation plans to Madrid. I stared down at my knees as I was waiting for my clothes to dry and noted how swollen and fluid-filled they looked. I had them propped up on a picnic table and was trying to massage around my sore knee caps as I mentally wondered how I would carry on alone. The day before my knees had hurt so badly and I was walking so slowly that Liesbet had actually ventured to the final village of the day alone to find a room and drop her backpack and then doubled back to carry my pack the rest of the way so that I could limp along without the added weight. Although I had not made a final decision to embark on the pilgrimage until July, I had in fact begun training for the journey in April. I
felt very concerned that my body was resisting the stress of walking so much, despite its having received nearly five months of training.

When my clothes were finished being washed and Liesbet was finished making arrangements, she and I and two other pilgrims—an Italian named Jacapo and a German named Tomas—went to a bar to have something cool to drink while she waited for her train to arrive. We had met the night before when overbooked hostels forced all four of us to share a very cramped bedroom together. When it was time, Liesbet hugged me tightly and wished me luck and then made our two companions promise to take care of me. As I watched her walk away, I couldn’t help feeling a little abandoned.

Knowing that my pace had slowed significantly because of my aching knees, I decided to head out ahead of Jacapo and Tomas the next morning. I told them that I was sure they would catch up to me quickly. I pulled my heavy backpack over my shoulders and followed the other early risers out of the hostel. Pamplona was the first major city that we had reached on the Camino and many intersecting streets made finding the route out of the city difficult. I had only wandered through a small portion of the city the evening before and I was having a difficult time finding waymarks. I spotted some other pilgrims who looked confident and decided to follow them. As I followed from a distance, it began to settle in that I was officially on my own. I felt very vulnerable and nervous and began to doubt my ability to complete what now seemed like an impossible journey.

Within minutes I recognized one of the more confident-looking pilgrims walking ahead of me. It looked like the girl, Alyssa, whom I had met on my first day. She was walking with a male, and they were having a conversation in Spanish. Rather unexpectedly,
she looked around, and when she saw me she stopped and waited for me to catch up to her.

That day we were to climb a hill so steep it was known as Alto del Perdon, or “the hill of forgiveness.” Alyssa and Jorge (the Spaniard she had been talking with) walked ahead of me for much of the day since my knees were by now in a great deal of pain and my pace was becoming increasingly slow. Alyssa, however, made frequent stops to take photos. I would later learn that she was a very gifted photographer, even if amateur; her keen eye often meant that she would be inspired at random moments and stop for sometimes long periods of time to take a series of photos until she was satisfied with the composition. This would turn out to be one of the many reasons that would make our companionship work well; for, although she was almost always walking at a quicker pace than me, her frequent photo stops would allow me to close the gap in the distance between us.

This particular day, Alyssa and Jorge kept pace with each other, and I occasionally caught up to them as we approached Alto del Perdon. Climbing this hill—and even worse, climbing down the opposite side—was excruciatingly painful. I attempted to hide my tears from those walking near me. I felt a little less silly when I discovered Jorge’s knees were beginning to bother him as well. A young Italian pilgrim I had seen looking perfectly healthy just the day before had sent his backpack ahead by taxi and was limping along with just a small grocery bag of necessities in hand.

Later in the afternoon, Jacapo and Tomas caught up to me and together with Jorge, Alyssa, and the ailing Italian (I never did catch his name), we walked for hours. We took a long detour to see a 12th century church which turned out to be closed when we arrived. By the time we arrived at our final destination for the day, all the hostels were full. It was
extraordinarily hot and I had been pushing myself through a lot of pain during the afternoon to get to the village. When we found out that all nearby hostels were full and that the next available was another kilometer away and situated at the top of a very large hill, I found myself choking back tears of frustration. With each painful and exhausted step I had been clinging to the hope that it would be over very soon and I could rest. Arriving only to find that I had to keep going was miserable. By the time we actually arrived at the hostel, I was so tired and in so much pain that I could do little else but collapse. I took off my dirty boots and sweaty socks to allow my blister-covered toes to breathe and gingerly walked to find ice for my aching and swollen knees. Jacapo, Tomas, and Jorge ventured back into town to do some exploring and find dinner; rather unexpectedly, Alyssa decided to stay at the hostel and keep me company. That evening we shared a long one-on-one conversation.

Alyssa and I formed a bond rather quickly. From our very first day of walking together, we had been able to converse very easily. We found a rhythm between conversation and silence and seemed to move seamlessly between long stretches of each. She asked open, honest questions, and we processed our struggles with faith, family, the future, and broken relationships. Of course we discussed lighter topics too. Over the course of so many hours and kilometers, it seemed there was almost no subject that we did not discuss.

On our first afternoon of walking together, Alyssa had breached the subject of faith. She had asked why I was walking the Camino, and although I could not exactly explain my answer succinctly, I had tried my best to give a brief account of my brokenness and my search for direction. I had mentioned feeling called through prayer to make this pilgrimage. A short time later she had asked me about my faith and how I had come to believe in God.
Over the course of the following days and weeks, faith would come up again and again. I attended Mass whenever I could (which was fairly often since it was available on an almost daily basis), and one day Alyssa asked if she could accompany me. After Mass, we shared a meal, and Alyssa asked me questions about what had occurred during the liturgy. I described my basic beliefs as best as I could and explained how, although I could not understand the Spanish, I could still follow what was happening because of the universality of the structure of the liturgy. Alyssa and I eventually developed something of an exchange. She would come to Mass with me and afterwards provide a basic translation of the readings and homily, and then she would ask me questions about the meaning behind the actions and prayers. She asked questions about my belief in theological concepts such as saints, Mary, the Trinity, and suffering. As we got more comfortable with each other, she began to ask questions about more difficult issues like homosexuality, priesthood, contraception, and sex and marriage. I had never been asked to explain my beliefs so explicitly and found that there were times when I had great difficulty articulating my views because in some cases I was not entirely sure what I believed or why. Regardless of my ability to communicate effectively, I always felt energized by our conversations about faith.

My conversations with Alyssa also became a good place to process the challenges of the Camino itself. The questions that I had been asking myself during those first days when I had been walking with Liesbet continued to linger. I was walking at a much more relaxed pace, but I was still struggling with trying to adjust to the difficulty of what I was doing, and I felt like I was not engaging as much as I had desired in the spiritual journey. I had pictured the Camino as a vast canvas of time on which would emerge a picture for my life. I had tried my very best to have no expectations of my journey, but it seemed that I had them despite
of myself. The fact was, I wanted answers. I wanted to “figure things out.” For a long time I had been struggling to discern my vocation, and recently I had even been struggling to determine a next step for my life. As far as I was concerned, I had done everything God had asked; I had taken the risk and was a continent away from my comfort zone. God had called me to this journey and I felt it was time for some answers. But where were they? What if they did not come? What else would I have to do? At some point I found the courage to voice my frustration and insecurity over the lack of clarity I was feeling. As Alyssa and I continued to share more of our personal stories and process our experiences of brokenness over those first few weeks of walking, Alyssa eventually suggested that perhaps this journey was less about finding answers and more about letting go.

I had no idea how five hundred miles would pass. I had no certain picture in my head for what the journey would look like, how the villages and cities would be arranged, or who I would meet. I had begun my journey with an open mind and no expectations . . . or so I thought. Yet as the first and second weeks passed by, I began to feel that this journey was most definitely not what I had expected. This was not the deeply prayerful and meditative experience I had pictured. My thoughts were either consumed by the events and emotions of the life I had momentarily stepped away from or by the physical task before me. My mind would be distracted by thoughts about how much longer I had to walk before I could take a break, by how hot or tired or in pain I felt, by daydreams of what food sounded most delicious, by fantasies over how wonderful it would feel to lay down, by concern over whether I would be able to find a bed and food for that day.

This had been another aspect of the journey that was not meeting my expectations. During those first few weeks of the Camino, there were quite a lot of pilgrims. I had
unknowingly chosen a time of year when many Europeans were on holiday. As a result of the high influx of pilgrims, it was proving a bit difficult to find accommodations. More than once when we arrived in a village or town, the hostels would be full and we would either have to keep walking or find alternative accommodations. For many pilgrims, the solution to this problem meant leaving before sunrise and attempting to arrive in destination villages as early as possible on any given day, sometimes arriving as early as 11 a.m. and waiting in line for an hour outside of hostels until it was finished being cleaned from the previous group of pilgrims. This created a sense of pressure around one’s pace, and it began to feel as if the Camino was some sort of race. Even casual conversation seemed to revolve around a spirit of competition . . . or at least comparison. One of the most frequently asked questions I received when encountering new pilgrims was where and what day I had started the Camino. If the person I was talking to had begun from St. Jean-Piet-du-Port after September 5th (which was the location and date I had begun walking) then it was difficult not to read a slight tone of superiority into the words of the speaker as I was informed of his or her starting date, location, and implied faster pace.

Alyssa and I unpacked much of this struggle in our long conversations together while we walked. We often walked separately and silently in the mornings, leaving each other alone to be with to be with our thoughts. In the afternoons, however, we were tired and hot and conversation helped to pass the time and motivate each other through the fatigue. We would talk about the stuff of our lives and process the joys and challenges of the journey. We talked through the sense of anxiety we were both feeling because of external pressures like the uncertain availability of accommodations and the spirit of competition we were discovering among pilgrims. Comparing myself to other people had been (and
continues to be) a lifelong struggle, and although I may not have realized at the time just how much I was comparing myself to other pilgrims, watching them move along with such haste and assurance certainly complicated my struggle with self-confidence. Regardless of my ability to recognize or articulate this struggle, there was an unanticipated sense of tension which began to underlie my journey whose root was to be found in comparison.

WEEKS THREE AND FOUR: LETTING GO

Over the course of the last two weeks the landscape had become increasingly flat as we moved from the Pyrenees into the rolling hills and vineyards of Basque country into agricultural plains known as the meseta. It was autumn and the crops had already been harvested, leaving flat, dead fields almost as far as the eye can see. I can recall having conversations with Alyssa about the emptiness of the landscape as we struggled along. As the hills became more gentle and the fields more vast, the word “empty” continued to surface and I found myself reflecting on what it must mean to be empty.

I was preparing to enter my third week of walking and the injuries I had felt at the beginning of the Camino were only worsening. What began as pain in my knees quickly shifted to terrible tendonitis in my wrists and forearms as I relied more and more heavily on trekking poles. Eventually unable to use the poles because of my arms, I tried to make do without them and found myself walking more gingerly because of my sore knees. Somehow the shift in gait began to affect the tendons on the upper sections of my feet and I found myself in such pain that Alyssa and I decided to use our first rest day. We spread it out over two days, walking only half the distance we had originally planned for both days. When I had made arrangements for the pilgrimage, I booked my return flight based on a five-week time table and left myself only two days to rest (having no idea what amount of time was
appropriate). Taking my first rest day so soon in my journey made me a bit nervous, but it seemed wise to try to take it easy on my body before things got worse.

Perhaps giving into some of the competitive pressure we were feeling, Alyssa and I and a German girl named Julia that we had just met decided to strike out especially early the next morning. Our destination for the day was a fairly large city called Burgos, and we wanted to arrive in the early afternoon so that we could secure beds in what was sure to be a very crowded hostel and leave ourselves plenty of time to explore the city in the afternoon. We set out before sunrise, using a headlamp to follow markers into a wooded path. Because we were surrounded by fog and had only one headlamp to share between three people, the pathway was very difficult to see. I tripped on a rock, and twisted my right foot. I stopped and wrapped my ankle, but was determined to continue the next ten kilometers into the city. We arrived and got settled into our assigned room at the hostel, which we would share with a number of other pilgrims, including an elderly gentleman named Benny who was from Ireland. Alyssa and I had been traveling at fairly regular intervals (roughly 20-25 kilometers per day) and had been starting to form something of a community with others who seemed to be moving along at a similar pace. Although I walked slowly and often arrived at each destination well behind other pilgrims, we found ourselves staying at the same hostels and eating at the same places. However, because I had taken a rest day, all of the pilgrims that we usually saw throughout the course of the day had moved on, and we were now on track with a new set of pilgrims.

Alyssa and I ventured out to explore the city a little and see its cathedral. Afterwards we found a place to eat, iced our feet, and called it an early night. When we started out the next morning, I could feel the stiffness and pain along the side of my right
heel. The pain worsened over the next several days and I was beginning to wonder whether I was becoming a burden to Alyssa. I started to fall further and further behind her as I was walking; often she was not even within my sight.

Two mornings after we left Burgos, Alyssa, Julia, and I awoke to particularly chilly weather. We stopped by a small shop before heading out to buy a few snacks for breakfast since the one bar in the village was not yet open. There were individual tea bags for sale and when we asked the store owner if he knew of any place where we could find or purchase hot water, another man in the shop enthusiastically offered to allow us into his home which was located just across the street. We accepted his invitation somewhat sheepishly, but he led us into his home and within minutes produced a kettle of boiling water as well as three bananas and some biscuits.

As we left the gentleman’s house, he wished us a good journey and we were on our way. The crisp air quickly warmed up as the sun rose higher in the sky and caused the rolling fields to look like they were glimmering. My spirit was lifted by the warmth of hospitality and a beautiful day and I could not help but feel positive about the journey ahead. Yet after a short time, I approached Julia and heard her whimpering as we made our way down a hill. When I asked about it she explained that her knee was hurting her terribly, but she insisted that she was well enough to continue walking. I walked near her for a time and prayed for her as I walked. I found it so difficult to see her in pain that I can recall asking God to let me experience her pain for her.

After a time we took a break and Julia seemed to feel significantly better. As we continued onward, my foot began to flare up and I fell significantly far behind Alyssa and Julia. The pain worsened quickly and each step became so excruciating that it felt like fire
shooting up my leg. Every time I stepped on my right foot my breath would catch in the
back of my throat and I would have to brace myself for the next explosion of pain. I became
nauseous and began to beg for God’s help. Prior to leaving on pilgrimage, I had collected
prayer intentions from friends, family, and members of my parish. In this moment I began
to think of all the intentions that stood out in my memory: prayers for clarity and
discernment; prayers for the sick, imprisoned, and dying; prayers for struggles with issues
like addiction, unemployment, divorce, and infertility. Unable to bear my pain, I began to
try to channel it in prayer, thinking of all of the hopes and all of the brokenness written
down in the little book that was currently tucked away in my backpack. I thought of Jesus,
walking with the unbearable weight of the cross on his back and wondered how in the world
he could carry such pain with such love. I tried my best to embrace the pain, but I began to
fear that I would not be able to make it to the nearest village. I had no idea how far it was. I
considered stopping and sitting down but I was worried that I might be left stranded. I
could no longer see Alyssa or Julia ahead of me and although I contemplated trying to shout
for their help, I felt foolish and found that I did not have enough energy anyway. Instead
each time my right foot met the ground I uttered a pleading prayer: *Dear God, please let me
make it to a village*. *Dear God, please let me make it to a village*. *Dear God, please let me
make it to a village*.

After some time a small village appeared at the base of a dip in the road ahead. I
found that my utterances morphed into something of a whimpering—a mixture of relief,
gratitude, pain, exhaustion, and dread at the prospect of the hill I was going to have to
descend to get there. When I did finally arrive, I found Julia and Alyssa and collapsed in a
chair at the café table they had chosen. I felt my temper shortening with irritation as Julia
was happily chirping along in conversation and Alyssa was snapping what seemed like an obscene amount of photos of a nearby wall where a bird was flying back and forth from a protruding brick. She was trying to catch its shadow on the wall while it was in flight. I was struggling with the realization that I was going to have to stand up and walk again to use the restroom, order food, and ask for ice. Once these seemingly insurmountable tasks were completed I was horrified to discover that Julia and Alyssa were only stopping for lunch and very much planning to continue walking another seven to ten kilometers that afternoon to the next village. I was at a loss as to how to proceed. On one hand, I was in no shape to continue walking and staying put seemed the only reasonable option; but on the other hand, I was unprepared to be on my own and in a village as small as this one, I was especially terrified of being abandoned when there seemed to be very little access to lodgings or medical care.

We were joined at our table by another pilgrim who introduced himself as Andreas. He had begun his journey in Puy, France and had been walking for over forty days now—a distance that seemed staggering when compared to our mere fifteen. He showed us his walking stick and explained that he had been adding carvings each day to represent his journey. He asked about our plans for the remainder of the day and inquired about my injury. When I explained my conundrum about staying put or moving on, he encouraged me to walk through the pain. He had struggled with pain himself for much of his journey, but found that it eventually dissipated as he pushed past it. I felt slightly dubious about the medical wisdom of his advice, but took hope in his story of overcoming. Andreas also explained that he was a practitioner of Reiki healing and offered to use his skills on my foot. Completely unfamiliar with Reiki at the time and more than a little uncomfortable at the
thought of allowing a stranger anywhere near my unpleasant feet, I hesitated; yet, I was so desperate to feel any improvement that I felt willing to try anything and consented.

Andreas raised my foot into his lap and for several silent minutes held his hands over areas of pain. Feeling self-conscious and uncertain about what he was actually doing, I fell into silent prayer and offered my own internal pleas for healing.

When Andreas was finished, he encouraged me to continue walking and offered to let me use his walking stick for support. I felt humbled by his generosity in entrusting me with such a precious object. I consented and in an unusual arrangement, I found myself walking side-by-side with Andreas while Alyssa and Julia were staggered behind. He asked whether the Reiki had helped and unsure whether to credit the strange ritual, the rest, the nourishment of food and drink, or the comfort of having someone walking by my side again, I told him that I was feeling surprisingly better. After a short time, I felt I could no longer keep up with him. He assured me that I could keep his walking stick and return it to him at the next village, and then he forged ahead. As the afternoon wore on, my renewed strength wore off. This time as my pace weakened, so did that of Alyssa and Julia. We took turns falling behind and pulling forward, but for the most part we stayed in a pack, trying our best to allow our conversations to distract us from the difficulty of pushing forward when our energy was evaporating in the afternoon heat.

As the afternoon wore on, the three of us came upon the ruins of an ancient hospital built by the Knights Templar. I can recall wanting to feel impressed, but in reality I desired nothing more than to arrive where we were headed. I was starting to reach the point at which I had found myself that morning: nauseated by the heat and the pain. I felt like I was expending every ounce of energy I had to convince myself to keep going. In the
meantime, I began to sense that Alyssa was becoming more quiet and withdrawn. She was walking a bit ahead of Julia and I and I began to worry that she was not in a good space. I could not help but feel that I was becoming a burden to her; I was slow and needed to stop for frequent rests and although I endeavored not to complain, I’m sure that I struggled to keep my spirits up. Undoubtedly, I was demanding patience and energy.

Not long after we passed through the Templar hospital, we spotted a village in the distance. It was situated at the base of a very large hill, on top of which were the ruins of a medieval castle. Although our destination was in sight, it felt as if it was never getting closer. Alyssa was impatient to arrive and pulled a bit further ahead of Julia and me. After what seemed like an eternity, the main road on which we were walking passed into a village named Castrojeriz. At the base of the east side Castrojeriz, just below the castle-crowned hill, was a large monastery. We followed the road as it wound around the base of the hill, past the monastery, and into the heart of the village. Striding along the cobblestone street past a maze of houses, we found ourselves wondering how much further we would have to walk before we would reach the hostel. I was dragging severely and Julia lagged back with me. We tried to distract ourselves from our impatience by chatting. We eventually came to realize that the hostel we were searching for was located on the extreme opposite side of the village from where we had entered it; we would have to follow waymark after waymark across the full span of Castrojeriz until we finally came across its portico.

There was a small cluster of tables and chairs across the street from the hostel entrance that Alyssa instructed us to sit at while she went in to talk to the hostel owner. She left her backpack with us and disappeared into the building. I threw off my backpack and collapsed into an open chair, pulling up another across from me so that I could prop up
my aching foot. After several minutes Alyssa came back outside, followed by a middle-aged
gentleman. The expression on her face communicated all that was necessary to know about
our situation. Alyssa’s bottom lip began to quiver and she dissolved into a flood of tears. I
stood up to walk toward her, but the few moments of rest I had taken were enough to
stiffen everything and I let out a yelp in response to the unexpected burst of pain in my foot.

We were immediately joined by two gentlemen who had been sitting at the café
table next to Julia and me. I recognized one of them as Benny, the Irish gentleman Alyssa
and I had met at the hostel in Burgos. Alyssa informed us that this hostel and another about
a block away had no space available. There had been a third hostel close to the entrance of
the village, but we had wandered past it and would have to backtrack two kilometers to
reach it. It was highly likely that such an excursion would reveal the same *completo* status.
Even more unfortunate was the news that the next village with accommodations was an
additional ten kilometers away. Although my mind was keen to panic, I found myself
determined to hold things together for Alyssa’s sake. Benny and his companion were all
concern. Benny kept emitting expletives of frustration as he tried to brainstorm solutions,
all the while assuring us in the gentlest way that all would be well. Meanwhile the middle-
aged man that had followed Alyssa out of the hostel gripped her by the shoulders and
began talking to her very expressively in Spanish. He pointed his finger in her face and
repeated a phrase very firmly. I was taken aback by his apparent scolding, but sure enough,
Alyssa pursed her lips, dried her tears, and turned to obey as he motioned for us to follow.
Benny and his friend grabbed our packs and followed, insisting on carrying them for us.

As we followed the stern Spanish man, I questioned Alyssa and ascertained that he
was the owner of the hostel that had been full. When she had broken down he put his
finger in her face and told her matter-of-factly not to cry—-that this was not the end of the world. He had informed her that he knew of a place where we might be able to stay and was in the process of leading us just down the road to what turned out to be a very humble inn. Technically it was considered a hotel instead of a hostel, but in our desperation we were more than willing to pay the difference in cost. The hostel owner explained our situation to the clerk at the inn and asked her to see to our care. We tried to express our gratitude as he turned to leave, but he would hear none of it. He made sure we felt comfortable with the arrangement, gave a kind smile, and left. Benny and his friend stayed just long enough to deposit our packs and wish us well before departing as well.

Moments later we were showed to our room by the innkeeper. It was modest, but it felt extravagant given that we would gladly have slept outside or in a closet only a few moments earlier. Not only were there three separate beds, but we were to enjoy sheets and a non-communal bathroom for the very first time on the Camino. We were giddy with delight. Alyssa, Julia, and I each collapsed into a bed and after several moments of silence began to talk through a shower schedule. During our down time Alyssa also broached the subject of the next day. She pointed out that I was in no condition to walk and would simply have to take a rest day. I knew that I had no argument--I had barely made it through the day. Yet, I could not help but feel concerned about using my last rest day when I still had almost five hundred kilometers left to walk. Besides, how would I function on my own? I had come to rely on Alyssa as a translator and true companion.

After resting and bathing, I was relieved to discover that there was something of a restaurant connected to the inn; fortunately, I would not have to walk far to find food. I made my way down the stairs very gingerly and found a table with Alyssa and Julia. My
previous conversation was still resounding in my brain and I was distracted throughout the meal by my struggle to accept the fact that I was going to have to stay put the next day. I continued to chew over fears about my inability to communicate and lack of rest days remaining. Yet, I also became aware of the tension that I had been feeling earlier in the afternoon around Alyssa. For days I had been worried about being a burden to her. I had also begun to wonder whether my reliance on her was in some way inhibiting my own journey. Perhaps I was becoming too comfortable and not pushing myself as far outside of my comfort zone as I should be.

Ultimately this was the thought that gave me consolation as I prepared to sleep later that evening. My decision to separate from Alyssa in order to stay behind and rest would result in an opportunity for Alyssa to be freed from me and for me to challenge myself to further growth. Before bed, Alyssa had been kind and written a list of words and phrases that she thought I might need in her absence. The phrases ranged from “Can I have ice?” and “Is there a doctor?” to “Where is the bus station?” She carefully wrote out each phrase in English first and then translated them into Spanish with phonetic spellings so that I would be able to pronounce them. Confident that I was making the best choice and was as prepared as possible for its consequences, I crawled into bed with a sense of calm resignation.

The next morning, I awakened to Julia’s watch alarm and the subsequent shuffling of preparation as the two girls readied themselves for the day. Although I was intending to stay behind, I wanted to get up and see them off. I sat up, stretched out, swung my legs over the bed, and stood up. Only I didn’t. The most indescribable pain exploded from my right heel as I had tried to put weight on it. My leg crumpled and I found myself collapsing.
I managed to fall toward the bed Alyssa had been sleeping in and caught myself on its post. I bit my lip and held in the scream that was at the back of my throat. I felt warm tears rolling down my cheeks and wanted nothing more in that moment than to be out of Alyssa and Julia’s sight before I lost control. I was desperate to get to the bathroom so that I could disappear. I dragged myself to a small table at the foot of the bed. Unfortunately the bathroom was still around the corner and there no intermediate furniture against which I would be able to prop myself. I hopped a few times on my left foot, and attempted to shift a little weight to the toes of my right foot. The same eruption of pain followed and I let myself fall into the doorway of the bathroom. I crawled in, shut the door behind me, and dissolved into sobs.

Never, NEVER had I experienced such intense pain. Yet the pain was immediately rivaled by an overwhelming combination of emotions. I was absolutely terrified. There was no way I could move forward. Not until this very moment did it ever dawn on me that I might have to quit the Camino. I might have to stop in midst of my journey and never arrive at its conclusion. My fear was quickly overcome by anger. I had felt so confident that I was called to this journey. In fact, I had never felt so confident about a decision in my life. Why on earth would God have called me to something I could not do? Why would God lead me so exceedingly far outside of my comfort zone only to forsake me there? I felt utterly abandoned.

I tried hard to calm myself but the tears would not stop. I pulled myself up on the sink, splashed some cold water on my face and took several deep breaths. I hopped to the door frame and opened the bathroom door to find Alyssa standing on the other side of it looking desperately concerned. I opened my mouth to assure her I was okay, but melted
into tears again instead. Alyssa was quick to act. She walked across the room and retrieved the walking stick that I had borrowed the day before. She gave it to me and helped bear my weight so that I could hop back across the room to my bed. Julia seemed uncomfortable; it was clear that she wanted to get a start for the day but was unsure how to proceed. Alyssa suggested that Julia join her for breakfast and assured me that she would be back shortly.

Sure enough, Alyssa was back in the room within minutes with a tray of food. She told me that she had spoken to the innkeeper and been assured that I could take my time in the room. Wanting to give me space alone, she excused herself to return downstairs to her own breakfast. As she disappeared and I was left alone, I found the stillness of the room maddening. It was in such stark contrast to the commotion occurring internally that I felt it was somehow mocking me. I tried to register the terror, anger, and confusion that were each clamoring for control of my brain. As I tried to rein in my emotions, it began to dawn on me that for the first time in my life I felt completely and utterly helpless. Here I was, stuck in a very remote village somewhere in the middle of a foreign country. I was lying in a bed from which I was unable to move, located in an inn whose name I was unable to pronounce. I could not budge to find help, and even if I had been gifted with the mobility to seek help, I was stricken dumb by a language ineptitude which rendered me powerless to ask for help should I desire it.

As I took stock of my utter helplessness, the word “empty” came into my thoughts. It had been surfacing in my reflections throughout the last week as Alyssa and I had made observations about the increasingly barren landscape and our own barrenness in understanding the purpose of our journey. I recalled my earlier ponderings over the meaning of the word “empty” and was suddenly stricken by a profound awareness that I
was having an experience of emptiness. I found myself reflecting on what it must mean to pour one’s self out, to become empty. I considered all of the expectations that I had brought with me on this journey, despite my effort to leave them behind. This included an expectation that I would arrive in Santiago, and that I would have walked to the entire way.

As I continued to reflect on this idea of emptiness, I began to think of the things which God might be calling me to be emptied of. Immediately coming to mind were struggles with pride, fear, control, and expectation. It seemed that whether I liked it or not, I was in this moment being emptied of control. I had absolutely no power to change my present circumstances. As I saw it, I was simply faced with this reality and needed to choose whether I was going to accept my lack of control or resist it. I lifted up my struggles in prayer and felt myself awakened to a deep knowledge that no matter what happened, God would be with me. I felt a deep and comforting realization that even if my worst fears should come to pass—if I were stranded in this town, forced to stop my journey, and somehow unable to return home, even still God would be with me. I would not be abandoned. I felt a deep sense of peace wash over me and in this consolation I realized that I had nothing to fear. I felt myself surrendering my expectations for my journey. My attachment to the idea of completing the pilgrimage slackened and for the first time since my personal struggles began, I felt a sense of freedom. Prior to embarking on pilgrimage, I had felt an emptiness that was terrible and consuming . . . a weighty hollowness that seemed to be eating away at my soul. In this moment, the emptiness I felt was liberating. It was surrender. It was trust.

Moments later, Alyssa re-entered the room. She asked how I was doing and I told her that I was feeling much more relaxed and trusted that everything would work out. She
began to tell me about her time at breakfast. She told me that she ran into Benny and had shared a very deep conversation with him. She also told me that she had decided over breakfast to take a rest day and was planning to stay with me. I was in disbelief, knowing full well that she would be sacrificing her last rest day. I protested, and assured her that I felt confident that I would be just fine on my own. She insisted on staying, stating that there was no way she felt comfortable leaving me alone. She also claimed that her ankle was giving her a little trouble and that she thought it best to rest before it became problematic. I knew that she only added this last part to make me feel better. Knowing how much of a sacrifice Alyssa was making was humbling; yet I had to admit that I was completely relieved—elated—by this self-gift. I was profoundly grateful and found myself smiling internally at what I took to be God’s response to my trust.

What had begun as the worst day of my entire journey very quickly became the most blessed. After Alyssa made the decision to stay with me, we packed up and attempted to make a move to one of the hostels that had been full the day before. The inn at which we were staying was too expensive to stay another night and we were already breaching on the innkeeper’s hospitality with our late check out. I packed as much as I could from the confines of my bed and waited until the last possible moment attempt to stand up. I clutched Andreas’ walking stick with all of my might and placed the full weight of my body onto it, using it in place of my right foot. I felt incredibly guilty that I was still carrying the walking stick; it felt like I was holding on to someone’s personal journal. I had not run into Andreas the evening before, and although we had discussed the possibility of Julia taking it with her when she left that morning, we had decided that we could not be certain she would find Andreas again and I was in desperate need of something to help bear my weight.
I had chosen to keep it for the time being, hoping that it would eventually make it back to its proper owner.

Depending on the walking stick to stand, I watched as Alyssa strapped herself into her pack and then slung mine on backwards, over her stomach. She walked patiently by my side as I made extraordinarily slow progress leaving the inn and traveled the short distance up the street to the closest hostel. We must have been a sight moving so slowly up the street, but we eventually reached the base of the long staircase that led to the entrance of the target hostel. This was not the hostel we had tried to enter the previous afternoon; it was a second hostel that Benny had recommended to Alyssa earlier that morning. I looked at the long staircase ahead of me and my stomach dropped. Alyssa and I were both concerned that the hostel would not be open yet since it was the custom of most hostels to remain closed until noon in order to clean from the previous group of pilgrims. We arrived well before noon, but to our surprise we were greeted from the bottom of the stairs by a wiry and bearded man shouting from the top: “Bienvenida, peligrinas!” He signaled for us to wait and ran down the stairs to meet us. He took one look at me and announced that I needed to see a doctor. He told us to stay put, grabbed our packs and disappeared up the steps and into the hostel, and then met us at the bottom again moments later.

The kind man introduced himself as Paco and told us that he was Italian, but had been working as a volunteer and running the hostel for many months. He situated himself on my right side, put out his left arm, and told me to give him my weight. There was a small clinic just up the street, and he insisted on walking me there. I could not help but feel overwhelmed by his hospitality. As we were walking he remarked in broken English, “You know, even a donkey is not so stupid to carry such a heavy load for so many days in a row.
Even a donkey would know that it needed to rest.” I could not help but chuckle at the truth of his slightly insulting statement.

When we arrived at the clinic I began to panic, realizing that I had no idea how the health care system worked in Spain. I began to chastise myself for not having thought of this before I left the country. Would they accept insurance? Would I have to pay out of pocket? Would it be expensive? Paco went and spoke to a receptionist and then offered to stay with Alyssa and I to translate during my visit. Alyssa assured Paco that she was happy to accompany me in to see the doctor so that I would have a translator. Promising that he would see us soon, Paco left and headed back to the hostel. When the doctor was ready for us, I hobbled back to the examination room, and Alyssa explained my ailment. He expressed concern over the ankle twist that seemed to have set things off. He asked many questions and examined my foot closely. He seemed puzzled that the pain was concentrated along the heel. He gingerly moved my foot in several directions and when he finally moved it in a particular way I yelped in pain. He told Alyssa that the problem was tendonitis and that I needed to ice my foot, take ibuprofen, and most importantly, rest.

We thanked the doctor for his help, and to my shock I was never asked to pay so much as a Euro. I could not believe my luck. Alyssa helped me back to the hostel, and after the long and exhausting ascent up the stairs, she deposited me at a picnic table and told me that she would return shortly with some food. I was joined by Benny, who had also chosen to stay another day in Castrojeriz. He sat at the table and asked me about my journey. When I told him about the last twenty-four hours his eyes twinkled and he explained to me that this set of circumstances was an opportunity to engage in the journey. “All these other people,” he explained, “are just on a hike. Now you are entering the real journey. The inner
He told me about a saying he had come across at the hostel: *I don’t walk the Camino; the Camino walks me.* We talked about surrendering control and trusting in God. By the end of our conversation, Benny was reciting Mary Oliver poetry to me. He was one of the most wise, open, and humble persons I had ever met.

Alyssa returned soon after with ice for my foot and a bundle containing all of the foods that she had come to learn were my favorites: fresh bread, tomato, fresh cheese, olives, dark chocolate, and Coca-Cola. I was beginning to feel overwhelmed by the generosity of other people. As the afternoon wore on, a new set of pilgrims filtered in. Many of them congregated around a picnic table outside the entrance to the hostel, and together we shared food, drinks, stories, and music. Through this community of strangers, I became acutely aware of the diversity and goodness of other people. That afternoon I wrote in my journal:

God, you truly have taken such wonderful care of me. First Alyssa decided to stay for the day. She brought me breakfast, walked to the *albergue* to find information about getting medical attention, carried my backpack for me to San Estaban Albergue, translated at the doctor visit, brought me lunch. She is such a blessing. What would I have done without her? And then [there’s] the friendly *hospitalero*: he welcomed us like we were coming home, . . . assured me it was okay to rest for as long as I needed, . . . took my arm [and walked me] to the clinic, and offered to translate. [There’s] the store clerk who took such interest in my condition and rounded down on my bill; the Irishman’s sage advice, potato chips, and poetry; the guitar music as I write and rest; the other *hospitalero* who just brought me ice. . .

Truly I feel overwhelmed by the goodness of God in others. I couldn’t be ‘stuck’ in a better, more beautiful, caring place. Which also smells wonderful with its church incense. I definitely feel like this is perhaps part of the emptying process . . . maybe not so much the emptying/getting over of a breakup, but [an emptying of] my own inner-baggage: fear, insecurity, poor self-esteem, [high] expectations, and issues with trust and control. These are what I believe [You are] trying to empty me of. It is a process that I am still trying to understand and that seems to be reflected in the emptiness of the landscape of the *meseta*. I told Alyssa yesterday that I think in the beginning I was feeling all this pressure to find answers and to have revelations. Instead, I am starting to let go of that pressure. I am realizing that this journey might be more of a process of becoming empty—a death to self so that
I can be filled. ‘Unless a grain of wheat should fall to the ground and die, it remains but a single grain with no life.’ Without death, there is no life.

At the end of my journal entry, I found myself writing the lyrics to a song that I had been humming to myself occasionally over the last several days. Perhaps it was their inclusion of the word “empty” that called the lyrics to mind, or maybe it was the incense burning in the hostel that triggered a memory; regardless of their prompting I found myself writing the words, “I’m waiting, set apart/like incense to your heart/a libation I’m pouring out/ empty and beautiful.”17

The next morning, Alyssa departed with the rest of the pilgrims and I stayed behind. I had seen her off with a close hug. We had exchanged email addresses, and although we planned to stay in the same village that evening, we had no idea whether we would actually see each other again. Paco had been extraordinarily kind in allowing me to stay at the hostel a second day. Typical policy for hostels along the Camino was that pilgrims were only allowed to stay for one day so that beds would remain free for new pilgrims. Paco had approached me and assured me that I would be welcome to stay for as long as was necessary. When I told him that I was planning to try to stay on schedule and catch up to my route by bus, he looked dubious and tried to convince me to rest for a few more days in Castrojeriz. Although I had been reflecting on surrendering my need for control, I still felt it necessary to try my best to stay on schedule if I could at all help it since my return flight to the U.S. had a set location and date. In order to cover the distance necessary to stay on schedule, I was going to have to take a bus from Castrojeriz to the next village because I could not walk. This was an extreme blow to my pride. I had imagined that I would walk

every step to Santiago; to take a bus, even if it was for a short leg, seemed like cheating. All along I had been internally judging other pilgrims who spoke of taking buses to avoid particularly challenging or boring stretches of the Camino. Here I was, it seemed, poised to do exactly what I had despised.

I stayed at the hostel and attempted to pass the time until the evening when the bus was scheduled to arrive. I felt miserable. I wondered what the journey without Alyssa would be like. The previous day’s pilgrims were an eclectic group from all over the world whose most common language was English. This day’s set of pilgrims seemed to be almost entirely from French-speaking countries. Not one pilgrim spoke in English. I spent the majority of my day sitting on a bench with my foot propped up either writing or drawing. I interacted with no one. I felt extremely isolated, and although I still found myself in a place of trust, I was struggling to feel positive about what lay ahead. I wondered whether I would continue to feel this isolated as I moved forward on my own.

That afternoon shortly before I was to walk to the bus station, a middle aged Frenchwoman signaled for my attention and motioned me to sit down at the table in front of her. I pulled myself up from the chair I was occupying and shuffled toward the table feeling confused. She began to chatter in French, but when it was clear that I could not keep up with her, she began to use hand motions to communicate. She pointed to a now empty jar of lentils, and then to me. She pantomimed eating and continuously pointed at me. It seemed that she was inviting me to share her meal. I indicated that I didn’t have much time, but she was persistent. I felt humbled and nodded my head in consent. She showed me each of the ingredients that she had purchased from the market and motioned to ask if I liked them. After a few moments it became clear that she had not simply been
asking whether I wanted to share a little of her food, but that she had in fact planned to
cook a meal for me. She did not sit down to eat with me, but instead prepared my meal one
course at a time and served me. She dished out a bowl of the lentil soup and tore off a
generous portion of a baguette and placed them in front of me, ordering me to eat. She sat
across from me and began to slice a pear. I felt completely uncomfortable at the prospect
of being served and tried to protest. Noting my timidity, she firmly ordered me to *mange*. I
had taken enough French in high school to realize that she was telling me to eat, and I
obeyed. Any time I slowed down, she would command, “*mange!*” and I would obey her
order. As I finished the soup, she indicated that the pear was for me as well. She picked up
each slice and peeled off the delicate skin with her knife, then handed it to me with a gentle
“*mange.*” I was overwhelmed by her kindness and could feel a lump rising in my throat.
The only thing I could think to say was, “*Merci. Merci beaucoup.*”

As I finished the simple meal, she signaled to inquire whether I liked chocolate. I
nodded and she tore the remainder of the baguette into two pieces. She sliced both
portions lengthwise so that they could be opened to make sandwiches and began to line the
inside of the bread with pieces of chocolate. She gave me one chocolate sandwich to eat
and wrapped the second one in leftover plastic, indicating that it was for my journey. She
picked the best-looking apple from a bag that she had bought and handed it to me. I
indicated that it was nearing time for me to set off and she generously offered to help with
my pack, but I assured her I could manage. I thanked her again and again, and she gave me
a smile and curt nod.

I picked up my backpack, slung it over my shoulder, leaned my weight into Andreas’
walking stick, and picked up the chocolate sandwich and apple. I limped out to the patio of
the hostel and found Paco. He tried one last time to convince me to stay and rest, but when it became clear that I had made up my mind to leave he gave me directions to the bus stop and pointers for hailing the only bus that would be passing through that afternoon. I arrived at the unassuming bench that I presumed to be the bus stop and settled down to wait. After several minutes I began to worry that the unmarked bench on which I was sitting was perhaps not a bus stop after all. An elderly gentleman eventually joined me and I longed to be able to ask him whether I was in the correct location.

My nervousness over whether I would figure out the bus situation gave way to my sorrow at having to take the bus at all. I had been wrestling with my decision all day, but now that I was actually waiting for the bus I found myself struggling more than ever. After such intense and painful struggle, it seemed as though this decision was a form of giving up. I would no longer be able to say that I walked the entire way to Santiago, and silly though it seemed, this was a major blow to my pride. Over and over I fought to remind myself of my need to let go of my pride and expectations. This was not the journey I pictured, but I was sure that I was being called to surrender my need for control and perfection. I had been so focused on making this journey in a particular manner that I was losing sight of the opportunity to simply take things as they came and live the journey. I thought of Benny’s words: *I don’t walk the Camino. The Camino walks me.* Here I was, trying to control every aspect of my journey where I perhaps I should have realized my lack of control and allowed myself to be open to whatever the journey had in store.

After an eternity, a large bus-like vehicle pulled up and stopped. When the driver opened the door, I said the name of the village I was heading toward and he nodded his head. Relieved that I seemed to be in the right place, I climbed in and found a seat across
from the elderly gentleman who had been waiting with me. I sat down, looked out the window at the objects that were now speeding by, and began to cry. For weeks they had only ever crawled past me as I walked. The distance that would have likely taken me eight to twelve hours to walk was now hurtling past me. After only about twenty minutes, the bus arrived in the village.

I stepped off the bus alongside the elderly gentleman and a few other pilgrims who had already been aboard when I got on the bus. We stood for a moment and tried to orient ourselves. I had noted the names of several hostels in my guidebook while I was on the bus, but I was concerned about finding one with available space since I was arriving so late in the evening. We seemed to have been dropped off in a central plaza, and wishing to avoid appearing lost, I rather arbitrarily chose one of the roads radiating off the plaza and began to walk down it. Just a few hundred feet up the road I stumbled upon a hostel and decided to go in and inquire about space. As I walked into the courtyard, I ran directly into Alyssa and several of the young pilgrims we had met the night before. She looked at me, smiled, and said, “I guess we’re meant to continue our journey together.”

The following day, I continued my journey slowly and gently on foot. Over the next days and weeks I tried my best to find a balance between resting and pushing through the pain. I found with tendonitis that although the injured area might be in great pain, the pain lessened if I pushed myself through it and allowed the tendons to warm up. Of course, this was risking further injury since the pain was somewhat masked while the tendon was in use, leading to false confidence that things were improving. If one was not careful, this could further damage the already strained tendon and the pain would re-enter with full, sometimes increased force once it was given an opportunity to rest.
After Castrojeriz, the landscape continued to flatten out and my pace continued to slow down. Each morning became a challenge in which I would have to overcome such extreme pain and stiffness that I was having to reteach myself to walk. I had to coach myself through each step: *Okay, Mary Kate, pick up your foot. Shift your weight onto it as your heel touches the ground. Roll through the step from your heel to your toe. Now pick up your other foot.* There were several mornings when this process was so slow and painful that I felt positive that I looked like I was playing a game of “Mother May I” and had been ordered to take only baby steps. Usually things would warm up and I could eventually pick up my pace a little, but it took a long time.

I tried my best to be patient with myself and embrace humility as I learned to cope with the limits of my body. This emptying process coincided beautifully with the increasingly empty landscape. Shortly after Castrojeriz, our journey brought us to stretch of road dating to Roman antiquity. It is, in fact, the longest extant stretch of Roman road known to exist. Because this pathway was considered an alternative route, we saw only two other pilgrims over the course of our entire day of walking. The land was flat as far as the eye could see, and our guidebooks warned us to pack plenty of food and water, as there would be no towns, villages, or access to water for the next eighteen kilometers. There were no trees for shade; only vast open fields of already-harvested earth. The brilliant blue sky hung in contrast with the palette of browns that surrounded us. I described the experience later in my journal:

> Once again, my feet and shin were painfully cramping as I began, slowing me to a snail’s pace. I felt like I had to reteach myself how to walk. Eventually I got myself into a good pace, albeit slow. Alyssa was far ahead and we were very much alone on the trail . . . Though my feet definitely suffered throughout the day, they were not as bad as they generally have been, and I actually began to enjoy the solitude of the walk. I felt I was able to find good quality prayer time, and at some
points I was so far behind Alyssa that I felt comfortable singing out loud, which was so freeing! . . . I began to notice such little things, such as the color of the rocks or sparkling of leaves. I even experienced a . . . transcendent moment . . . where I actually felt happy. I simply had this moment of complete contentment with exactly where I was, when I was, who I was. A feeling that God loves me and is so good.

My slow pace provided me with the opportunity to admire the ancient rocks over which I was walking. I imagined the same stones being traversed by ancient Romans. I began to reflect on the countless feet that had tread that very same path over the centuries and the countless more that would walk it in the future. I was one of millions of pilgrims destined for Santiago. I was suddenly struck by the knowledge that I was part of a universal community—a community of pilgrims that spanned space and time. I became aware of my littleness in the face of such vastness; and yet I felt a sense of connection to these brothers and sisters of the past, present, and future. I had begun my pilgrimage with an extreme sense of independence and individuality. I had felt that God was calling me outside of my comfort zone and that I had to make this journey on my own. Yet, it was beginning to dawn on me that this journey was not simply about proving something or overcoming hardship by myself; I had learned quickly that the journey was impossible to experience without the presence of other people. Indeed, without the assistance of other people, I would have been forced to give up the pilgrimage long ago. I was learning that no matter how much I thought I needed to be alone, I had never been alone. I had always found myself accompanied by another, whether that person was Alyssa, Benny, or a hospitable stranger. Even the stones beneath my feet were telling me that I was not alone. I was an individual, yes, but I was also intimately connected to a larger community.

Although my day had been strangely euphoric despite its challenges, my mood darkened quickly when we arrived at our destination for the day and I realized that there
was no evening Mass. It was Sunday, and Alyssa and I had been assured by the hospitalero in the village we set out from earlier that morning that we were headed to a large town where there were sure to be evening services. We might have made more firm plans for that day, but we had not come to our destination the evening before until quite late, arriving completely exhausted after our longest day of walking on the Camino yet. In fact, that previous afternoon of walking had been one of our most grueling, and out of desperation we resorted to singing Christmas carols and telling stories one word at a time to distract ourselves from the task at hand. After almost twelve hours of walking, we did not think we could walk one more step and had collapsed in bed.

When we set out that following morning, Alyssa asked on my behalf about the possibility of attending Mass and we were informed that the only service in the village was at eleven-thirty. Alyssa felt we could not wait until the early afternoon to set out for the day. I could not expect Alyssa to understand how important attending the liturgy was to me, nor could I expect her to put her day on hold for my request, and so I agreed with her. The hospitalero told us that she thought there might be a Mass at a nearby village, but it would require walking about six kilometers out of our way, and she was unsure of what time the service was. It seemed that our most viable option would be to wait until we arrived in the larger town later that evening.

Although I had made my best judgment based on the information I had been given and had had every intention of going to Mass, I still could not help but feel horribly disappointed when I discovered that there was no evening service. I had been steeped in the notion that to participating in Mass every Sunday was a moral obligation; although my rational senses told me that my situation was unintentional, I nevertheless felt awful.
Stronger than the sense of guilt I felt was simple disappointment over not being able to receive the Eucharist. During my long and reflective walk that day, I had found myself looking forward to being able to attend Mass and unite the work of my day to the Mass. In the first week of the Camino, I had been walking through lush vineyards; now, as the last few days had revealed increasingly vast fields of already-harvested grain, I could not help but think of these images during the liturgy as the priest offered the bread and wine as “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” I thought of the emptiness left by the harvested “fruits of the earth” and the emptiness that I was endeavoring to co-create in my soul and longed to place it alongside the sacrifice of the Mass as the offering of my so very human hands.

The following day, as Alyssa and I planned to set out for the city of Leon, I was in low spirits and once again found myself in a place of struggle with my foot. I had been walking a fine line between pushing myself through the pain and endeavoring to go easy in order to avoid further damage. Things were especially stiff and painful that morning as Alyssa and I wandered through the village in search of some place to eat. We wandered into a bar and found ourselves eating breakfast next to a beautiful woman named Chiara. We had met briefly during a lunch break the week before. Alyssa and I had decided to take shelter from the heat under a tree and Chiara had meandered along and asked to join us. She was Roman but had spent the last four years working in the London-Heathrow airport, and as a result, her accent was a gorgeous blend of Italian and English.

This particular morning as we sat together eating our toast and coffee, Chiara inquired about my foot and talked about her own struggle with injury. She began to encourage me to consider taking a bus into Leon, since that day’s walking was notorious for
being stressful and ugly. Apparently the entirety of that day’s route was alongside a highway and at some point required crossing the highway. We would be walking on hard pavement all day instead of softer surfaces like dirt or gravel. Alyssa and I had heard about the unpleasant journey into Leon from several pilgrims and when we had been consulting our guidebooks the night before, Alyssa had made a suggestion about taking the bus. As I sat at the counter listening to Chiara and Alyssa try to reason with me, I felt a deep resistance to their suggestion; once again, my pride and determination were outweighing reason. Yet, as I felt the rebellious creature that was my pride welling up inside, it dawned on me that this alone was reason enough to be open to Alyssa and Chiara. I had learned a valuable lesson in Castrojeriz, but clearly I was still wrestling with pride and expectation. If I had been looking to follow the most difficult path, perhaps it was time to realize that mustering the humility to take a bus again was in fact more difficult than sucking up the pain through my walk into Leon.

Before Chiara left, she told me that she wished to give me something that she had been given along the Camino. She pulled out a small miraculous medal that was tied to a piece of string. She explained that she had been given the medal by another pilgrim along the way, but since she was not religious and was sure I could use it more than herself, she wished to give it to me. I thanked her for her generosity and immediately tied the medal to the Camino shell that was hanging on my backpack. Alyssa and Chiara set out and once again I was left alone, knowing that there was a distinct possibility that I may never run into either again. I managed to locate a bus schedule and slowly made my way toward the bus stop. This time there were a number of pilgrims taking the bus into the city. We flew past
those walking alongside the highway and I felt the now-familiar tug of guilt and doubt about my decision to take the bus.

We arrived in Leon a short time later. The bus terminal was at the edge of the city, and unsure of exactly where I was, I began to walk in what I took to be the direction of the city center. We had made several stops on our way to Leon, picking up many locals appearing to be on their way to work in the city. As I walked away from the bus, I was quickly surpassed by the brisk-walking professionals. I gradually made my way closer to the city center and it became clear that I was in the midst of a business district. As I looked at the men and women surrounding me and passing me on the opposite side of the street, I began to feel incredibly self-conscious. Each one was dressed in suits, ties, dresses, and skirts; and here was I in my dirty clothes and clunky boots carrying my backpack and walking stick. Although it seems humorous to recall now, I vividly remember walking slowly and stiffly down the street and being taken aback at all of the beautiful Spanish women walking past me in their pumps. I wondered how on earth they could be walking so quickly and in such impractical shoes. Imagining what it would feel like to be wearing those shoes in my current condition was enough to cause me to tear up. I felt sure that I would never be able to wear heels again.

After some time, I stumbled into a square and stood looking at the façade of a large cathedral. I decided to enter the cathedral right away, despite my strange apparel. The cathedral in Burgos had been breathtaking; but as I entered this structure, there was something about the way the light filtered through the windows which made me immediately aware of the innate spirituality of the space. I felt as though I had stepped into a different realm. I walked around the perimeter of the building, taking in each side chapel
and stained glass window. When I reached the nave and looked backward toward the entrance, I drew a sharp breath as my eyes caught sight of the rose window. I stood transfixed for minutes, and each time I tried to move on to look at some other aspect of the impressive building, I felt my eyes drawn back toward the rose window.

After a time, I wandered back out of the cathedral and consulted my guidebook. Using the cathedral to orient myself, I mapped out a route to the nearest hostel. There were several hostel options, but I chose a large one that was attached to a convent. It seemed to have plenty of beds and, according to the guidebook, pilgrims were welcomed to join the sisters of the convent for prayer each night. I arrived at the hostel a short time later and waited outside for it to be opened. As I was being registered, I asked one of the *hospitaleros* for information about the cathedral, particularly about the availability of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Between missing Mass the evening before and taking the bus earlier that morning, I was feeling very unsettled and thought that somehow talking to a priest—even if we could not understand each other—would make me feel better. Looking back, perhaps I lacked the spiritual maturity and theological groundedness to understand that I was perhaps being too hard on myself.

Nevertheless, I asked the *hospitalero* about Confession and he assured me that the sacrament was available daily at the cathedral. I was not looking forward to the prospect of walking all the way back to the building, but I was relieved that I now knew where it was located. I asked the man to teach me how to ask for the sacrament in Spanish and he willingly obliged, repeating the phrase several times until I seemed to have it memorized. As I turned around to head back out the entrance that I had come in, I ran directly into Alyssa who was just arriving. Shocked to see how quickly she had arrived, it dawned on me
how much I must have been slowing her down. I felt unsure of whether she was happy or 
disappointed to see me, and when our eyes met, I nodded and gave a timid smile in 
acknowledgement and then set off for the cathedral.

Despite my effort to rest that day, I would in fact wind up walking around the city of 
Leon so much that I more than made up the distance I had saved by taking the bus. During 
my second of four trips between the hostel and the cathedral, I entered on a mission to go 
to Confession. Signs posted in the entryway indicated that the sacrament was offered each 
day before the celebration of daily Mass. I had arrived at just the right time and had 
approximately twenty minutes until the start of Mass. I proceeded to an information desk 
and did my very best to ascertain the location of Confession. The woman at the counter 
barely looked up from counting the money in her hands and informed me that she only 
provided tourist information and could not help me. Discouraged by her abrasiveness, I 
approached another counter and posed the same question. When it became clear that the 
woman did not understand English, I tried the Spanish phrase that the hospitalero had 
taught me. It was to no avail. I tried several different times, but the woman only looked 
confused. I apologized and thanked her and then decided to explore the church on my own.

I came upon a side chapel that had confessionals lining the wall, but no one 
appeared to be in them. Feeling self-conscious around those quietly praying before Mass, I 
walked around the confessionals as inconspicuously as possible and could not discover any 
place where Confession was being offered. I stayed and sat through the entirety of Mass. 
Afterwards, I approached the priest and tried once again to use the Spanish phrase to 
communicate my desire for confession. The kind old priest looked confused and I tried to 
pronounce the word several more times, but no matter how I tried to pronounce it, I was
not understood. He was clearly on his way to something else and began to chatter on in a manner that seemed both kind and stern. He was speaking too quickly for me to keep up, but judging by his tone and the very few words I was able to pick out, I could not help but feel I was perhaps hearing a lecture on language ignorance.

I left the cathedral a few moments later feeling humiliated and completely defeated. When I arrived back at the hostel, I settled my belongings into my bunk and reconnected with Alyssa in the courtyard. She had not explored the city yet and was keen to see the cathedral. She also needed a few items and wanted to find food while she was out. She invited me to come along, and although I had already seen the cathedral twice, I had not had anything to eat since breakfast and decided to accompany her. Eventually I told Alyssa about my morning, and she listened intently. I felt comforted by her presence. Earlier that day I had questioned whether she might be disappointed to see me; but the ease of our conversation that afternoon and her inclusiveness made me feel comfortable in her presence once again.

The following morning when Alyssa and I set out from Leon, I felt more comfortable in her presence than ever. The journey out of the city was particularly unpleasant as we covered many kilometers on pavement and found ourselves surrounded by much less charming structures on the outskirts of the city. We had stopped at a bakery and market that morning to buy food for lunch, but had an extremely difficult time finding a spot to eat it when the time came. Eventually we discovered a patch of rough, garbage strewn grass along the side of the road and sat atop our backpacks once we discovered a relatively garbage-free zone. We chatted and laughed at the absurdity of our situation.
Over the next several days my journey was marked by highs and lows. Alyssa and I both continued to battle with the mental, emotional, and spiritual difficulties of the journey. Alyssa was struggling with back pain and anxiety over reoccurring issues with bed bugs. I was still grappling with my injured feet and, although I had clearly sensed a call to be emptied of expectation and pride, this was something I was still wrestling to overcome as well. My pace had been growing steadily slower, and I had come to peace with my lack of control over the situation. Nevertheless, I still found myself struggling with the implications of my slower pace. I knew that I had to arrive in Santiago by a particular date in order to catch a plane. I was continuing to feel a tremendous amount of pressure to cover a certain distance each day in order to remain on pace. I had reconciled myself to taking a bus twice in order to stay on track and felt I had proven to myself that I was willing to swallow my pride. My resistance to taking buses no longer felt like an issue of pride; indeed, I had already accepted that my journey was imperfect, and my desire to walk no longer had anything to do with perfection. I found walking to be fruitful and I longed to engage in the process of walking even if it brought difficulty. Continuing to take buses for stretches of the journey simply because I was restricted to a timetable felt as if I was robbing myself of valuable experience.

I felt a great amount of tension resulting from the rivalry between my body and my schedule. This was only heightened by the fact that I seemed to be meeting more and more pilgrims who were on no kind of schedule at all; if they wished to stay in a particular place for multiple days then they simply did, and if they wished to only walk ten or twelve kilometers and stop then they could. Although the competitive spirit remained a challenge of the Camino, I was beginning to discover that some pilgrims were being very intentional
about resisting the competitive pressure. They took something of a nomadic approach to
the journey that appeared to bring a great deal of freedom and flexibility to do whatever
they were feeling called to do in the moment. I found myself feeling extremely envious of
this freedom.

My discontent over the pressure I felt and my desire for the freedom to slow down
seemed only to grow each day. It was epitomized in a discovery Alyssa and I made one
afternoon several days after our departure from Leon. I had experienced a particularly
rough day of walking; it had been one of those “Mother May I” mornings when I had had to
think myself through tiny baby steps until my feet warmed up. Alyssa was so far ahead of
me that she was no longer in sight. I became especially conscious of how outlandish I
looked when I began to be passed by other of pilgrims. They came in clumps and would
pass in front of me and then out of my sight in no time at all. On several instances I was
stopped and asked if I needed help. I would explain that I was fine, just slow. Fortunately
the word “tendonitis” sounds very similar in multiple languages, so I was easily understood.
Most passers-by would make a sympathetic grimace and then move on. One pilgrim,
however, felt the need to mock me as he was walking by. He chided me for moving so
slowly and asked me in an amazed tone what time I had set out that morning. He threw me
a very judgmental and quizzical look as he wondered aloud how I would ever make it. He
moved on at a very brisk pace, and as I watched him disappear from sight, I became aware
of just how slowly I was moving.

Unexpectedly, however, I felt myself overcome by a deep sense of gratitude. My
pace was beyond my control and although I looked foolish, my slowing down was allowing
me to take in everything as I walked. I took stock of the weeds and wildflowers growing
along the side of the path; the colors of the pebbles and stones as they passed under my feet; the shapes of the shadows of the bushes and trees; the hum of the insects basking in the same hot sun as me. I felt profoundly grateful for each of these things, and for each step I was able to take. Although they were small, they were significant because they were still getting me closer to Santiago. I had been greatly struggling with the temptation to compare myself to other people, but in this moment I found myself feeling grateful that my journey was deepening, even if it was slowing down.

Eventually I stumbled upon a small village, where I found Alyssa waiting for me on a bench next to a stone bridge. I reloaded on ibuprofen (another choice for which I found myself being judged by other pilgrims), readjusted the bandaging on my feet, and continued alongside Alyssa that afternoon. We talked once again about the tensions we were feeling, from stress caused by time and tightly-packed schedules to pressure imposed by other pilgrims. I told her about the man that had passed me earlier that morning and chided me for my pace.

We were growing very weary in the afternoon heat, but to our great joy we stumbled upon something of a haven at the top of a large hill. It appeared to be nothing more than a rundown shack, but there was a small crowd of pilgrims relaxing around it. Apparently it served as a very primitive hostel that was open to all pilgrims free of charge; it was a cooperative in which one was welcome to come and go as one pleased in exchange for help with tasks as needed. In front of the brick and plywood structure was a small snack stand containing offerings of fresh fruit and fruit juices grown by the owner. The shack was painted bright colors and decorated in messages written in a variety of languages, presumably by pilgrims who had stayed there. We were clearly not the first pilgrims to take
refuge from the heat that afternoon; a small handful were sitting in shade along the façade of the shack with their boots and socks off, enjoying glasses of the fresh fruit juices. To my delight, I spotted Julia among them. The shack was a point of reunion with several pilgrims that we had met previously and not seen in days or weeks. We sat in the shade allowing our feet to breathe and bodies to cool, drinking in the joy of friendship and leisure with our juice. Nailed to a tree alongside us was a sign that read: “SANTIAGO STAYS STILL. SLOW DOWN.” The message could not have been clearer.

When we arrived in our destination village later that afternoon, I once again came across the critical man. He saw me enter the hostel and stood frozen for a moment before asking incredulously, “You’re just now arriving? What did you do, take a nap?” I chuckled and assured him that had not been the case. I had taken my time that day, first because my body had dictated that I needed to . . . but as the sign had reminded me, my spirit desired it as well. I was determined not to be apologetic to the man about my choices. For the life of me, I could not understand why he felt so concerned about the way I was conducting myself. And although I did not wish to judge, it seemed to me that he was missing something about the purpose of the journey. I felt deeply grateful for my experience, even if it perhaps brought more struggle than this man’s journey was bringing him. As irritating as his judgmental statements were, they were a further reminder that I needed to let go of my pride and expectations and walk at my own pace.

Although Alyssa, Julia, and I had reunited briefly, we once again separated the following morning when Julia decided she wanted to walk far that day. Alyssa and I agreed that we would rather take an alternative scenic route and not be quite as ambitious about the kilometers we planned to walk. We wound up in a small village named Rabanal where
we met several interesting new pilgrims and decided to splurge and treat ourselves to a massage. Alyssa’s back was bothering her so much that she was concerned about continuing the following day without addressing the issue. Although I had not initially planned on getting a massage because I could not bring myself to allow anyone near my unpleasant and painful feet, the prospect of any sort of relief, even if only momentary, was enough to overcome my hesitation. Instead of massaging inflamed tendons as I had been hoping, however, the hour passed rather strangely. The masseuse continuously shook his head and muttered in Spanish (I was later informed by Alyssa that he was making remarks about how damaged my feet were) and in the end wound up taping up my feet in a very complex manner and giving me acupuncture. Although I will never know how effective the treatment truly was, it seemed to at least prevent the pain from worsening over the remainder of my journey. I had watched the taping technique closely and would endeavor to recreate it whenever the old tape began to loosen and fall off.

Alyssa and I both felt some physical improvement as we set out the next morning. It was day twenty-six of walking and we were to arrive at the highest elevation of the Camino, a site marked by a monument known as Cruz de Ferro. The monument consisted of a tall pole mounted by a cross, at the base of which was a mound of stones. I had not realized it until reading my guidebook the evening before, but traditionally pilgrims brought a rock from their homeland that they carried with them throughout the journey and then left at the base of the cross as a symbol of a burden being left behind. I had not brought a rock from my home country, so I would have to make do. As Alyssa and I began our ascent up the mountain, I chose three rocks from along the pathway in the dawn light. Although their journey with me would be short, I gave each one a great amount of thought as they
weighed in my pockets during my climb up the hill. One rock represented pride, another
envy, and the third symbolized control.

Several hours and rest breaks later, we finally made it to the summit. As we
approached the staggering mound of rocks at the base of the cross, the atmosphere
transformed. There was a solemnity about the site as pilgrims quietly climbed the mound
and stood in silence to observe the offerings that had been left or to leave their own. I
ascended the mound myself and stood for several minutes looking at messages left on the
rocks and attached to the pole before me. There was something remarkably intimate about
this space, despite its public locality. Here individuals were collectively leaving mementos of
what they had been carrying in the backpacks of their souls. Here were symbols of pain,
loss, regret, fear, attachment, and anger (to name a few). Standing on such tangible
evidence of burdens acknowledged and released and of the vulnerability and courage
involved in this process was humbling and empowering. I pulled the three stones from my
pocket and reflected on the three struggles that they represented. I said a silent prayer
before tossing each one onto the pile, asking God to help me release myself from my pride
and envy and need for control. Just before climbing up the mound, a leather bracelet that I
had been wearing and was very much attached to had broken and slipped off my wrist.
Although I’m sure it could have been repaired, I could not help but think the break was
perhaps providential. The bracelet had read, “Be Not Afraid” and I felt I was being called to
leave my fear behind as well. I laid the inexpensive yet precious object underneath a stone
and turned to climb down the mound.

Alyssa and I decided to eat our lunch at *Cruz de Ferro*. I think we both were so
drawn to the site that we felt reluctant to leave. As we pulled out the lunches we had
packed earlier that day, a woman and man arrived on the summit by donkey. Moments later, the woman sat down and pulled out an ancient-looking instrument. What had previously been silence pierced only by the sound of whipping wind and occasional hushed conversations was now overtaken by a melodic hum that sounded primal and otherworldly. It lent a sacred quality to what already felt like sacred ground. As Alyssa and I finished our lunch, more pilgrims began to arrive at the site and it seemed a good opportunity to tear ourselves away from that which had become transfixing to us. Logic said we had to move on.

We continued a short way down the path, saying little. I began to feel extraordinarily tense. I had just made the resolution to let go of my envy, and yet here I was, yet again wishing I could slow down. After perhaps walking only about fifteen minutes, the trees on our left side cleared and opened to a breathtaking view of the surrounding mountains. The clouds had cleared out and the sun was shining on the blue-ridged mountains, the spines of which were marked out by windmills like a game of connect-the-dots. Alyssa and I simultaneously stopped in our tracks to stare at the scene before us. After a few moments, Alyssa declared that she was going to spend some time in this spot and did not mind if I wanted to move on without her. I did not want to impose on her time to herself, but I too found myself longing to spend some time taking in the beauty before me. We both climbed a little ways off the path and then separated ourselves by some distance and made ourselves comfortable on the rocky ground. Alyssa pulled out a small watercolor set that she had brought with her and began to paint. I pulled out my journal, and began to pour out the emotions I was feeling in prayer:

9/30: Top of Irago: Highest Point of the Camino
How beautiful are your works, O God. The beauty of your creation takes my breath away. How good you are, O Lord. You know me, you know better than I know myself. You know my darkness, my weaknesses, my shadow. I have been struggling on this journey with a lot of things, but I don’t think I realized until this Camino just how stubborn and proud I truly am . . .

I have [also] come to realize just how much I compare myself to others and concern myself with what they think. I am more consumed and eaten with envy than I would ever care to admit. I compare myself to others so often and become envious of what they have instead of looking at myself and learning to be satisfied, happy, or joyful for the blessings I have. On this Camino I’ve struggled greatly with envy and jealousy as I compare myself to other pilgrims. I feel envy for their ability to socialize or be outgoing when I lack this skill; envy for their ability to communicate where I cannot; envy for their freedom and lack of fear in journeying when I feel trapped by my schedule and am afraid to be alone. I look at others who have no apparent serious physical limitations, who don’t seem to be limited by pain . . . who are going all the way to Finisterre . . . who seem to have all the time in the world and can go at whatever pace their body or spirit tells them to . . . who don’t have a deadline to Santiago and can stop or slow down . . . who can rest for as long as they need and not need to catch up by bus . . . even those who seem to have a better, more joyful attitude than me . . . Why do I compare, Lord? Why am I so envious instead of grateful?

Lord, I give you my pride, my envy, my need for control. I do not know what will take place over the next ten days, but I don’t need to know. If I don’t make it the full twenty-six kilometers today, I will be okay. If I have to go slower and catch up by bus, then I trust that it is Your will, and who am I to distrust Your will? You know much better than I . . .

I give you this Camino, Lord . . . I accept that I have limitations. I have physical limitations. I have limited time and means. I do have a schedule—and knowing that it was self-created and did not have to be so is difficult to accept, but I do. That’s my Camino. I have limits. I have limits. I am human, and I have limits. . . . Or maybe you are calling me to cancel Rome? To let go of it, to trust that I will get there somehow, someday? Maybe it is worth letting go of that expectation so that I can be more present and less rushed on the Camino? . . . I am grateful for the gift of this day, this beauty before my eyes, this journey, this opportunity. Whatever you give me, Lord, I accept. I ask only for the grace to discern your will. If it is your will to cancel Rome, help me to hear your voice and to let go. If it is your will for me to accept the limitation of time I have placed before myself and to be grateful for even that opportunity, then let me hear your voice and let go of wishing for more . . . wishing to not have to fall back on the bus if I can’t keep up, wishing I didn’t have to try to balance pushing myself and my body with giving into rest and slowness. Lord, help me to let go of something . . .

I paused from my writing and looked out over the mountains once again. I had come to terms with the fact that I had to listen to my body and take this journey one day at
a time, even if it meant continuing to take a bus for parts of my journey. Yet, I still felt uncomfortable. My gut was telling me that I was limiting myself. I found myself attempting to rationalize my circumstances to myself: I had already set up so many arrangements concerning my time in Rome and my return flight to the U.S. that it would be incredibly expensive to rearrange everything. I had already booked a hotel in Rome, booked tickets to a papal audience, and managed to be among the lucky chosen by lottery to receive a tour of the necropolis underneath the Vatican. How could I give this up? But it dawned on me that no one ever said I had to go to Rome. It had been something I had added onto the end of the trip when I was booking it because it seemed like a good idea to see as much as I could while I was in Europe. Perhaps, though, it was meant to be a separate trip. I had come to do the Camino, and that clearly needed to be my focus. I felt I would be robbing myself of this experience if I was constantly feeling rushed. I was concerned that I might not be getting as much out of the pilgrimage because of the self-imposed deadline that was causing me to cram too many events into too little time. On this day of letting go, perhaps what I most needed to let go of was my agenda.

Moments later, Alyssa asked if I had reached a good stopping point. I closed my journal, looked up at her, and announced that I was thinking of cancelling my trip to Rome. She confirmed that in her experience, she tended to have better experiences when she spent more time in a fewer number of places than when she had crammed a lot of places and activities into a short amount of time. We talked about flight options, and by the end of our conversation, I had decided that I would let go of Rome. I was certain that I would no longer be spending multiple days in the city seeing museums, churches, the necropolis, or the Pope. I would absorb those days into my Camino journey and, depending on how the
next several days shook out, I would either move my Santiago to Rome flight out by a few
days so that Rome would simply be a layover on my way home to the U.S.; or, if I felt I
needed more time, I would cancel my previous flight completely and move out my entire
trip home. Regardless, I would simply have to trust that I would get to see Rome someday.
That would have to be its own pilgrimage.

Surrendering my agenda brought an immediate sense of relief. A burden had been
lifted, and I was overcome by a sense of peace and joy. My joy seemed to be reflected in
the beautiful landscape: the awe-inspiring hills, the bright warm sun, and even the cows
that roamed freely along the hills. I felt as though I had a share in their freedom. No more
rushing. No more pressure. I was free to take my time and let myself be guided by the
journey instead of trying to control it. My joy was almost too much to take in, and I smiled
to myself as I realized that the physical high point of the Camino had brought such a
spiritual high point.

As we walked on, Alyssa mused aloud about her plans for the remainder of her
travels. Unlike me, she had been travelling for almost a month prior to starting the Camino;
the pilgrimage was to be only one piece of her travels abroad. She had recently concluded
her graduate studies in landscape architecture and was studying public spaces, particularly
the movement of people through space. She had been in Scotland and France before
commencing her Camino journey, and she still planned to travel to Portugal, Turkey, and
Greece after she arrived in Santiago. My decision to change my plans for Rome initiated a
conversation about slowing down and letting go of some of her later travel plans.

The slowing down process took effect almost immediately. That afternoon we took
our time walking so as to drink in the breathtaking scenery. I shared how much I had
enjoyed being able to stop to journal when the inspiration had struck earlier and voiced my desire to embrace similar opportunities in the future. After a time, the descent from the peak became extremely steep and difficult. Embracing our newfound spirit of living in the moment, we decided to stop in a small village nestled in the mountainside called Acebo.

We had walked a mere sixteen kilometers that day and had originally intended to stop at Acebo for our afternoon break and then continue on. However, we arrived in the village much later in the afternoon than originally planned and decided to break for the day instead of pushing on through a very difficult walk.

The days ahead would be marked by a similar pace. Alyssa and I would make a goal for our destination each day, and then evaluate how we were feeling as we went and readjust accordingly. I continued to reflect on the idea of emptiness and endeavored to be mindful of surrendering my pride, envy, and control each day. The book of intentions that I had been carrying proved to be extremely helpful in this regard, as it gave me something for which to offer my struggles. As “emptiness” continued to emerge as a salient word in my journey, I also found myself reflecting on the idea of my shadow. Each day had brought new places, joys, and challenges; but whether walking alone or with others I was always accompanied by my shadow. Furthermore, since I was always walking in the same direction, my shadow moved very consistently each day. I was north of the equator traveling westward, and so the sun always rose behind me, moved overhead on my left side over the course of the day, and set in front of me. As a result, I began my walk each day with my shadow in front of me. It would gradually shorten and move toward my right side, and then lengthen and move behind me. As Alyssa and I slowed our pace, we found ourselves arriving to each destination village later and later, sometimes reaching them as
late as nightfall. This provided an even greater opportunity to observe the movement of my shadow throughout each day, especially its lengthening at the end of the day.

As I continued to reflect on the spiritual significance of emptiness, I found myself thinking about the movement of my shadow as somehow indicative of my daily vocation. I have always felt drawn to Franciscan spirituality and found myself contemplating the story of St. Francis embracing his shadow. According to legends of the saint, Francis felt completely repulsed by leprosy, but one day as he was riding he experienced a mystical encounter with a leper and found the courage to embrace and kiss that which he once abhorred. Many speculate that Francis saw something of himself in the leper which caused feelings of repulsion. In explaining the encounter his followers wrote, “Among the lepers Francis begins to conquer himself, and to find sweetness in what formerly had been distasteful to him.” As I set out each day with my shadow in front of me, I began to realize that perhaps my call was to embrace and love the flaws and weaknesses I saw in myself which repulsed me. Perhaps in embracing these parts which made up my shadow, I could come to love and accept myself as God does: as a broken and yet beautiful creation. Perhaps I could begin to rediscover myself as an unconditionally loved daughter of God. As I saw my flaws laid before me each morning, perhaps I was being called to acknowledge their presence, embrace them as integral to my humanity, and surrender them into the hands of God. Like my shadow, it was a movement of seeing darkness before me, encountering it, and moving through it.

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WEEKS FIVE AND SIX: BEING FILLED

The journey from Cruz de Ferro to Santiago began to take on a very different character than the previous stages of my journey. The first two weeks of my journey had been filled with angst as my body struggled to adjust to a demanding routine and my mind and spirit wrestled with exhaustion and impatience over answers that were not coming. As the landscape had flattened out, my journey became one of emptying and letting go; I had learned through difficult and painful experience that I needed to loosen my iron-tight grip on control and expectation and allow the folds of my journey to relax into being. As I learned to surrender, the words of Isaiah echoed in my soul: “Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low; The rugged land shall be a plain, the rough country a broad valley.”¹⁹ As I worked toward relinquishing control and fear, the bumps and hills in my soul began to relax into a broad valley of hope and trust.

If the first two thirds of my journey were characterized by tension and then letting go, perhaps the final two weeks of my journey can be described as fruitful. Becoming empty created space to begin being filled. The empty flatlands of the meseta of the Camino began to ripple into rolling hills and mountains as we approached Santiago. Although my feet remained a serious struggle for the remainder of my journey, having the freedom to go at my own pace made the terrain much more manageable. September slipped into October and the landscape grew rich with the colors of the season. The abundance of the harvest grew in my soul and I felt myself increasingly thankful for every experience I was having. Each day seemed to bring an unforeseen joy, whether it was the generosity of strangers, the

beauty of the landscape, fruitful conversation with fellow pilgrims, or even something as simple as sharing bread and cheese in the shade alongside a stream.

One morning as Alyssa and I approached a village we stumbled across a very modest, old home. There was a sign on the entrance to a small courtyard advertising home-grown raspberries. We looked at each other rather sheepishly, knowing without speaking exactly what the other person was thinking. We often got hungry around this time of morning, and raspberries would have been a delicacy compared to our usual snack. Alyssa timidly peeked around the corner into the courtyard, located the owner of the home, paid the advertised amount, and returned with a small box of raspberries. We took off our packs and sat on a stone wall opposite the house, swinging our legs and eating raspberries with the joy of two small children. We were interrupted moments later by the passage of a herd of cows being shepherded by a woman carrying a stick and talking on a cell phone. We lifted up our packs and cradled our legs to let them through and as they walked out of sight we burst into laughter. Alyssa turned to me and remarked, “Sometimes I can’t believe I’m here. I have to pinch myself. This is so amazing, and I can’t believe I get to experience it.” She had somehow put into words exactly what I was unable to articulate: that although I could not yet fully understand the meaning of the journey, I knew something amazing was happening and I felt absolutely blessed to be experiencing it. Through the hardships and challenges, I could feel myself being filled with joy, gratitude, and trust.

In the days following Cruz de Ferro, I came to the conclusion that I would not be able to make it to Rome in time to catch my flight back to the states; I decided instead to cancel my flights altogether and buy a new return flight from Santiago to the U.S. I wanted to give myself plenty of time, and so I moved my return flight out by a week. Alyssa also decided to
make some adjustments to her itinerary, determining that she would rather take her time walking the remainder of the Camino than travel the remainder of the countries that had been on her itinerary. She too would fly home from Santiago.

With the extended time for our journey Alyssa and I began to discuss the possibility of walking to Finisterre after our arrival in Santiago de Compostela. In plotting out the route, it looked like it would take an extra three to four days, which we could afford because of our decision to push out our flights. I had never heard of Finisterre prior to embarking on the Camino; however, as I had met pilgrims along the way, I was asked very frequently whether I was intending to walk to there. I gradually ascertained that Finisterre was a town on the western-most coast of Spain, so-named because prior to the discovery of the Americas it was thought to be the western most point of the world (as indicated by its name, which translated to mean “the end of the earth”). Many pilgrims raved about Finisterre. The promontory was marked by a lighthouse, and pilgrims traditionally watched the sun set over the Atlantic Ocean as a symbolic end to their journey. Santiago was still the goal and destination of our journey, but there seemed to be something in the idea of walking until we came to the ocean and could literally walk no further. This seemed like it might provide a way for us to wind out of the journey and prepare for our return home instead of stopping cold once we reached Santiago.

As Alyssa and I drew increasingly close to Santiago de Compostela, I found myself struggling to come to terms with the end of my journey. As much as I was struggling with the physical ramifications of walking, the thought of it all being over was something I could hardly wrap my brain around. I remember voicing my thoughts to Alyssa one afternoon as we were walking. The prospect of returning to my everyday life seemed surreal. I had
rather ironically referred to my former life as “real life” in our conversation since what we were doing seemed so completely outside of the realm of normal. I knew this lifestyle was not sustainable, and yet it paradoxically felt so very much more “real” than the life I had stepped away from. Here I was living life at its very simplest, carrying everything I needed on my back. More so than any other point in my life, I was living in the present. As each day progressed, my deepest concerns were finding food, shelter, and the correct route; at times I could not even think past the present moment of placing one foot in front of the other. Living life in such a simple manner eliminated the clutter of extraneous worry and created space for depth and meaning. And yet, I occasionally found myself taken out of this presence as I began to wonder how I could possibly return to the demands of my everyday life. How could I bring the depth and reality of this experience to my life after the Camino?

Although I was struggling with the reality of the Camino drawing to a close, I also found myself feeling increasingly excited and joyful as Santiago approached. As the distance behind us increased and the distance in front of us decreased, we found ourselves in disbelief that so many days and kilometers had passed and that somehow we were almost to Santiago. The journey there had seemed so unfathomable, and yet it had come to pass. Because I had focused on taking each leg of the journey one step at a time, the approach of Santiago de Compostela took me off guard. I had known that our destination was drawing near, but one day it simply dawned on me that instead of reaching a village the next day, we would be arriving in Santiago. I could hardly comprehend what it would be like to finally arrive. Was I prepared for such a momentous event? Alyssa and I mused over our impending arrival in many conversations during our final days of walking into Santiago. The day before our projected arrival, I wrote the following in my journal:
Here I am, the evening before my final day of walking (not counting Finisterre). I can’t believe I will be arriving in Santiago tomorrow! At least I hope . . . if there is one thing I’ve learned, it’s that nothing is “for sure” when it comes to the Camino . . . . you have to be able to adjust expectations. But as I sit here and write, it feels a bit strange; I’ve become so accustomed to the daily rhythm of walking and walking that tomorrow seems like just another day . . . but this time the destination is SANTIAGO! It feels so strange, a bit surreal, bittersweet, and exciting. I was talking to Alyssa today, though, and tried to sort through some feelings I’ve been struggling with in regards to the Camino and its conclusion. I almost feel unready for Santiago—like I need more time, or am unprepared to arrive. Why? I ask myself. I think I feel like I need more time to prepare mentally, emotionally, spiritually. Do I comprehend what I am about to see? Have I considered what I am journeying toward?

I have had this destination abstractly looming, an unseen goal to my journey. I have been greeted, well-wished, and blessed as a pilgrim of Santiago. I have prayed to St. James and asked for his intercession for my safety, health, and protection. [I have endeavored to be open to] God’s will for this journey. . . . Despite this, I still feel unprepared. Did I allow myself to truly become a pilgrim? Was my spirit truly open and humble? Did I walk with God? Could I have been more open on my journey? Did I use my time to the fullest? Did I pray enough? It’s almost as if I want to redo parts of the Camino and do it better. Alyssa compared it to my crudencial.20 I was remarking earlier . . . that I wished I could go back and redo parts of my crudencial . . . that I didn’t fully understand its purpose when I first started and got too many stamps in the first week . . . some from places I don’t even remember and have no real significance to me...other times I visited a significant place and neglected to stamp. If done over, I would get stamps at each albergue and then only from significant places (churches I visited, etc.). My wanting to “redo” parts of the Camino seems a bit like my desire to edit my crudencial . . . Wanting to “edit” my crudencial is silly because my crudencial documents my journey exactly as it is, silly stamps and all. Wanting to “edit” my journey is to be ungrateful for the journey I’ve had; it sends a judgment that it hasn’t been exactly what it should have been, which is again to try to be in control and have expectations . . . to suppose that I know better than God. Which is something I believe my eyes have been opened to on this trip.

As much as I have tried to avoid having expectations on/for this journey, I find I have. I have struggled because I greatly hoped to find answers along this journey, and I haven’t. Or maybe I’ve just found different ones [than I expected]. . . . It occurred to me as I was thinking about going at my own pace and not comparing myself to other people or living according to their expectations . . . maybe I need to

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20 Reference to the pilgrim’s passport, a document that was stamped at significant points along the journey. The passport was stamped each day as part of the registration process at a hostel. Stamps were also available at historical or cultural landmarks. The passport was used as evidence of the length of one’s journey when obtaining a compostela.
slow down this whole process of vocation discernment; it’s not a race. I can take my time. I can live life and be happy wherever I am and trust that God will lead me in God’s own time and way, when God deems I am ready, not when I think I am ready. So maybe, then, I need to be happy with exactly who and where I am and trust that I am who and where I am meant to be . . . God will move me as He sees fit. I will be grateful for the exact journey I have been given and embrace whatever feeling and emotions I have when I enter Santiago.

The morning that Alyssa and I were to arrive in Santiago was surreal. As we walked we expressed our disbelief that we would be arriving at the point towards which we had been striving for nearly six weeks. We stopped to eat breakfast and as we left the bar and climbed a steep hill along the pathway, we passed an elderly pilgrim whom I recognized from the hostel the evening before. I had found her extraordinarily inconsiderate the previous evening; however, as we passed her, I could not help but feel moved by compassion for her. She took slow, measured steps and used double trekking poles. She reminded me of an older version of myself. We were bound for the same place, she and I, and that seemed bigger than any petty irritation I had felt. I found myself praying for her journey as I listened to her winded breath fade behind me.

Although we had a full day’s distance to cover to get into the city of Santiago de Compostela and I was as injured as ever, Alyssa and I found ourselves just outside of the city in what seemed like no time. Our excitement was pushing us forward at an unrealized pace. We walked as briskly as possible given the condition of my feet and stopped for only one short break before pushing on to the outskirts of the city. Signs demarking the city limits stirred us to such excitement that we were giddy. We finally made our way toward the city center, greeted with a sign that simply read: “SANTIAGO”. I recalled the road sign I had seen on my second morning of walking that bore the same name but carried the number
790 behind it. The name and a decreasing number had appeared dozens of times since, and now to see no kilometer count at all felt unbelievable.

We had no idea how much further we would have to walk into the city before arriving at the cathedral. We searched in expectation for its spires at every turn, and as we rounded corner after corner with no sighting of the cathedral, the anticipation became almost unbearable. After several kilometers and what seemed like an absolute eternity, we turned a corner and I clutched Alyssa’s arm. It was distant, but there rising above the surrounding buildings were the double spires we had been seeking for five hundred miles. We could hardly talk for excitement, and I recall passing locals who were going about their day in an ordinary manner and wondering aloud how they could possibly look so nonplussed on what was undoubtedly the most exciting day of my life. Our elation was recognizable to at least one man—a pilgrim who was on his way out of the city. Spotting the anticipation on our faces, his face exploded into a grin and he held both of his thumbs up and declared, “Good stuff!”

The cathedral spires grew taller as we drew nearer, until we had to shade our eyes to see the tops of them. The pathway brought us to the rear of the building and followed along the cathedral’s north side and through an archway before opening into the vast city square that stood in front of the cathedral. As the road approached the archway, Alyssa and I could no longer verbalize our excitement. A bagpiper stood in the archway and as his music greeted us, Alyssa began to sob. We passed through the dark tunnel and emerged into the light of the city square, where we stood and beheld the cathedral. Alyssa continued to sob, and I felt so overwhelmed by Alyssa’s reaction and so confused by the wide range of
emotions bombarding me that I was overcome as well. I described the experience in my journal:

I could not stop smiling, but I also had a strange sensation because I was feeling a whole lot of things at once and I wasn’t sure which one was taking precedence. Of course I felt happy, excited, relieved . . . but also a bit disappointed and sad? I think I wanted to experience more than I was feeling. I wanted it to be this great, amazing event that overwhelmed me with joy. This is all very strange to describe because I did feel happy . . . almost giddy . . . with excitement. But I also felt . . . a strange pressure. . . . Was this living up to the tremendous anticipation/expectation of five hundred miles? Was this it? This quick arrival, this moment in the plaza, staring at what I’ve journeyed for five-and-a-half weeks to see?

Maybe a large part of this is still the same struggle I have been trying to understand and put into words over the past few days . . . maybe it is more a disappointment with myself. Was I ready to be here? Had I prepared myself enough? Had I made the most of my journey? Had I made it according to God’s will for me, or what I still clinging to my own need for control?

I felt a very strange mixture of glee and dread, joy and confusion . . . and I think the tears that began to stream down my face were from this overwhelming ball of confused emotion . . .

We stood there, the pair of us, completely oblivious to the commotion of pedestrians on the square. We stared at the ornate façade of the cathedral and laughed and cried until we were approached by a passer-by who offered to capture the moment for us. As Alyssa continued to weep, I began to feel awkward. I wanted to share the moment with her, but I also wanted to give her the space she needed. Unsure of what to do, I finally declared that I needed to sit down and I dropped my backpack and walking stick and plopped down right there in the middle of the square. I have no idea how long we sat in the square, silently gazing at that to which our joy and pain had brought us. Tears began to flow more freely down my cheeks. I was still trying to sort through my complicated emotions; all I knew was that I felt overwhelmed. I had not had the strong immediate emotional reaction that Alyssa
had had; my own tears were more in response to hers than anything. Was I feeling disappointed? Was the arrival all that I had been hoping for?

The only indication that we had of the passage of time was the passage of the shadow from the building behind us. As we sat facing the cathedral, the shadow behind us grew longer until it began to creep under our bodies. Our sweat began to cool in the shade and after a time we became aware that perhaps we had been sitting for a long time. Alyssa broke the silence and asked if I was ready to go inside the cathedral. Although finding a hostel had previously been our first priority upon arriving at a destination for the evening, it seemed inappropriate. All of our strivings had been toward this cathedral and seeing it was part of our arrival. Dirty and sweaty, we took up our backpacks and walking gear and approached the formidable set of stairs leading into the building.

When we crossed the threshold into the cathedral, we had to stand for a moment to allow our eyes to make the adjustment from the bright exterior we had just left to the dimly-lit interior. We were greeted in the narthex by a marble column known as Portico de la Gloria. It depicted the tree of Jesse, and pilgrims have traditionally placed a hand along the carving as they enter the cathedral. Over the centuries this ritual had actually worn a hand imprint into the carvings, and as a result the column was being blocked off to prevent further damage. Despite its inaccessibility, I began to pour over the images on the column and like the stones on the Roman road, I found myself reflecting on the many pilgrims that had touched them over the centuries.

As my eyes wandered past the column, I gazed at the colonnade and ornate altar, but it was still at too great a distance to discern details. Alyssa and I walked around the side aisle on the south side of the nave and began our long approach to the altar. There were
many elements within the cathedral to take in, and I found myself struggling to decide
where I should focus my attention; I was eager to drink everything in. Raised above the
mid-section of pews in the nave was one of the most opulent organs I had ever seen. The
side aisle was lined with confessionals, devotional spaces, and side chapels. We approached
the transept and the altar drew nearer, revealing an altarpiece even more elaborately
decorated than the organ I had just seen. A host of sculpted angels were holding an
ornately-carved canopy in suspension above the altar. Below the canopy, overlooking the
altar was a statue of St. James.

As we proceeded up the side aisle along the altar, we discovered a set of stairs
which led visitors behind the altar up to the statue of St. James. I remembered reading in
my guidebook that pilgrims traditionally ascend the stairs and embrace the statue from
behind and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their arrival. Alyssa and I joined the small line
of visitors that had formed and made our way up the stairs to the sculpted St. James.
Although the guidebook had mentioned hugs, the visitors and pilgrims in front of me
seemed to be showing restraint and stuck to a gentle touch or pat on the shoulder of the
statue. When it was my turn, I was more aware of my own awkwardness in carrying out the
ritual than in the prayer of gratitude I was endeavoring to make. As I descended the stairs
on the opposite side, I discovered another set of stairs that led below the altar and a sign
indicating that this was the location of the crypt of St. James. I paused before proceeding. I
had been so overwhelmed by the general experience of arrival that I could feel myself going
through the motions of these rituals without really having the capacity to take them in.

Alyssa and I descended into the crypt and stood for some moments staring at the
silver box containing the relics of St. James. Once again I found myself in an I-cannot-
believe-I’m-here-and-I-don’t-know-what-to-do trance; this all seemed to be happening so fast, and I was sure I was not absorbing every moment like I had been hoping to. I recall feeling called to prayer and wishing to kneel, but I also felt so self-conscious and afraid to disturb the flow of visitors within the small chamber that I refrained from doing so. There was a small alcove opposite the reliquary chamber wherein hung a large metal plaque. I could decipher enough of the Spanish to understand that its words were a quote from Pope John Paul II. I asked Alyssa for a translation and she read aloud: “I, Bishop of Rome and pastor of the universal Church, from Santiago send to you, old Europe, a cry full of love: go back and find yourself, be yourself.”

We made our way from the crypt into the main body of the cathedral.

Remembering my frustrated effort to receive the sacrament of Confession in Leon and several failed attempts since then, Alyssa offered to inquire about its availability here in the cathedral. Moments later, she returned and told me that there was a German priest hearing confession that understood a little English. She pointed out the confessional that she had been directed to, and then left me to myself. I approached the confessional, noticed that it was occupied by another individual, and sat down to wait nervously. When the confessional was vacated, I approached and asked the priest if he would be willing to hear a confession in English. He looked a little uncomfortable and told me in broken sentences that he could as long as my problems were not very complicated. I discussed some of the things that had been weighing on my heart and that I had been hoping to let go of. The priest gave me penance and absolution, and for the first time since I had arrived, I felt a sense of peace and calm in my spirit.
My uplifted spirits must have been visible, because Alyssa commented on how different I looked when I caught up with her afterwards. We left the cathedral and set out to find the pilgrims office to get our *compostelas*. After a time, we stumbled upon the inconspicuous building which contained the office on its second floor. We waited our turn in line and met individually with a representative. The woman asked me for my pilgrim’s passport, which she imprinted with the official stamp of the cathedral. She proceeded to ask me a series of questions, including inquiries about the reason for my journey, the distance and means by which I had traveled, and personal information such as my name and country of origin. My information was documented, and then I was presented with my *compostela*, a document (complete with a Latin transcription of my name and the date) which officially documented my journey and arrival in Santiago de Compostela.

Feeling jubilant as we left the building, we crossed back to the cathedral square and decided to find lodging for the evening. Alyssa had researched several locations beforehand, and despite the somewhat confusing layout of the city streets, we found our way there quickly enough. We had decided to splurge on a hotel room in celebration of our arrival. The accommodations were still very modest: we were shown to a very small but tidy room containing two twin beds and a desk; the bathrooms were communal and located on separate floors. Alyssa and I showered, hand-washed our clothes, hung them from the balcony to dry, and decided to head out to find something to eat for dinner.

We had planned to head back to the cathedral square because we had run into some familiar faces earlier that afternoon and had been invited to meet at the square at around seven and join the group for dinner. By the time that we finished at the cathedral, got settled into our hotel and cleaned ourselves up, it was well past seven. Alyssa and I
decided to walk around the city for a bit to see if we recognized any of our friends enjoying
dinner outside. Much to the chagrin of my flip-flop clad feet, we wound up walking quite a
ways through the city. Alyssa seemed to care much more than I did about meeting up with
other pilgrims. She also was being very discriminatory about where we ate; she wanted to
eat somewhere rather special for the occasion and was hoping to find a place where we
could eat outside and enjoy the lovely evening. Although this sounded ideal, I felt myself
growing impatient; my feet were throbbing and I was too hungry to care where we ate. I
gently suggested that we find a place to eat ourselves, and then if we felt inclined we could
continue to walk around and look for our group afterwards. We headed back in the
direction of our hotel and stopped at a restaurant along the way that seemed suitable.

I do not know whether everything simply tasted better because I felt famished, but
the meal that Alyssa and I enjoyed that evening was one of the most memorable food
experiences I have ever had. We took our time enjoying every bite. We split an appetizer of
asparagus-wrapped goat cheese, filled our stomachs on pasta and house wine, and topped
everything off with chestnut-covered lemon custard and torte de Santiago. We discussed
our enjoyment of the food as we ate and also began to process our arrival. We talked about
our first glimpse of the cathedral and tried to express what had been going on internally for
each of us. Alyssa described how overwhelmed she had felt by the meaning of the
experience. I tried to express my confused emotions: my joy, sadness, lack of preparation,
amazement, and disappointment. Mostly I expressed that I was having a difficult time
processing the fact that I had arrived. Simply expressing my confused emotions proved very
helpful. Somehow hearing myself voice some of the negative feelings that were making me
anxious was relieving. I came to the conclusion that I needed to give myself more time to

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process. Besides, the event that I had been looking most forward to—the pilgrim’s Mass—had not taken place yet. I still had that to look forward to the next day. A Mass for pilgrims took place in the cathedral every day at noon; we had arrived in Santiago after the Mass that day, but we had planned to take a full day off in Santiago before setting out for Finisterre and could therefore attend the Mass the following day at noon.

As our stomachs grew full and we felt satisfied, the exhaustion began to hit and to my great relief, we decided to head back to the hotel instead of searching out the group of pilgrims we had been trying to meet. Half an hour later I climbed into the luxury of crisp, cool sheets and fell asleep feeling relaxed, comfortable, and blessed.

The following morning, Alyssa and I took our time getting out of our beds. I had wanted to dress up for Mass, but since I only had two sets of clothes, I chose the least grimy ones and tried to look my best. For once I had the luxury of taking a morning shower and took advantage, hoping that it would somehow make up for my very simple appearance. Although I still had to spend time taping up my feet for the day, it was the first time in ages that I did not pull socks and boots over them. I had decided to go with my flip-flops that day; for although they were certainly not dressier than my boots, they were at least cleaner. Alyssa and I found a café and ate a simple and leisurely breakfast of toast, marmalade, and coffee. As the morning grew late, we made our way to the cathedral and filed in for the pilgrim’s Mass. We took our seats in the front left section of the nave and watched the space fill up as the beginning of the service drew nearer.

A petite nun approached the altar and welcomed all of the pilgrims. She rehearsed a responsorial hymn with the congregation and then announced that the Mass would be concelebrated by a number of priests visiting from different parts of the world. When the
entrance hymn began, no fewer than six priests and deacons processed to the altar.

Although it was almost entirely in Spanish, I found myself completely engaged in the liturgy. I tried my best to pick out words or phrases to understand in the readings, but they were mostly unintelligible. The beautiful and incomprehensible words which rhythmically punctuated the silence became like music which hung thick in the air. I knew that whatever their meaning, the words were sacred and served as a powerful milieu to which I could join my prayer.

The Mass proceeded from the liturgy of the Word into the Eucharistic prayer, and I found that I was able to follow along more closely because of the familiarity of the prayers and structure of the liturgy. As the bread and wine were consecrated, I recalled the vineyards and empty wheat fields that had marked my travels to this place. They represented my journey, with all its joys and struggles. I had nothing to offer but myself and my Camino. I offered my journey with the sacrifice of the Mass, praying that, like the bread and wine, it too would be made a sacred and acceptable offering of thanksgiving.

The priests took their turns praying parts of the Eucharistic prayer and their words rang out in various languages, once again reminding me of the universal nature of my faith. Here I was, in a completely different country, celebrating the Eucharist with hundreds of pilgrims from all over the world. As the communion hymn began and members of the assembly began to come forward to receive the Eucharist, I rather unexpectedly found myself weeping. I was overcome by the beauty of approaching the Eucharist with so many of my brothers and sisters. Never before had I felt so intimately connected to strangers...strangers, and yet family. While making the Camino, I had perhaps for the first time in my life discovered the absolute necessity of community, and in that celebration of
Eucharist, it was reflected before my eyes. I left my pew to proceed to the altar and once again found myself engaging in the profound activity of walking. As I put one foot in front of the other, I felt the intensity of my individuality, but simultaneously experienced myself as completely absorbed into the larger body of the community. I stood before the priest, and as he raised the host and uttered the words “Cuerpo de Cristo”, I responded Amen with a full heart. I experienced an overpowering sense of gratitude and felt the presence of Christ not only in the beautiful gift I was now consuming, but also in the body of people receiving this very same gift. It was if an invisible network of chords knit us all together.

I made my way back to my seat and began to feel slightly self-conscious about the tears that seemed to be flowing steadily and uncontrollably. I knelt to pray and moments later was shocked by the sudden blare of the organ above my head. I looked up and saw no fewer than eight men crowding around a large thurible. It was the largest one I’d ever seen in my life, measuring at over five feet tall. It is in fact the largest such vessel in the world, and I had seen it hanging in suspension from its large pulley system in the vault over the center of the transept when we had arrived the previous afternoon. This vessel was perhaps the most famous feature of the cathedral and I had read about it and seen pictures of it many times in my guidebook and as I had been making preparations for my pilgrimage. Every source I had read, however, made it clear that the thurible (known as the botafumeiro) was only lowered and used on rare occasions—for special feast days. I was not aware of any special feasts being celebrated that day and had harbored no expectations of seeing it beyond its still presence as an ornament hanging from the transept.

For this reason, I was taken by complete surprise to see the botafumeiro lowered and eight men loading it with incense. As the organ blared on and the petite nun began to
sing a hymn in high soprano, the men raised the *botafumeiro*. They began to tug on a series of ropes connected to one giant rope which wound its way through the complex pulley system and held the vessel on its other end. The *botafumeiro* began to swing back and forth. At first it swung the length of the altar, but with each massive tug given by the men, the thurible gathered speed and momentum, and the distance it swung increased dramatically. Within moments, it was swinging the complete length of the transept, reaching nearly ceiling height on both sides. It was like a giant pendulum, swinging the full width of the cathedral, dispensing a thick cloud of smoke as it went.

I stood in teary amazement watching this ritual take place. Never had I felt so blessed, so full. As the *botafumeiro* gained momentum and the first scent of the incense reached my nose, I lost all control and began to weep openly. There was something about that smell: I felt as if I was at the parish of my childhood, in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, and in Heaven all at once. In that moment I knew that I had arrived. I had come home. I was bathed in the scent of incense, the sight of its majesty, and the glorious sound of organ and cantor. I had never experienced anything so beautiful or transcendent in my entire life.

As I watched the powerful image of the *botafumeiro* swinging before my eyes, it dawned on me that *this* was my answer. This was what I had been searching for. I thought of the words cried out by John Paul II that were inscribed in the crypt, the message at very heart of the pilgrimage: GO BACK AND FIND YOURSELF, BE YOURSELF. This journey had at its most essential been a journey of self-discovery. It has been about unearthing myself, my truest self. It had been about processing and letting go of hurts, and stripping away things that were barriers to my deepest self. It had been about becoming empty in order to create
room to be filled. What better image did I have for this journey than the botafumeiro? Here was an object that functioned only because it was first empty. Only because of its inner vacancy was there room for the coals and incense that had been placed there to be ignited and flamed by the oxygen. In fact, as the giant thurible gained momentum and accelerated through the air, its inner contents were spurred into full-fledged fire by its increased exposure to the oxygen. The smoke poured out ever stronger and spread ever further to bless those it reached.

Was this not the very vocation to which I was being called through Baptism? Was I not beckoned to follow Christ’s footsteps into the Paschal mystery? Like the botafumeiro, I was called to become a vessel. I was summoned to take part in the self-emptying love of Christ, to die to the aspects of myself that I clung to because they helped maintain my insuperability...characteristics like pride, envy, and control. I was invited to let go, to empty myself of these things. I was called to the vulnerability engendered by humility, gratitude, hope, and trust. These were the oxygen to my incense...they were what was meant to fill the interior space of my soul so that my most central core could be inflamed.21 For here in the core of the soul, the “holy of holies”22 was found my most visceral, true self: I AM, the God within. Here was found the unique identity gifted to me by God. Here was found love...love which through self-emptying could be stirred into flame and overflow to bless everyone with whom it came in contact.

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21 Ignatian spirituality in fact describes the core of the soul in terms of flame: “...the core of the soul is the most profound, personal, and unique part of you. This aspect of you is like a sanctuary, a holy of holies, where God is creatively loving you breath by breath. Here God’s creatively immediate love...burns in a vigil of eternal flame. The white-hot center of this eternal flame is a central point of goodness in you and is a gift of God.” See Timothy M. Gallagher, “Discernment of Spirits in the Exercises” in Discernment of Spirits: The Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 165.

22 Ibid.
No matter how my future would take shape, I knew that this *bontifumeiro* imaged my vocation. I was called to constantly submit myself to the process of being emptied, to be shaped from a mass of solid clay into a hollowed vessel. In doing so I would be allowing space to be created within me for fulfillment. I would be allowing space for God to work within me, to fan the flames of love at my deepest core into a blaze whose sweet perfume could flow out to meet the world.23

Slowly the men stopped and lowered the *botafumeiro*. The music ceased long enough for one of the priests to offer a concluding prayer and sending forth. The organ once rang out in an exuberant fashion as the priests filed out. I wiped the tears from my face and broke into a smile. Santiago had not disappointed. The arrival was more beautiful and profound than I could ever have imagined. I turned to Alyssa, who was smiling radiantly as well. There was a joyful buzz in the air as pilgrims embraced, shook hands, reunited, and began to file out of the cathedral. Now that I had arrived, I had a strong desire to revisit some of the rituals that I had only robotically participated in the day before. Alyssa and I revisited the statue of St. James, and this time I did not care how timidly other visitors approached; I embraced the statue enthusiastically and offered a prayer of thanksgiving for my arrival. We also re-entered the crypt, and this time I knelt down and allowed myself to be absorbed in prayer instead of self-consciousness. I once again looked at the plaque that faced the reliquary and beheld the words of Pope John Paul II. Alyssa had her journal with her and was copying the Spanish passage word-for-word. Later that evening I would do the same and transfer the passage into my own journal. I felt these words expressed the

23 Images in a way Frederick Buechner’s definition of vocation: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Discussion found in *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 95.
mission I and every Christian pilgrim had been tasked with: to rediscover ourselves and to live out of this identity. We were bidden to empty ourselves of barriers and false selves and allow our deepest, truest selves to be fanned into being. Perhaps Thomas Merton puts it most clearly: “For me to be a saint means to be myself.”

As Alyssa and I ascended the stairs from the crypt, we ran directly into Chiara, the kind pilgrim who had given me her miraculous medal and advised me to take the bus into Leon. The three of us embraced as if we were the very best of friends. She had just that moment arrived in Santiago and was seeing the cathedral for the first time. The joy that we all felt was palpable. That afternoon Alyssa and I explored the city and enjoyed a leisurely dinner with a group of pilgrims. We spent time celebrating with several pilgrims we had met along the way, and many more that we had not. That evening was especially memorable as we met a group in the cathedral square. The night air was a perfect temperature and a full moon hung over the cathedral. There were ten of us or so, and many of us had only just met, but our journey was enough to bind us together. We sat in a circle on the stones of the plaza. One of the pilgrims brought a loaf of bread and bottle of wine to share, and since we had no glasses, we simply passed the bottle around the circle and took turns sipping from it as we shared our Camino stories in a variety of tongues.

The following morning, Alyssa and I set out for Finisterre. We watched the spires of the cathedral shrink in the distance behind us, knowing that we would return in a few days. We could hardly believe that we were back on the road. It felt strange to be walking further than Santiago, and after a complete day of rest it felt a bit out of routine. The routine came back soon enough, however; our bodies once again adjusted to the labor of

walking, and our familiar concerns with finding food, shelter, and the correct pathway returned. The journey from Santiago to Finisterre took four long days. The time seemed to pass in a very strange manner, characterized by an interesting mixture of anticipation and dread. There was no longer the anticipation of Santiago; instead there was finis terre—the end of the earth. We were walking to the end, moving until we could walk no further.

Given my physical condition, it was all I could do to eek four more days of walking out of my body. Yet, I found myself grateful for the choice to continue walking past Santiago, for I was not prepared to be finished. Knowing that the journey would be over and that I would have to return home made me sad. Santiago had been such a joyful high that I felt the need to wind down, and mentally and spiritually prepare myself to re-enter my everyday life. The walk from cathedral to ocean provided time for me to process my experience at Santiago and consider how I could take my experience of pilgrimage home.

Alyssa and I took our time walking. Because the route was not as well traveled as that to Santiago, there were fewer intermittent villages, and so our days were longer as we were forced to travel further distances between each village. With our lengthened stretches of walking, we talked through the prospect of going back home. We brainstormed about gifts we might bring our loved ones to represent the Camino, and how we could possibly begin to describe such a deep and profound experience when we were often at a loss to understand its impact ourselves. Once again we found ourselves mulling over how different our everyday lives were from the life we had grown accustomed to through this experience. We talked about readjustments that would challenge us, as well as things that excited us about returning home. Alyssa also asked me about the answers I had been in search of when I began the Camino . . . had I found the answers I was looking for? What
was next for me? In thinking about her question, I reiterated some of the reflecting I had been doing on emptiness. I shared that I had come to the conclusion that this journey had indeed been more about letting go than finding answers. I had let go of my need for answers, my need to have a plan for my life. I felt at peace about my future. I knew without any doubt that God knew me better than I knew myself and that God would provide the answers when I was ready. I was going home with a heart full of trust.

Much to our chagrin, we woke up to rain on our final day of walking. We had managed to escape rain for the entirety of our pilgrimage, save for the very first day, when we had been crossing the Pyrenees and met for the very first time. Rain on the last day seemed an almost poetic way to bookend our journey. The rain was light enough that it did not make walking miserable; however, both Alyssa and I felt disappointed by the weather since the clouds and moisture would surely prevent us from watching the sun set over the ocean when we arrived in Finisterre that afternoon.

When we did reach Finisterre, we approached our arrival in much the same way as we had approached Santiago; we did not look for accommodations, but proceeded straight to the lighthouse and cliffs (located an additional two kilometers outside of the town) which marked the end of the Camino. We came to the very last waymark of the Camino, which read: 0.0 kms. Alyssa and I walked past the light house and climbed down a series of large boulders. I had been coaching my feet all day long, pleading with them to make it just one more day. As I sat on the boulder with my feet stretched out in front of me, I promised them that their journey was over. I looked out over my boots to the ocean beyond and felt my heart become filled with gratitude. Although the weather did not permit us to see a sunset, there was still something profoundly beautiful in the sight we beheld. The way in
which the clouds obscured the sun made it impossible to see a horizon line between sky and ocean, giving the illusion that we were looking out into an endless abyss. Somehow it seemed fitting, perhaps capturing the unknown future into which I was proceeding with newfound trust and hope.

As Alyssa and I stood up to head back into town, we were rather unexpectedly approached by a middle-aged gentleman. He sounded German as he explained that he and his wife were visiting Finisterre. They had noticed our backpacks and wondered if we had walked here. We smiled and explained that we had just completed a pilgrimage. He asked questions about where we had come from and how long we had been walking. He wanted clarification and asked in a rather amazed tone, “And so . . . all this walking has been good? You have had a good journey and understand more about the meaning of your life?” His forwardness caught me a little off guard, but his question was wildly appropriate. I was still unpacking the meaning of my journey and would continue to do so for years. In the moment I could not articulate how it had affected me, but I was absolutely certain that it had. I paused for an instant, then smiled and simply answered “yes.”

Alyssa and I spent the night at an albergue in the town, but rather than spend the following day exploring Finisterre as we had originally planned, we decided to catch a bus back to Santiago early in the morning in order to give ourselves one final day in Santiago. Although it had provided time to draw our journey to a close, Finisterre had not been all that it had been talked up to be. Alyssa and I agreed that it left Santiago as the high point and so we were eager to return and spend our final day enjoying the city. We checked into the same hotel we had stayed at when we had first arrived. We showered, washed our clothes in the sink and hung them out to dry, and then set off to explore the city. No longer
needing to worry about the weight of our packs, we wandered around and picked out gifts and souvenirs to bring home for our loved ones. Although many stores were clearly catering to the tourist industry, we did manage to find a few unique shops off the beaten path. One such shop was located just down the street from our hotel, and there among the odds and ends sold by the distinctive shop-owner I found a small medal of the botafumeiro that I purchased and added to the chain around my neck to wear as a reminder of the meaning of the journey.

Alyssa was to leave first thing the following morning; my flight, however, was not until late the following evening. When it was time for Alyssa to depart, I walked with her to the bus station, both because I wanted to see her off, and also because I knew it would put me at ease later that evening if I knew where I was going to catch my bus to the airport. Just before Alyssa climbed on the bus, she turned to me and we embraced. “Friends in ‘real’ life?” she asked. “Friends in ‘real’ life.” I answered. She boarded the bus, chose a seat next to the window, and we waved to each other as it pulled away. I could feel a lump rising in my throat as I thought of how she had been a mere stranger six weeks ago. Only a few days ago we had been mistaken for siblings. I smiled to myself and said a prayer of thanksgiving for her companionship. I was confident that God had placed her in my life, just as I was certain that I would not have made it to Santiago without her.

That afternoon was rainy and lonely. I had returned to the hotel to pack up my belongings. I stayed as long as I could, taking advantage of the small television in our room. I flipped through channels and came across a live broadcast of the weekly papal audience. I felt a little sad that I was not there but felt confident that I had made a good decision to take my time on the Camino. I was where I was supposed to be. When checkout time
came, I took up all of my belongings and returned the key at the front desk. Between the
pouring rain, the challenge of having to carry a backpack and parcel of souvenirs
everywhere I went, and my painful and limited mobility, I decided to lay low for the day. I
visited a small museum that was nearby which documented the history of the pilgrimage.
Later in the afternoon I found a bar and occupied a table for several hours while I ate my
last meal in the city and caught up on journal entries.

As the evening approached, I decided to attend Mass one last time at the cathedral.
It would be over at around 7 p.m., just in time for me to walk to the bus station and catch
the last bus to the airport. I arrived at the cathedral prior to the start of the liturgy and
visited one of the side chapels that I had spied during my first visit there. I was still carrying
all of the prayer intentions that I had collected leading up to my pilgrimage. They had
unexpectedly proven to be a critical source of strength and focus throughout my journey,
for there had been many moments when I felt I could go no further but had summoned the
energy to continue when I recalled the intentions collected in my journal. Having something
tangible for which to offer my joys and struggles had turned out to be extraordinarily vital.
It seemed fitting to leave them in Santiago.

I entered the chapel and pulled out my journal. I ripped out the front section
containing the intentions and prayed for each of them one last time. I noticed a basket
beside a large statue of St. James, discovered it to be a receptacle for prayer intentions, and
placed the pile of pages in the basket, asking St. James to take over praying for them. I was
also still carrying the walking stick that had been loaned to me by Andreas weeks before. I
considered leaving it behind as well, since I had always felt that it was merely on loan. It
seemed selfish to keep the walking stick for myself when it had so generously been given to
me in a time of need. I knew how precious it had been to its owner and how precious it had become to me, however, and since I was unsure what would happen to it if I simply left it in the chapel, I decided to take it with me after all to gift to a friend in appreciation for his support along my journey.

I left the chapel, leaned my backpack, walking stick, and parcel of souvenirs against one of the large pillars along the nave, and then took a seat in the neighboring pew and waited for Mass to begin. Once again I was blessed with the magnificent experience of being incensed by the *botafumeiro* at the conclusion of the liturgy. Once more I felt myself moved to tears; nothing could have made a more proper conclusion to my journey. When the liturgy was over, I strapped on my backpack, grabbed my walking stick and parcel, and stepped out into the dusk to begin my trek to the bus stop. As I walked away, I looked back one last time at the cathedral. I grasped the small pendant of the *botafumeiro* that now hung about my neck. I recalled the refrain that had come to me that day in Castrojeriz:

*I’m waiting, set apart/like incense to your heart/like a libation I’m pouring out/empty and beautiful.*

I left Santiago, empty and beautiful.

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CHAPTER TWO

EUCHARIST AS SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY: EXPLORING THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF PILGRIMAGE AND LITURGY

The previous chapter presented an account of a very concrete experience of pilgrimage... the practiced pilgrimage. My journey to Santiago de Compostela was for me a tangible event which has fostered a particular conception of the liturgy. My actual, embodied experience of pilgrimage gave meaning to the concept of sacred journeying and allowed this concept to develop as a framework for understanding the liturgy. Indeed, my participation in the practice of pilgrimage became for me a metaphorical living out of the Christian journey, which has in turn provided a lens for the way that I conceive of and participate in the liturgy. My pilgrimage journey was at the same time informed by the faith perspective with which I entered it, and in this way my participation in the liturgy provided a framework for understanding my pilgrimage experience.

This chapter will explore the relationship between pilgrimage and liturgy, examining the ways in which the two practices are capable of mutually enlightening one another. As I have hinted above, the relationship between pilgrimage and liturgy is not a direct, linear correlation; rather, pilgrimage and liturgy form a dynamic, overlapping, and multi-faceted interrelationship. In order to better understand the ways in which this dynamic relationship will be discussed throughout the course of this chapter, I have provided several conceptual maps. Let us first consider the relationship illustrated by figure 2. Here liturgy provides a context for the experience of Christian pilgrimage. As implied by its identifier, Christian
pilgrimage is such because it is approached within a particular theological framework. Thus, for the Catholic Christian, the practice of pilgrimage is informed by a faith perspective which is sustained by participation in the liturgy. In this way, the pilgrimage experience is set within and interpreted in the light of a liturgical context. As a pilgrim of Santiago, I approached and lived out my Camino experience through the framework of my faith perspective as a Catholic Christian. I encountered many pilgrims who approached their journeys through the lens of different faith perspectives or in some cases no faith perspective at all, and our conversations proved that our interpretations of our Camino experiences were vastly different. My own journey was informed by the twenty-five years of spiritual living and liturgical participation which had preceded it.

Figure 1 illustrates a relationship in which liturgy is examined within the context of pilgrimage. As mentioned previously, my experience along the Camino was not only informed by liturgy, but has brought great insight to my understanding of liturgy. Indeed, because of my journey to Santiago, I have come to interpret the liturgy in light of the notion of journey. I have come to understand liturgy as a kind of enactment of pilgrimage, not only throughout the course of a single liturgical celebration, but over the course of an individual’s lifetime, and indeed all of history until the end of time. Thus, my experience has brought into clarity particular aspects of Eucharistic theology which inform not only my present understanding of the liturgy but also reinterpret the very framework with which I approached my pilgrimage journey in the first place.

Having set forth these conceptual maps to better clarify the parameters of this discussion, I will proceed to explore the interrelationship of pilgrimage and liturgy more closely. I will take as my starting point the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
found in chapter 24 of Luke’s gospel. The story of Emmaus describes a geographical journey, and it is precisely this physical journey which provides a means for the unfolding of a spiritual journey. In this way, Emmaus provides an archetypal pilgrimage narrative. We will see that the concept of journey serves as a point of commonality between pilgrimage and liturgy; as journey is the central theme of the Emmaus story, the practices of pilgrimage and liturgy may be read in light of the Emmaus story (see figure 3 conceptual model).

Drawing on sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet, I will discuss three elements which emerge from the Emmaus narrative to structure the Christian journey. Reading my experience of pilgrimage and subsequently the liturgy in light of the Emmaus journey, I will show that the same tri-part structure emerges and orders both practices.

Having examined the tri-part structuring of my Camino pilgrimage, the liturgy, and the Christian life in the first section of the chapter, I will proceed to use the theology of Chauvet to explore the way in which the Eucharist functions as a symbolic gift exchange. Given the central importance of the Eucharist to all three experiences named above (Camino, liturgy, and Emmaus), I will explore the way in which the Eucharist serves as a location of formative encounter. Because it exists as a sacramental reality, the Eucharist occupies something of a liminal space. It is in this liminal space that something happens; we are more fully drawn into our Christian identity, the process of which forms and informs the way that we live. As our Eucharistic encounters draw us deeper into our identity in Christ, we more fully image God, and our journey becomes one of ever-deepening communion with the divine. In this way, the Eucharist is a catalyst for our Christian pilgrimage, serving as both source and summit of our journey. This discussion will move between an approach which examines the Eucharist from a perspective of pilgrimage (Figure 1) and that which
uses insights provided by Eucharistic theology to enlighten my experience of pilgrimage (Figure 2).

THE EMMAUS JOURNEY: A TRI-PART STRUCTURE

Luke 24:13-35 tells the story of two disciples traveling on the road to Emmaus. They are journeying together, “conversing about all the things that had occurred”\(^{26}\) over the course of the last several days regarding the end of Jesus’ life and rumors of his resurrection. As they are “conversing and debating”\(^{27}\) about these things, Jesus approaches and begins to walk with them, but their eyes are preventing from recognizing his identity.\(^{28}\) It is clear that they are upset by the content of their discussion, for when the unrecognized Jesus asks what they are discussing as they walk along, the reader is told that the disciples

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\(^{27}\) Ibid., Lk 24:15.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., Lk 24:15-16.
“stopped, looking downcast.” 29 One of the disciples, Cleopas, responds to the question of Jesus-the-stranger in a somewhat remonstrative tone:

‘Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place here in these days? . . . The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.’ 30

It is clear that a major element of the Emmaus narrative is storytelling. As we saw, the account opens with a group of disciples who are downcast and processing their experience through conversation. They share in the heaviness of each other’s hearts as they process their brokenness through conversation. As the unrecognized Jesus joins the conversation and hears the disciples’ narrative, he reinterprets their story: “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.” 31

Here again, the companions relate to each other through the sharing of stories.

The three companions eventually reach a juncture, and when the unrecognized Jesus gives indication of moving on, the two disciples urge him to break his journey for the day and stay with them. He agrees, and during the course of the meal that is shared, the stranger Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Immediately their eyes

29 Ibid., Lk 24:17.
31 Ibid., Lk 24:25-27.
are opened, and they recognize the stranger as Christ. He disappears from sight and the
disciples realize that their hearts had been burning within them as they had been walking
and listening to him open the scriptures along the journey. They set out at once and return
to Jerusalem to recount to other disciples what had taken place and how Jesus was made
known in the breaking of the bread.\footnote{Ibid., Lk 24:28-35.}

The Emmaus story gives a paradigmatic account of Christian pilgrimage, providing an
image of both geographical and spiritual journey. In the case of the former, the disciples
travel from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and following the experience of Jesus that they have
upon arrival at their destination in Emmaus, they are incited to return to Jerusalem. It is
this bodily journey between Jerusalem and Emmaus which mediates an inward, spiritual
journey. I am not claiming here that the geographical journey is the initial cause of the
disciples’ inner journey; for clearly the individuals are already journeying with some level of
commitment to Christian discipleship since they are named as disciples and aware of the
happenings of Jesus. The journey to Emmaus, however, does appear to embody an
important moment in the spiritual journey of the disciples: a moment of conversion in
which the disciples move from a space of disbelief in the possibility of the resurrection of
Jesus to one of belief.

The disciples move from a space of expectation into a loss of expectation, and it is
through this abandonment of anticipation that they are enabled to receive the unexpected
gift of being moved beyond expectation. We will explore this point in much greater detail at
a later point in this chapter; what is important for this discussion is that the journey of the
Emmaus disciples involves an inner reversal—a conversion—which is symbolized by their
geographical roundtrip from Jerusalem to Emmaus and then back to Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{33} This conversion is brought about through encounters with Christ, first as he reinterprets the Scriptures and then as he breaks bread. These encounters so affect the disciples that they are prompted to return to Jerusalem to share with the other disciples “what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”\textsuperscript{34} Thus, the Emmaus story might be thought of as having three major movements: encounter with Christ through Word, encounter with Christ through breaking of bread, and the carrying of these encounters out into the world as the disciples return to Jerusalem.

In thinking back to my experience as a pilgrim on the Camino, three very similar movements emerged to shape my experience. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I do not wish to discuss the relationships between Emmaus, Camino, and liturgy as if having an exact point-for-point correlation; I realize that such a linear understanding is neither possible nor appropriate, since such an attempt would only result in the oversimplification of each experience. I do, however, wish to offer observed connections between each experience that I believe help to shed light on the ways in which these practices (particularly Camino/pilgrimage and liturgy) interrelate. My hope is that the exploration of such connections will allow the practices to mutually enrich one another.

By its very nature as a pilgrimage, my journey along the Camino involved an outer and inner dimension. And like the Emmaus journey, it could accurately be described as a journey which embodied a kind of conversion. As in the case of Emmaus, more will be said about this topic further in the chapter. For now, however, let us examine the way in which

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{New American Bible}, Lk 24:35.
my journey to Santiago was shaped by elements which echo the three movements observed in the story of Emmaus. In recalling my experience, there were two particular activities which became central to my journey: talking and eating. Perhaps it seems strange to exclude activities like sleeping or praying, but the experiences of conversing and sharing meals provided moments of encounter with others. It was through these actions that I became a companion...that I accompanied others and was accompanied by them; for, the sharing of conversation and sustenance afforded moments when I was able to move past physical presence to get to know fellow pilgrims on a deeper, more intimate level.

The variety of contexts and persons with whom I conversed over the course of the Camino are too numerous to count. I was privileged to be able to engage in countless conversations which deepened my understanding of the person with whom I was sharing a conversation, and in many cases these conversations also helped to deepen my understanding of myself and my place in the world. It was through conversation that I processed the past events of my life, as well as those that were taking place along the Camino journey. I was able to find meaning in many of them, or at least come to understand them in a new way. As we saw in the first chapter, my conversations with Alyssa were a particular place of encounter. Like the disciples of Emmaus who “conversed” and “debated” Alyssa and I shared in conversations that ranged in depth from completely banal topics to deep subjects (like faith and religion) which sometimes engendered respectful debates.

Eating also became an important aspect of my pilgrim journey. Meals were critical to my physical nourishment, particularly since I was expending so much energy walking and

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35 Ibid., Lk 24:15.
carrying a pack. Yet, these meals were perhaps even more emotionally and spiritually
nourishing. They fostered a kind of intimacy with others, no matter what the
circumstances. There were occasions, for example, when Alyssa and I would share picnic
lunches, plopping down on some random patch of earth to share the simple nourishment
that we had packed for ourselves: bread, fruit, cheese, and chocolate. Some days we would
talk and laugh as we enjoyed our meal; other days we would either be too tired or too
astounded by the beauty of our surroundings to talk, and so we would simply sit and take in
creation and each other’s company. There was something about the rationing of the food
portions we had packed and the savoring of each bite which felt sacred.

Other meals were eaten with larger communities of people. There was something
unitive in sharing meals; since eating is a universal human need, it transcends any barriers
of race, culture, or creed and draws individuals from all walks of life to the same table.
Meals were very often multinational, and at times the activity of eating served to unite
persons who otherwise remained separated by language. This was very much the case, for
example, in the meal that I shared with the Frenchwoman in Castrojeriz. Although we were
prevented from communicating, the self-gift of the woman in preparing and sharing a meal
with me facilitated a very intimate moment that made the meal sacramental.

The experiences of conversation and meal sharing that were ongoing throughout my
Camino journey culminated upon my arrival in Santiago de Compostela. Here, there was a
sense of joy that permeated every conversation; we had done it . . . we had arrived! And
there seemed no better way to celebrate our joy and our thanksgiving than by sharing in a
meal. I am reminded of the impromptu sharing of wine and bread that took place on the
cobblestone plaza outside the cathedral on our last night in Santiago. Although many of us
had never previously met, our journey was enough to bind us together. We sat in a circle and laughed and told stories as we passed around the food and drink. Word and meal culminated in a particular way at the pilgrim’s Mass. Here, despite my inability to understand the Word due to language constraints, I understood more than ever that I was part of a story that was larger than myself. As I shared in the Eucharistic meal, I felt intimately connected to the strangers from all over the world in whose company I was worshipping and eating. They were strangers, and yet they were my family.

This experience has so deepened my sense of identity that it has lingered with me ever since. Here we find elements of the third movement of the Emmaus story: the going forth, or “lived” dimension of the experience. The disciples were so affected by their encounters through word and meal that they were prompted to go forth and tell of their encounter. My experience along the Camino has lingered with me and been something that I continue to carry with me despite the span of time that has passed since the conclusion of my pilgrimage. I have been and continue to be prompted to tell of my pilgrimage experience, whether in formal settings or informal conversation. My experience has truly shaped the way that I live: not only has it affected the manner in which I approach the liturgy and conceive of my own subjectivity, but it has also effected a career change and shifted the course of my life.

Interestingly, the two types of encounter that we find in the Emmaus story and which characterized my pilgrimage—story and meal—are also what form the body of the liturgy. Using this Emmaus schema, the liturgy may be viewed as something of a journey, a pilgrimage from font to altar. The baptized are brought together to share in the story of
God’s salvation history. Scripture becomes a place of encounter\textsuperscript{36} as believers are immersed in the story of salvation and reminded of their identity as people of God. This great historical love story is made present not only through the formal proclamation of the Word, but through the prayers and responses of the assembly. The assembly’s proclamation of the creed, for example, serves as a pledge of belief in the story of the life of God, and subsequently serves as a pledge of acceptance of one’s location within this story. Story continues to unfold in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Here in the breaking of the bread, we encounter Christ as Christ is made most fully present and recognizable.\textsuperscript{37} God’s economy of salvation continues to unfold as we receive the self-gift of Christ in the Eucharist, and are transformed by our encounter. Like the disciples of Emmaus, our encounter leaves us somehow different, and we are nourished and enlivened to go forth into the world and live out our encounter. Thus, the three major movements of the Emmaus story--encounter with Christ through Word, encounter with Christ through Eucharist, and the carrying of these encounters out into the world--are echoed in the Mass through the Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Concluding Rites.

It should perhaps be noted that while Word/story and meal have been described to characterize the content of pilgrimage and liturgy, there are particular bodily preconditions for each of these practices as well. In order for a practice to be pilgrimage, for example, it necessarily involves walking; the simple sharing of meal and conversation, although meaningful, would not constitute a pilgrimage in the sense that is being discussed here. Similarly, the practice of liturgy necessarily involves bodily participation. The bodily presence of the assembly through gesture, procession, singing, sitting, standing, kneeling,

\textsuperscript{36} Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium (1963), para. 7.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
etc. plays a constitutive role in the liturgy, for it is only through the concreteness of our bodies that we can receive Scripture and sacrament and live out the ethical dimension of our lives. Embodiment and its role in the practices of pilgrimage and liturgy will be further explored in the next chapter.

Also taking the story of Emmaus as his starting point, sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet develops a three-part structure to describe the Christian identity which categorizes and further cultivates the movements which have been hitherto described. We will examine Chauvet’s study of the Emmaus narrative more carefully in the next section; however, Chauvet’s resulting tri-part structure is useful for the remainder of this discussion.

Drawing on themes similar to those which have been described so far (namely encounter through Word and meal, and a resulting “going forth”), Chauvet writes:

Living in God, the Lord Jesus has left his place on earth . . . From now on, this place is occupied by the church. Of course, the church occupies this place symbolically, that is, by maintaining the radical difference, for the church is not Christ, but his symbolic witness, which means that its origin and constant raison d’être is to direct everything back to him. It is in the church that faith find its structure because the church is in charge of keeping alive, in the midst of the world and for its good, the memory of what he lived for and why God raised him from the dead: memory through the Scriptures, read and interpreted as speaking about him or being his own living word; memory through the sacraments, (here the breaking of the bread) recognized as being his own salvific gestures; memory through the ethical testimony of mutual sharing, lived as an expression of his own service to mankind.38

Thus, for Chauvet the Christian identity is given by Christ, mediated by the Church, and formed by the pillars of Scripture, sacrament, and ethics. The whole of the Christian journey is structured according to these elements.

Chauvet includes in the first of these categories not only those texts which make up Christian Scripture, but “everything that pertains to the knowledge of God’s mystery

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revealed in Jesus,” including theological discourse and catechesis. In his discussion of sacraments, the theologian points to baptism and Eucharist as two principal sacraments performed in memory of Jesus’ death and resurrection because they are sacraments of Christian initiation. Chauvet explains that “It is through these two sacraments that every person is initiated into the mystery of Christ, that is, becomes a member of his living ‘body.’ Eucharist is the summit of the initiation because it is through participation in Christ’s Eucharistic body that one is fully integrated into the ecclesial body.” Finally, in his understanding of ethics, Chauvet includes “the ethical conduct by which Christians testify to the gospel by their actions. . . . [in other words,] all that pertains to action in the name of the gospel.” Chauvet explains that these three categories—Scripture, sacrament, ethics—can be superimposed on the more fundamental anthropological structures of knowledge, gratitude, and action. The human subject, he argues, cannot exist without thinking of the world (theoretical reasoning), singing the world (aesthetics), and acting in the world (ethics). It is this anthropological structure which is transformed when taken up by the Christian faith.

As we have seen, the Emmaus narrative has something of a primordial connection with the elements of a pilgrimage and the structure of the liturgy…and indeed with the whole of Christian existence. The pilgrim journey of Emmaus is self-evident; if Emmaus shares characteristics in common with the liturgy, perhaps the liturgy might be understood as a journey as well. But a journey from where and to where? The answer seems to be held

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39 Ibid., 29.
40 Ibid., 29-30.
41 Ibid., 30.
42 Ibid., 31.
43 The relationship between gratitude and sacrament will be further explored later in the chapter.
within the categories set before us by the story of Emmaus, and the work of Chauvet: the Christian journey is one from font to altar. We are incorporated into the Body of Christ through our baptism and brought more fully into this identity through the liturgy. We encounter the Word, and the story told by Scripture becomes our story. We are reminded where we come from, where we are heading, and the Way in which we may arrive. Our Christian identity is deepened as we move from font to altar, from Word to sacrament. Here we encounter the kenotic love of God in the Eucharist, which forms and transforms us. The Eucharist allows us to enter and become more fully drawn into the kenotic love of Christ and to be transformed by this love so that we live our lives in a manner that images our encounter. In this way, the Eucharist has an ethical dimension; for our lives are lived out of the identity which we received in baptism and which continues to be shaped through our participation in the liturgy. Our Christian journey necessitates nourishment, which is provided by the one we seek to image. Thus, the Eucharist is both the source and summit of our Christian life, for God’s kenotic love provides sustenance for the journey, as well as the paradigm to which we aspire.

WE ARE WHAT WE EAT: THE EUCHARIST AS FORMATIVE ENCOUNTER

In the previous section, we examined the way in which Scripture, sacrament, and ethics emerged as elements that order the Emmaus narrative, my experience on *El Camino de Santiago*, the liturgy, and the whole of Christian existence. In each of these experiences, the Eucharist served as a point of pivotal importance: in the Emmaus story, Christ was recognized in the breaking of the bread and the disciples come to believe; in my experience of pilgrimage, the Eucharistic celebration at the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela served

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as a point of encounter which gave meaning to my entire experience and has subsequently shaped my faith journey; and finally, the liturgy culminates in the celebration of Eucharist. It is clear that the Eucharistic encounter holds a particular importance in all of these experiences—that it causes something to happen. In this section of the chapter, we will examine the Eucharistic encounter more closely, considering the way in which the Eucharist effects a becoming. Because of its capacity to serve as a catalyst for becoming or moving toward, the Eucharist—and by extension the liturgy—may be understood as enacting a type of journey or pilgrimage.

With the opening words of Alexander Schmemann’s text, For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy, readers are confronted with a phrase that has become an all-too-common truism: we are what we eat. Derived from a statement made by German materialist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, the phrase was intended to “put an end to all ‘idealistic’ speculations about human nature.” Interestingly, however, Fuerbach’s effort to reduce the nature of humanity to simple biological function resulted in the formulation of an expression that manages to express humankind’s “most religious idea.”

This notion of more closely imaging that which we eat provides a useful construct as we begin to explore the Eucharistic encounter. We will see that the Eucharist is a space in which we are confronted with divine kenosis and are prompted to a response. Our responsive posture allows us to receive the gratuitous gift that is being offered and, through this exchange, be more fully drawn into the inner life of God. This kenotic encounter draws us more fully into the identity we received in baptism. Since we act out of our identity, our

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
encounter with the Eucharist forms a life to be lived. In this way, the Eucharist is indeed an ethical space.

In considering Eucharistic ethics, theologian Mark Godin makes an important distinction between the ethical nature of the Eucharist and the Eucharist as an ethical act. He points out that a typical approach among Eucharistic ethicists is to make arguments about how to act based on what is seen in the Eucharist. In other words, theologians have taken elements found in the Eucharist and used them as instructions for a Christian life. Using this line of thinking, for example, one might argue, because there is sharing in the Eucharist, we ought to share with the poor. This approach, argues Godin, is more homiletical than Eucharistic, since the ethicist is extrapolating ethical considerations from what is going on liturgically, just as a sermon extrapolates from Scripture text. Such an approach provides a didactic form of moral formation which is essentially extrinsic and rhetorical. Godin proposes that in place of examining the Eucharist for its ethical nature, a more intrinsic approach be taken. He takes the Eucharist as his starting point and examines the inherent nature of the sacrament, contemplating how the sacramental act is itself ethical. In the first approach outlined by Godin, the Eucharist is connected to ethics because it is used as a basis for moral teaching/formation; in his alternative approach, the act itself is morally forming. This insight is worthy of noting in order to clarify that we will be examining the formative activity of the Eucharist from the intrinsic perspective advocated by Godin.

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49 Ibid., 54.
50 Ibid., 54.
51 Phillip Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, Identity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 75.
The sacramental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet provides a good starting point for understanding how the Eucharistic act is intrinsically formative. Chauvet’s understanding of the sacraments goes beyond the classical understanding of sacraments as causes of salvation or instruments of grace. In fact, Chauvet’s sacramental understanding is largely predicated on how he distinguishes himself from the sacramental theology of Thomas Aquinas. It becomes evident in Chauvet’s work that he generally finds the sacramental theology of Aquinas to be too static and too reliant on the hypostatic union. He criticizes Aquinas, writing that “Thomas sees the sacraments entirely as prolongations of the hypostatic union when he no longer considers them under the aspect of their efficacy but in their essence or nature: they are conformed to it, for they ‘join the ‘word’ to the sensible thing, just as in the mystery of the incarnation the Word of God is united to sensible flesh.’” Here Chauvet takes issue with Aquinas’ emphasis on the miracle that takes place in the species of the Eucharist over the efficacy of the sacrament.

In making his argument, Chauvet cites two characteristics found in Aquinas’ treatise on the Eucharist that the Doctor of the Church uses to distinguish the Eucharist from other sacraments: first, Aquinas states that the Eucharist “contains” Christ himself; and second, he states that the first effect of the sacrament is in the matter itself, rather than the recipient. Although Aquinas does not seem to lose sight of the final purpose of the Eucharist as providing grace to its recipient, he does appear to view the consecration of the matter as the full realization of the Eucharist. This emphasis on the species of the Eucharist is

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53 Quoted in Ibid., 58.
54 Quoted Ibid., 63.
55 Quoted Ibid.
problematic for Chauvet. Responding to Aquinas’ notion of Christ being “contained” in the Eucharist, Chauvet argues that the Eucharist cannot be taken out of the ritual context of the consecration:

It is impossible . . . to treat of the Eucharistic presence of the Lord ‘in itself,’ that is to say, independently of the material instituted by Christ (the bread and wine, being realities whose essence is intrinsically constituted by their relation to humans), of the words quoted (notably the hyper, this relational ‘for,’ which constrains one to regard the presence as an adesse and not just as the simple esse of a subsisting-being), of gestures (those of the gift and of the fraction, which, as embodied words, come to make visible the intentionality of the spoken word).56

In other words, Chauvet feels that Aquinas places too much emphasis on the Eucharistic miracle. This ultimately results in the Eucharist being described as object instead of action.57 For Chauvet, what is actualized in the sacrament of Eucharist “is not the possibility of God making the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but in fact Christ’s gift of himself throughout his life up to his death for the many, in free fidelity to the mission he received from the Father.’”58 Thus, what is actualized in the Eucharistic species is “Christ-giving-himself” or the “givingness” of Christ.59 Chauvet explains:

We cannot reduce [the presence of Christ in the Eucharist] to the simple fact of being (“esse”). It is necessarily a “being-towards,” a “being for” (“ad-esse”): a presence of gift, immediately calling forth our own presence in return. This dynamic relational movement is not a simple determination that is secondary in relation to an existence that would precede it (at least logically) and which could thus, according to this logic, be apprehended for itself. It is immediately constitutive of the Eucharistic presence in its very actuality.60

Thus, Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is a “being-for” which demands our own presence or “being-for” in return. As systematic theologian Timothy M. Brunck explains, “the ‘presence

56 Quoted Ibid., 67.
58 Quoted in Brunck, Liturgy and Life., 68.
59 Ibid.
60 Quoted Ibid.
in return’ to which the assembly is summoned is the ethical *embodiment* of the ‘being-for’ of Christ. In this way, Christ’s Eucharistic presence is relational and inextricably connected to Christ’s presence in the assembly.

Chauvet deviates from Aquinas because he contends that Aquinas’ tendency to understand the *esse* of the Real Presence apart from the *ad-esse* provides a model which cuts off the Christ who is present in the Eucharistic species from the Christ who is present in the gathered assembly. Chauvet argues that Aquinas’ Eucharistic theology creates a division between Christ and his ecclesial body because it neglects to recognize the participatory dimension of the latter. Indeed, he perceives an imbalance in the way that Aquinas describes sacred movement within the sacrament. Although Aquinas recognizes an ascendant aspect of worship, he gives primacy to a second, descendant movement of justification and sanctification that passes from God through Christ to humanity. Chauvet wants to re-emphasize the exterior acts of thanksgiving and worship which constitute “the principle expression of our moral relation to God.”

Brunck points out that, “just as the Christology of Aquinas emphasizes the significance of the divinity of Christ over the human nature of Christ in the unique hypostatic union that was his, so Aquinas’ sacramental theology emphasizes the action of God through the divine humanity of Jesus with a consequent undervaluing of the activity of the human participants in the sacraments.”

Chauvet challenges what he takes to be Aquinas’ emphasis on the descendant movement of justification—or grace—because he feels it obscures the role of participation in the sacraments. He also views Aquinas’ notion of grace as being too instrumental, as if

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 85.
63 Ibid., 61.
64 Ibid., 62.
grace is mechanically produced by every sacramental ritual. He points out that grace cannot be calculated or capitalized upon because it is given freely by God. In this way, grace is best understood as a gratuitous gift, which engenders a return gift. The failure to receive this gift or to make a return gift ruptures the covenantal relationship offered by God. Taken more generally, gift exchange helps us to maintain our identity in the social order. Chauvet explains that when things are given and returned, “...it is precisely because one gives and returns ‘respects’ and ‘courtesies’. But in addition, in giving them a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself—himself and his possessions—to others.” Such an exchange is not a commercial process but a symbolic exchange in which identity is invested in personal relationship with the one with whom we exchange. Unlike commercial exchanges in which little or no investment of self is involved, those engaged in symbolic exchange affirm their subjectivity.

In proposing a model in which the sacraments are understood as a symbolic exchange instead of the causes of salvation or instruments of grace (as they have been understood classically), Chauvet appeals to a symbolic order. Here, Chauvet builds upon the linguistic and philosophical work of Martin Heidegger. Taking Heidegger’s understanding of the mediative function of language as his foundation, Chauvet constructs a similar understanding of the sacraments. According to Chauvet, language is “the primary concrete cultural expression of the circle in which the human is taken up and within which he or she

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65 Ibid., 86.
66 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 88.
67 Brunck, Liturgy and Life, 86.
68 Quoted Ibid., 77.
69 Ibid.
He argues that language does not grant a human subject the ability to name and manipulate objects; rather, language bestows subjectivity on the human person because it allows the person to enter into a pre-existing world of meaning. In other words, language serves as the vehicle through which meaning is mediated; the human person is brought into this milieu of language and meaning when he or she is brought into existence, and it is from within this milieu that he or she extrapolates his or her own subjectivity.

Just as language is a necessary mediation for the coming to be of the human subject, so the grace of sacramental ritual is a necessary mediation for the formation of the identity of the Christian believer. Chauvet explains that language has a symbolic function because it “places the real at a distance by representing it and thus enable[s] it to be integrated into a culturally significant and coherent whole.” Sacraments are “expressions by means of language” and are likewise participants in the symbolic order. As language mediates meaning and by extension subjectivity, sacramental mystery “is simultaneously a revealer and an agent of Christian identity.” Sacraments allow the participant to enter into a pre-existing world of meaning, where he or she is joined to Christ and Christ’s ecclesial body. Furthermore, sacraments reveal Christian identity expressed in discourse and gesture. Gesture gives body to the word, realizing what is expressed. Thus, the language and gesture of sacraments not only reveal but effect our identity as Christians.

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70 Ibid., 71.
71 Ibid.
72 Brunck, Liturgy and Life, 86.
73 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 15.
74 Ibid., 69.
75 Ibid., 95.
76 Ibid., 90.
embodied reality as revealing/expressing and effecting/forming will be explored further in chapter three.

What is to be gleaned from Chauvet’s appropriation of Heidegger is that his sacramental theology revolves around the concept of mediation. Let us now return to the story of Emmaus, examining how Chauvet uses this scriptural account to derive his tri-part structure of Christian identity and point toward the necessity of mediation. We have seen already that Emmaus describes a journey of conversion, but let us consider the particular way that Chauvet interprets this conversion experience. He begins his discussion of the passage by pointing out that the story begins with an underlying question, which, when read in light of the entire twenty-fourth chapter of Luke, might be expressed as: “If it is true that Jesus arose and that he is alive, how is it that we do not see him, that we cannot see/touch/find him?”77 The Emmaus story might be understood as a catechetical story in which the answer to this question unfolds, for it describes a passage from non-faith to faith, from lack of comprehension to recognition.78

As indicated by the conversation that the two disciples are having as they travel to Emmaus, they appear to know everything about Jesus, particularly about his dramatic last moments.79 Chauvet points out, however, that although “they know everything about him . . . they have understood nothing of him.”80 He explains:

They regard him as a ‘prophet’ but only as a prophet. True, they had been close to considering him the Messiah, ‘the one to redeem Israel’; but this political interpretation of Jesus’ messianism had misled them. True again, ‘angels’ have declared to some women that he is alive; but neither they nor the other disciples after them ‘saw’ him. Everything is at a standstill in their minds: they have allowed

77 Ibid., 23.
78 Ibid.
79 New American Bible, Lk 24:19. See also Ibid., 23.
80 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 23.
themselves to be shut up in the tomb of death with Jesus, and their difficulties are as heavy as the stone that closed that tomb. The unblocking of this impasse begins at the moment they let the stranger take the initiative and speak, an initiative characterized by the appeal to the Scriptures.\footnote{Ibid., 23-24.}

Chauvet proceeds to link Christ’s appeal to the Scriptures with the church. He points out that at the time Luke’s gospel was written, local assemblies of Christians would gather on the first day of the week, and, in continuity with custom in the Jewish synagogue, would read texts from Moses and the prophets.\footnote{Ibid., 24.}

Christ’s use of these texts in the Emmaus narrative indicates that these texts—and indeed all of Scripture—is from now on to be interpreted in relation to the death and resurrection of Jesus.\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, Christ’s reinterpretation of Scripture (which forms the “foundational discourse of the church”\footnote{Ibid., 25.}) makes clear the truth that the mediation of the church is necessary. Chauvet explains:

You cannot arrive at the recognition of the risen Jesus unless you renounce seeing/touching/finding him by undeniable proofs. Faith begins precisely with such a renunciation of the immediacy of the see/know [sic] and with the assent to the mediation of the church. For it is he, the Lord, who speaks through the church each time it reads and interprets the Scriptures as referring to him or, conversely, each time it rereads Jesus’ destiny of death and resurrection as ‘in accordance with the Scriptures.’ In other words, each time the assembly in church proclaims and hears the Scriptures as being his very word . . . it is his spokesperson, his representative, therefore his sacrament.\footnote{Ibid.}

This idea of mediation is taken up in an even more prominent way in the second movement of the Emmaus story: sacrament. For it is here, in the breaking of the bread, that the disciples recognize Jesus. Chauvet argues that the gospel writer’s use of the four technical verbs take, bless, break, give (the same verbs used in his account of the Last
Supper) make Christ recognizable. He posits that the use of these verbs would have elicited a response from the addressees of Luke’s gospel: “when hearing this passage, they could not help but think of the story of the Last Supper, which they knew by heart since this story, as transmitted in the New Testament...was read every Sunday.” Furthermore, just as they would have recognized their own practice of reading and interpreting the Scriptures in the “was this not necessary?” of Jesus in the Emmaus narrative, the verbs of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving would have allowed them to recognize their own practice of celebrating Eucharist in memory of Jesus. Chauvet explains here that, “What Luke tells us is that each time the church takes the bread, pronounces the blessing, breaks it, and gives it in memory of the Lord Jesus, it is he who does it through the church. The gestures the church makes, the words it pronounces are his gestures and his words. In the fullest sense of the word it is the ‘sacrament.’” In the same way that Jesus’ reinterpretation of the Scriptures in Emmaus points to the truth that it is he who speaks through the Scriptures proclaimed by the church, we find that the church’s practice of Eucharist celebrates his prayer and his action. In this way, the conversion experience described in the Emmaus account shows the necessity of one’s assent to the mediation of the church.

The disciples’ movement from disbelief to belief, from incomprehension to understanding, is brought about through the sacramental gesture of the breaking of the bread. Their eyes are opened, but interestingly, they are opened on an absence; for as soon

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86 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 26.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
as Jesus is recognized, “he vanished from their sight.”\textsuperscript{91} This absence, however, is inseparably bound to a presence. For, as Chauvet explains, “this absence knows itself to be henceforth in-dwelt by a presence.”\textsuperscript{92} Taking into consideration the Eucharist, we become aware that Jesus is not immediately present; that is, Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic species does not take the same physical form as his historical body. And yet, as we have seen, Christ’s Real Presence—his “being-for”—is actualized in the Eucharist. Thus, in the Eucharist we have a coinherence of presence and absence since the presence which is actualized has become invisible. This idea of presence and absence becomes the ultimate reinforcement of the concept that Chauvet has been extracting all along. He explains:

Luke’s exemplary lesson is clear: you cannot, he says to his addressees (and therefore to today’s believers), realize the performance of the passage from non-faith to faith, that is, this opening of the eyes which enables you to recognize Jesus as risen and always living, unless you obtain from him the ‘competence’ to accomplish it. For it is he who explains the meaning of the Scriptures; it is he who presides at the breaking of the bread; it is he who continues his service to humans through that of his disciples. To obtain all this, you must disenthral yourselves from your (quite natural) desire for immediate proofs of him. Failing this, you can only reduce him to your own ideology and your own preconceptions: he no longer is for you the living One . . . by submitting him to your desire and your previous convictions, you manipulate him and thus make him a corpse again. . . . In order to accede to faith, the two disciples of Emmaus have had to overturn their own Jewish convictions and accept something monstrous for any good Jew, a Messiah who would have to go through death. You too must convert your desire for immediacy and assent to the mediation of the church.\textsuperscript{93}

Thus, for Chauvet, one’s disposition in walking the Christian journey is of the utmost importance. In my experience of pilgrimage, I learned with some difficulty that it was necessary to let go of expectations. We saw in the first chapter how, despite my best intentions, I entered the Camino with images of what the pilgrimage should be. I struggled

\textsuperscript{91} New American Bible, Lk 24: 31. See Ibid., 21, 26.
\textsuperscript{92} Chauvet, The Sacraments, 21.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 27-28.
throughout the course of my journey with my desire to have control over the outcome of the experience. I learned especially through my struggle with injury that in order to receive the gift that the pilgrimage had to offer, I needed to let go of any preconceived notions I had about what the experience would or should be like. For, as Chauvet expressed above, I found that to approach the experience with an attachment to my own ideology and preconceptions was to limit the way I could encounter God through the experience. In order to receive the fruits of the experience, I had to approach it with a particular disposition: one of openness. Thus, my journey became one in which I was challenged to let go of things like expectation, pride, and envy in order to become open and assent to cooperation with God. This experience illuminates the disposition which is necessary for our encounter with the Eucharist. Indeed, we are called to a posture of openness in our approach to the sacrament (and by extension, our approach to the whole of our Christian journey). As we have seen in the work of Chauvet, we must be emptied of expectation—expectation of immediacy—in order to be open to the gift of the sacrament.

What precisely, then, is the gift which is encountered in the sacrament? Let us again return to the pilgrimage narrative. The first chapter described in some detail the significance of my arrival in Santiago. My experience in the crypt and my encounter with the thurible during the pilgrim’s Mass were two moments of significance which together expressed an important insight. For, it was through the use of the *botafumeiro* during the liturgy of the Eucharist that I came to understand the message at the heart of the crypt: GO BACK AND FIND YOURSELF, BE YOURSELF. I came to understand that the Camino had been a journey of unearthing and rediscovering my identity—one which I had already possessed, but which had been obscured by qualities like fear, pride, control, expectation, and envy (to
name a few). The pilgrimage had become a journey of emptying myself of these things in order to make room for my true, God-given identity to be stirred into flame. This truth was imaged in the botafumeiro—an object which was only capable of spreading its perfume because it was first empty/hollow. For me, this object symbolizes the identity to which I as a Christian was and continue to be called: to follow Christ’s example of self-emptying love. Indeed, I am called to become like this vessel, emptied of those things which obscure my most true God-given identity so that it can be stirred into love and overflow like the incense to enrich those with whom it comes into contact. Thus, at its core, the gift of the pilgrimage was an insight into kenosis.

This notion of identity and kenosis is also central to the Eucharistic encounter. The Eucharist enables our identity to be shaped according to the kenotic qualities of Christ. As we have seen in the work of Chauvet, the grace of the Eucharist is not a “value-object to be received”\(^94\) as it has perhaps been understood in classical theology. Rather, it is “a process of ‘receiving oneself’ as daughter or son, as sister or brother in Christ through the Spirit.”\(^95\) This is the identity which we receive in baptism, and which is more fully brought into being through Eucharist as we are formed more closely to Christ. The Eucharist, then, is what allows us to “go back and find ourselves, become ourselves” as we are exhorted to do by the crypt in Santiago. It is what allows us to more fully and authentically live into our baptismal identity as children of God. Thus, we may come to understand the Christian journey as one from font to altar. It is a journey of theosis in which we come to more fully reflect the divine image. The Eucharist becomes both source and summit of our journey since it not only nourishes us along the way—that is, it begins to effect the union toward

\(^{94}\) Brunck, Liturgy and Life, 81.
\(^{95}\) Chauvet, The Sacraments, 89.
which we strive—but it also serves as a foretaste of eternal life, “when God will be all in all.”

The conception of Eucharist as shaping our identity is evident in the work of systematic theologian Rodica Stoicoiu, whose writing on Eucharist and social justice is highly suggestive of Chauvet’s sacramentology. The kenotic act of Christ described in Philippians 2:6-11 forms the center of her understanding of the Eucharist. Here we see Christ’s self-gift as he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness.” That which is universal choses to become finite as Christ humbles himself to take on humanity and obeys his humanity even to death—incredibly, even to death on a cross. Like Chauvet, Stoicoiu describes the Eucharist in terms of a gift exchange. The freely given gift is the self-emptying (kenotic) act of Christ, given through the love of the Father, so that we may find ourselves returned to God. We receive this gift in a posture of emptiness and openness, powerless before its profundity. In our Eucharistic celebration, Christ’s kenosis confronts us with a new way of being human. Stoicoiu explains:

The Eucharistic gathering is first a community in which we experience this new ontological reality that continues to challenge us by word and gesture, transforming us into an authentic expression of Christ’s (kenotic) way of being human. Eucharist, therefore, is first of all an action, not an object. It is an action expressing the kenotic gift of Christ with the intention of continuing our transformation. Thus transformed we can carry out the mission of Christ in the world . . . we are altered and move out into the world to continue this self-emptying in justice to those in need.

As Stoicoiu explains, the Eucharist is no mere object; rather, it is a relational event which actualizes the “for others” quality of Christ. It demands that we practice self-emptying in

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96 See CCC, para. 1326.; also, NAB 1Cor 15:28.
97 NAB, Phil 2:7.
98 Ibid., Phil 2:8.
100 Ibid., 48.
order to enter into the relational encounter. In this way, the Eucharist begins to form us in light of the kenotic gift of Christ, whose orientation toward what is other becomes reflected in our identity.

This orientation towards others is also a constitutive element in Phillip Sheldrake’s discussion of Eucharistic ethics. Like Stoicoiu, he builds his discussion on the concept of identity. He begins by meditating on the nature of God, who, as Trinity, “is a space where the particularity of the divine persons is shaped by the interrelatedness of their communion...God [is] distinct but not discrete persons-in-communion, [which] suggests a personal space for each that is, at the same time, and indistinguishably, a ‘space for the other’.”

As images of God, we are unique particularities, and yet we are also fundamentally oriented toward what is other than ourselves. Sheldrake understands this coinherence of personal and collective to be encompassed in the term catholicity. For Sheldrake, catholicity refers to the Christian call to be open to all humanity, bringing together its many aspects, including those which must be held in tension. Catholicity does not involve a process of making all uniform; rather, it is a drawing together of particularities to make up a multifaceted collective. Through catholicity, identities are recognized for their particularity as well as their role within the community. Sheldrake points out that the Christian community might be said to have a vocation to catholicity.

This idea of catholicity is central to Sheldrake’s conception of Eucharistic ethics. He argues that the Eucharist is not merely a place of Christian piety; rather, it is the enactment

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101 Phillip Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 68.
102 Ibid., 72-73.
103 Ibid., 73.
of the special identity of the Christian community—an identity which is characterized by its call to catholicity. In the Eucharist, God is made present. As we have seen, God is the source and summit of true catholicity because of God’s ability to hold universality and particularity in tension. Through the Eucharist we are brought into the presence of perfected catholicity. In this transforming presence, the Eucharist “demands that the presumed identity of all people be radically reconstructed.”

We are identified as members of the Body of Christ and called to ‘make space’ in love for the other. We are brought into the presence of One who exists as persons-in-communion and given the grace to be more closely conformed to God, reoriented toward that which is other. In other words, “to practice the Eucharist implies radical transformation of human ‘location’ such that it is no longer to be centred on the individual ego but discovered in being a-person-for-others.”

Sheldrake points out that such a reformation of identity is no easy task. It requires honest recognition, painful dispossession, and fearless surrender as participants risk displacement from their bounded social and spiritual locations. Here again we see that the Eucharist becomes a participation in Christ’s self-emptying kenosis. Such spiritual displacement, however, brings about a Body of Christ in which “people are not opposed or juxtaposed but precisely allowed space to be identified as who they are . . . able to ‘do’ or ‘practice’ themselves in all their specificity.” In other words, each person is a unique manifestation of relationship with God. The kenotic encounter of the Eucharist neither

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104 Ibid., 75.
105 Ibid., 76.
106 Ibid., 74.
107 Ibid., 77.
108 Ibid., 76, 81-82.
109 Ibid., 77.
demands abandonment of our unique identity, nor sets us in opposition with one another; rather, if we allow it to, the Eucharist becomes a space in which we are enabled to live out our unique, God-given identity in a more authentic manner.

For Sheldrake, the Eucharist is an ethical space in which participants are identified as imaging a God whose very nature is predicated on being in relationship with that which is other . . . who furthermore poured himself out for others. Through the Eucharist our identity is shaped by the catholicity of God to become a kenotic outpouring to the world. Like Sheldrake, Godin sees the sacrament of Eucharist as a space in which we encounter that which is other. For Godin, the Eucharist is a space of attention and presence to Christ. He explains:

In the sacrament, we attend to the presence of Christ in the elements, in each other, in the sharing with one another. We attend to his present absence. Liturgy is the structure of our attention, our regard, woven around this present absence. This attention does not only form people ethically, it also constitutes ethical action. For in attending to the one in whom heaven and earth meet, coming to the point of incarnation, we come to a sacrament of difference, of meeting the other, so that the Eucharist is a sacrament of reconciliation—indeed, of consummation.110

For Godin, the attention that we give to the present absence of Christ is manifested in our attention to one another.111 This attentiveness means that we recognize the person we are encountering for all his/her particularity so that authentic sharing can take place. Godin explains that “there can be no sharing unless there is another with whom you can share and who can share with you. Otherwise there is just consumption. In the Eucharist . . . we consume Christ so that we do not consume each other.”112 In this way the Eucharist exemplifies a space of authentic relationship. Through our encounter with Christ in the

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110 Godin, “That the Sacrament is Always There,” 54.
111 Ibid., 58.
112 Ibid., 58.
sacrament, we encounter others and see them in their truest dignity while we are simultaneously seen in ours. Attending to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, according to Godin, means that we are “standing in a space where interest in other people can grow, and where you in all your joy and sorrow are open to their sight.”¹¹³ We see and are seen. We become vulnerable and meet others in their vulnerability. We touch and are touched, and in this sharing we love. For love is a passion for the presence of another in which we come to know even as we are known.¹¹⁴

So far in this section of the chapter we have explored the sacramental encounter of Eucharist. We have seen that when understood in light of Chauvet’s sacramental theology, the Eucharist is an action—a symbolic gift exchange characterized by participation on the parts of both giver and receiver. In this way, the sacrament is relational, not mechanical; for it is not a mere process by which the participant receives grace, but a symbolic exchange in which gift is freely given, received, and reciprocated. Thus far we have discussed the sacramental gift and our reception of the gift. Yet, as we have seen there is a third dimension to Chauvet’s gift theory: the return gift. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ means something; that is, it has an effect in the same way that coming to the end of my pilgrim journey has had an effect on me. For, although I had come to the end of my physical journey and arrived at my destination, the experience did not simply stop in Santiago or Finisterre. I once heard the Camino likened to a puzzle whose pieces were collected along the walk, but whose assembly does not take place until after the journey ends. I have found this analogy to be extraordinarily true, for it is an experience that I am continuing to process.

¹¹³ Ibid., 60-61.
¹¹⁴ Ibid.
and unpack nearly four years after it originally took place. This illustrates an interesting tension between the “already” of arriving and the “not yet” of the experience as its meaning has continued to unfold. The pilgrimage has had a lingering effect on my life, which might be evidenced by many things, not the least of which is this thesis project.

Similarly, the reception of the Eucharist has a lingering effect on its recipient. In his text *Life as Eucharist*, Norman Pittenger examines the relationship between identity and action. He explains that our doing follows upon our coming to know who we are and what we are capable of becoming. He rationalizes that the Eucharist “…is primarily concerned with giving God the glory—and to give God the glory is to make us what we are intended to be: his sons [and daughters], his beloved children. When that understanding is seen as central…the Christian will want to bring everything else into conformity with that ennobling vision.” Thus, our activity actualizes our identity. Because we act out of our identities, the identity formation that takes place in the Eucharist implies formation of activity as well.

We must acknowledge, however, that the reverse is also true: our activity is formative to our identity. We have seen, for example, that the activity of participating in the Eucharistic meal is formative to our Christian identity. Activity and identity may therefore be understood as interrelated, much in the same way that liturgy and pilgrimage have been discussed as interrelated. Like diagrams 1 and 2 in which pilgrimage informs liturgy and vice versa, we might say that identity informs action and action informs identity. What is of importance here is the indissoluble connection between Eucharistic encounter and the life lived. It is in this lived dimension of the Eucharistic encounter that we find

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116 Ibid., 82.
reflected the third movement of the Emmaus story: ethics. Receiving the particular gift of Eucharist leads to a life of discipleship. Indeed, it is the ethical living of our lives which constitutes our return-gift in the symbolic gift exchange described by Chauvet. Theologian M. Shawn Copeland expresses this ethical dimension in a way that seems to elucidate Chauvet’s sacramental vision:

In Christian worship, Eucharist commemorates the meal that Jesus ate with his friends on Passover only hours before he died...The words and gestures of Jesus at the Passover meal and its bloody aftermath embody the etymology of the Greek verb *eucharistein*, that is, ‘proper conduct of one who is the object of a gift.’

The fullest meaning of Eucharist goes well beyond a mere attitude of thankfulness and presses with eager yearning for concrete outward evidence of gratitude that indicates the gift is ‘effective and present.’ Eucharist is that inalienable gift that anchors believers in time, connects them one to another as well as their origin. . . . [It] is of inestimable value: no rate of exchange, no price can be set on the gracious, gratuitous, unmerited gift that Eucharist is. No medium of exchange can calibrate the meaning of Christ as God’s gift or the meaning of Christ’s self-gift in bread and wine.

The sacramental meal of the Christian church grows from these notions of thanksgiving and gift. In this meal, the community of the faithful acknowledges, blesses, and praises the gratuitous gift of Jesus Christ. His ministry and his being effect for us the very conditions of the possibility of claiming the gift of his body, person, and spirit; to dwell within the horizon of the *magnalia Dei*. Thus we embrace his Father as our own and seal our pledge to incarnate the triune love of God through acts of concrete compassion and solidarity in the here-and-now.117

Just as arrival in Santiago held in tension the “already” and “not yet” of the experience, so the “here and now” of Eucharist locates us in a liminal space between “already” and “not yet.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger expresses this tension in his discussion on time and space in the liturgy. He explains that, “the New Testament is a peculiar kind of ‘in-between’, a mixture of ‘already and not yet’. The empirical conditions of life in this world are still in force, but they have been burst open, and must be more and more burst

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open, in preparation for the final fulfillment already inaugurated in Christ.”

This progressive “bursting open” occurs through the renewing effects of the liturgy and our subsequent ethical living. Thus, our liturgical participation not only effects our own individual pilgrimage of Christian living; it also has an eschatological dimension. For, through our reception of Eucharist and consequent ethical living, we incarnate the gift that Jesus made of himself. Our ethics of service become a sacrament of Christ’s presence. As Christ is increasingly made present in the world, he increasingly permeates it, becoming “all in all.” Borrowing the Neoplatonic model of exitus-reditus which has been adopted by many theologians, we see here a kind of cosmic journey in which “God in his goodness moves out into the multiplicity of the world and then returns, enfolding everything into unity.” We are reminded by this “exit-return” model that we come from God and that our human existence is “a journeying back to God” where the human person is “set between God as both Origin and Goal.” Here again we see that God is source and summit of our journey.

Taking the Emmaus account as our guiding narrative, this chapter has begun to explore the way in which liturgy and pilgrimage interrelate. This relationship, as we have seen, is not a clear, correlative, and linear one; rather, it is multifaceted and somewhat fluid. I have nevertheless endeavored to show that these two practices can be mutually enlightening. Both practices can be characterized by the notion of journey (figure 3) and

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119 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 27.
120 Ibid.
121 NAB, 1Cor 15:28.
122 Andrew Louth, Maximus the Confessor (London: Routledge, 1996), 75.
exhibit certain elements of the Emmaus story which, according to Chauvet, also structure
the Christian life: Scripture, sacrament, and ethics. Taking into account the truth that the
Eucharist serves as the source and summit of our Christian journey, we examined this
particular aspect of the Emmaus story more closely. For, the breaking of the bread serves
as the pivotal point of the entire narrative. As a sacramental reality, the Eucharist is liminal
in its very nature, holding within itself both humanity/finitude and divinity/infinitude. As
such, it becomes a particular location in which we may access the divine.

Working particularly from the sacramental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, whose
understanding of the Eucharist is constructed on the notion of a symbolic gift exchange, we
come to see the Eucharist as a place of relational encounter rather than one of automated
grace. Chauvet describes an exchange in which gift is freely given, received, and
reciprocated.

Because Chauvet’s understanding of the Eucharistic encounter is much more
dynamic than previous models, we understand ourselves to have a greater participatory
role in the sacrament. We come to understand the Eucharist as the giving of a divine self-
gift—the actualization of Christ’s being-for—which demands from us a response of
acceptance. In this freely given gift, we encounter the Triune God, whose nature is one of
distinct-but-not-separate persons in communion. Here we find a coinherence of personal
and collective as the inner life of God illustrates an identity in which particularity is “utterly
dependent on what is other.”124 In other words, the personhoods of Father, Son and Spirit
are predicated on their relationship with one another. This catholic and kenotic character of
God becomes a radical interruption at the heart of our individual lives and challenges our

124 Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 68.
self-containment.\textsuperscript{125} Thus in the space of the Eucharist we are pushed beyond ourselves to encounter what is other. We are reoriented from ego-centeredness to become a person-for-others. In this symbolic exchange, our identity is reshaped according to the kenosis of Christ and we come to more closely reflect the for-others quality of our Lord. \textit{We become what we eat}. It is this identity which refers us to our task in history.\textsuperscript{126} Put simply, the Eucharist conforms our identity to Christ, and our lives are lived from this identity. Our ethical living becomes our return-gift.

The movements of gift, reception, and reciprocation seem to loosely correspond to the three aspects that Chauvet uses to structure the Christian journey: Scripture, sacrament, and ethics. Subsequently, the gift exchange which takes place at the level of the particular liturgy, as well as over the course of time\textsuperscript{127} can be likened to a journey or pilgrimage whose destination is union with God (figure 1). For, through the formation we receive in our encounters with Scripture and (especially) sacrament, we are prompted to live our lives in a manner that allows the presence of Christ to increasingly permeate the world.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Brunck, \textit{Liturgy and Life}, 81.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Here I am referring to the eschatological dimension.
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CHAPTER THREE

THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE: EXPLORING PILGRIMAGE AS A SACRAMENTAL REALITY

As we saw, the previous chapter explored the interrelationship of liturgy and pilgrimage. It was the actual, concrete experience of pilgrimage described in chapter one which allowed the practice to develop as a framework for understanding and approaching the liturgy. In this way, chapters one and two may be understood as evidence of the effectiveness of embodied practice. The focus of this chapter will be on the role of embodiment in Christian practice. Taking into consideration the accounts of creation, the Incarnation, Christ’s institution of the Eucharist, and his resurrection and appearance on the road to Emmaus, I will use Scripture and the work of sacramental theologians to discuss the necessity of mediation and the role of particularity in coming to know that which is infinite. I will examine the ways in which embodiment forms the heart of Christianity and sacramental theology, and explore the particular role that the body plays in receiving and mediating the spiritual. Building on this discussion, I will consider the role of embodiment in the practices of liturgy and pilgrimage, examining the expressive and formative dimensions of embodiment in each practice. Although I recognize that pilgrimage is not a necessary Christian practice, I will suggest that, because the spiritual is experienced through the corporal, the actual, embodied practice of pilgrimage can concretize the concept of pilgrimage and consequently become a useful paradigm through which to approach Eucharistic theology.
MATTER MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF EMBODIMENT AND MATERIAL REALITY IN CHRISTIANITY

Material has always been crucial to Christianity. This is not meant to claim that the Christian faith places any kind of emphasis on the accumulation of the material—in fact, Christ commands his disciples to do quite the opposite.128 What I mean here is that one of Christianity’s distinguishing features is its acknowledgement of the role that material reality takes in mediating the infinite/spiritual. Where some religious traditions exist primarily in spiritual realms, Christianity is by its very nature a very fleshly religion. It is visibly located in space and history. Its faith is constructed around a doctrine of Incarnation in which God took on humanity in all its tangibility and by this action elevated the dignity of all created material. For this reason, all material reality has the potential to be a channel of grace. Thus, material reality is not only present but central to the practice of the Christian faith and worship.

From its origins, the Church has held a sacramental understanding of reality. Let us examine more closely what is meant by the term sacrament. Drawing in a particular way upon the work of theologians Louis-Marie Chauvet, Roberto Goizueta, Anthony Godzieba, and Herbert Vorgrimler we come to understand that sacraments are concrete and particular realities which provide an access point to the transcendent and bridge the disparity between God and humanity by mediating and embodying the self-communication of God. They are not vague and general ideas, but are actual, tangible experiences whereby the universal and transcendent is made accessible through that which is particular and corporeal. These sacramental theologians recognize that “it is through concrete corporeal

128 See Mt. 19:21 and Lk 12:33.
mediations that the spiritual is communicated and lived.”

Indeed, God is so wholly different and other than humanity that there exists a disparity which would be impossible to reconcile without mediation. Vorgrimler speaks to this when he points out that “God’s relationship to human beings cannot be other than ‘sacramental’ . . . Because of the impossibility of entering into immediate communication, God’s self-revelation to human beings requires a mediation that lies within their receptive capacity.” In other words, if God desires to reveal God’s self to human beings, then God must create a symbolic expression in order to be made present and real to humans since the divine is so wholly different than humanity.

Godzieba explains that sacraments provide “…an ‘access-point’ where the revelation of God meets the embodied self’s transcendental yearning and intentional strivings for fulfillment.” In this way, sacraments function as something of a contact point with the divine whereby God uses particular, created reality to mediate God’s presence. Because all that is spiritual can only be encountered through that which is corporal, sacraments are always embodied. Working from the truth that the spiritual is encountered through the corporal, Godzieba develops the notion of a sacramental imagination. Through the sacramental imagination, we envision reality “through the eyes of faith” and recognize that “the finite can indeed mediate the infinite, that all aspects of created being can mediate grace...that materiality and history together are the means by which God has chosen to

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reveal God’s self.” For, as theologian Roberto Goizueta points out, “Implicit in the definition of sacrament is the presupposition that the concrete, particular object or entity that embodies the universal reality is in fact historically concrete and particular.”

Godzieba further clarifies this idea by explaining that “the crucial claim is that material ‘stuff’ has the potential to be a channel of grace, that creation necessarily mediates the presence of God that enables our participation in the divine life, on God’s initiative. . . . [that we] recognize transcendence in immanence.” Thus, when we see the world with the eyes of faith, we come to understand that all outward, created reality is capable of being appropriated by God for the transmission of the inward/invisible reality of God’s grace.

This notion of sacramentality is deeply rooted in Scripture and taken up in the Tradition of the Church. The Creation narrative found in the book of Genesis, for example, confirms the fundamental goodness of created reality and history—a claim which is intensified by the doctrine of Incarnation. Reflecting on this truth, John of Damascus wrote, “I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation.” Centuries later, Godzieba continues to speak to the intensified sacred potentiality of creation when he explains that the Incarnation is “the Word’s embodiment and God’s imaginative judgement as to the

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132 Ibid., 16.
135 We find a similar understanding in the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who asserts that everything is sacred for those willing to see it. For Teilhard, all reality is part of the milieu of God. See The Divine Milieu (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001).
potential range of materiality . . . locat[ing] [the] divine presence somewhere.” The Incarnation, then, “opens up the materiality of the particular as the arena of . . . receptivity . . . that the finite can indeed mediate the infinite.” Wendy M. Wright further clarifies this point as she writes:

God is not met in our lives solely in the solitary one-on-one encounter or in some disembodied arena clearly demarcated from the fierce, conflicting pressures of daily life. To put it in the language of Christian theology, the mystery of the incarnation itself—God becoming human—pushes us toward the insight that to encounter the infinite one must go through the finite—not around or below or above the finite—not by passing or eliminating the finite but going through it, in all its unique, unrepeatable particularity. The finite and the infinite are thus simultaneously encountered. The startling claim of the incarnation, fully human, fully divine, becomes a lens through which all created reality can be apprehended. The finite, fleshly world is the privileged place of encounter with God.

As Wright illustrates, a sacramental understanding of reality is heavily predicated on the Incarnation. For, through the Incarnation, God for the first time “becomes intimately associated with humanity because of the divine appropriation of the human body and condition.” Thus, the Incarnation becomes the crucial historical event which allows the concrete, particular, and material to become a receptor and mediator of the infinite. This theology of particularity is found in the work of medieval theologian and philosopher Duns Scotus. For Scotus, the Incarnation is “‘the highest good in the whole of creation’ and ‘was immediately foreseen from all eternity by God as a good proximate to the end.’ . . . [that is,] God’s purpose for creation. This purpose . . . is deification or a sharing in God’s own life. [For] God’s life is so fruitful that it constantly and inherently seeks expression in the

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139 Ibid., 24.
141 McDannell, Material Christianity, 5.
particularities of the created order.” Scotus perceives that God is in every particular, each of which uniquely embodies its Creator.

Perhaps nowhere in Scripture do we find a clearer example of embodiment than in the account of the Incarnation found in the fourth gospel. The gospel of John describes the embodiment of divinity in human material reality using very direct language: “And the Word became flesh.” God allows God’s self to take on created reality and become enfleshed. As theologian Colleen McDannell points out, “Jesus of the Gospels is an object of touch and of vision.” And yet, he is mediator and revealer of spiritual reality. We are told just a few verses later, “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.” We see this revelatory function of Christ throughout the gospel of John. For example, when Jesus is questioned by Thomas during the Last Supper discourse about knowing the way to the Father, he responds by stating, “‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’” This notion is again reflected in the epistle to the Colossians: “[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Christ, because of his enfleshment, makes visible the invisible reality of the divine. He is the sacrament of God, mediating in particular time and space the infinite reality of God.

To the extent that material reality continues to mediate the infinite, the Incarnation is an ongoing event. In this sense, the Incarnation has a twofold meaning, referring “both to

143 Ibid., 23-25.
146 *New American Bible*, Jn 1:18.
147 Ibid., Jn 14:6, 9.
148 Ibid., Col 1:15.
the act by which the Word of God assumes human nature and to the abiding state that results from the Word’s having assumed human nature.”\textsuperscript{149} The Incarnation thus provides the necessary condition for an “abiding state whereby humanity, precisely in its embodied subjectivity, is deemed a fitting locus for God’s revelation.”\textsuperscript{150} In other words, God became fully incarnate once in history in the person of Christ, but continues to be made present through the material bodies of humankind throughout history.\textsuperscript{151} For this reason, the human body can also be understood as sacramental. We will return to this point in the next section of this chapter.

Although the Incarnation holds the greatest theological argument for the importance of matter in Christianity and the reality of embodiment in the Christian faith, we can look to Scripture to find further examples. As we have seen, Christ himself provides an example of embodiment; but more than that, Christ chose embodiment as the means of establishing the tradition of the Christian faith. Let us look by way of example at the institution narratives found in the three synoptic gospels. Mt 26:26-30 and Mk 14:22-26 provide nearly identical accounts of Christ’s institution of the Eucharist. In both accounts, Jesus “took bread” and “took wine” and commands his disciples to eat and drink. In Matthew, Christ says of the bread, “‘Take and eat; this is my body.’”\textsuperscript{152} and of the wine, “‘Drink from it, all of you,/ for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} See Griffith, “Spirituality and the Body,” 69. The Church has a tradition of understanding humanity as being a sacrament of Christ. See Henri de Lubac’s discussion of Christ as sacrament of God and Church as sacrament of Christ in \textit{Catholicism} (London: Burns, Oats, and Washbourne, 1950), 29. This discussion is picked up by many subsequent theologians and eventually taken up in several Vatican II documents, such as \textit{Lumen Gentium} 9 and 48, \textit{Sacrosanctum concilium} 26 and \textit{Gaudium et spes}, 42. For a more complete discussion, see “The Church as Sacrament” in Avery Cardinal Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church} (New York: Random House, 2002), 55-67.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{New American Bible}, Mt 26:26, italics added.
of many for the forgiveness of sins.” Similarly, Mark’s Christ commands, “‘Take it; this is my body.’” and “‘This is my blood of the covenant which will be shed for many.’” The gospel of Luke provides a similar account, but with perhaps even greater clarity: “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant of my blood, which will be shed for you.’” In all of these instances, Jesus takes particular, material reality—this bread and this cup—and appropriates them for spiritual use. The particular and material become substances which arbitrate the universal reality of Christ’s body and blood. For, in each account, we are unquestioningly told that the bread and the wine are body and blood; Christ does not say “this is my spirit.” Thus, the very tangible realities of bread and wine embody Christ in perhaps an uncomfortably graphic way. Furthermore, as Luke’s account makes clear, we are told to “do this” in remembrance of him. We are not asked to simply remember or think of Christ; rather, we are commanded to perform and partake in this particular ritual meal, one in which the material embodies the spiritual.

We can discern another example of Christ’s use of embodiment if we return to the Emmaus story which has become so integral to this study. First we find that the risen Christ is not only alive, but embodied. While the disciples are on the road to Emmaus, we are told that “Jesus himself drew near and walked with them” although they were prevented from recognizing him. Just after their encounter with Christ, the disciples on the road to Emmaus

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153 Ibid., Mt 26: 27-28, italics added.
154 Ibid., Mk 14:22, italics added.
155 Ibid., Mk 14:24, italics added.
156 Ibid., Lk 22:19-20, italics added.
157 Ibid., Lk 24:15, italics added.
return to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples of their encounter. The Scripture tells us that “while they were still speaking about this”\footnote{Ibid., Lk 24:36} Christ once again appears in their midst, and in response to their astonishment commands them to examine his hands and feet: “‘Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.’”\footnote{Ibid., Lk 24:39} Furthermore, he asks them for something to eat, and eats the baked fish he is given in front of them.\footnote{Ibid., Lk 24:41-43} As we can see, the risen Christ of the Emmaus story is very concrete, appearing not simply as a resurrected spirit but an embodied being.

The encounter of the Emmaus disciples with the risen Christ once again illustrates the sacramental notion that the universal is met through particularities. Indeed, this specific set of disciples meet the risen Christ who is particularized in space and time in the physical person that they meet along the road. This distinct encounter effects conversion among the disciples, who initially express their dismay at the events that have transpired regarding the death of Jesus the Nazarene and disbelief of stories that have been circulating regarding his resurrection. The disciple Cleopas explains to the stranger that “‘Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.’”\footnote{Ibid., Lk 24:22-24} Jesus chastises them for their slowness to believe and proceeds to interpret the Scriptures, pointing to all that referred to him within the sacred texts.\footnote{Ibid., Lk 24:25-27} When he is invited to stay
with the disciples and joins them at table, we are told that he “took bread, said the blessing, 
broke it, and gave it to them.”\textsuperscript{163} This action becomes key to what follows:

With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from 
their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] 
while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’ So they set out 
at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven 
and those with them who were saying, ‘The Lord has truly been raised and has 
appeared to Simon!’ Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and 
how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.\textsuperscript{164}

The exact actions of taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it to the disciples— 
four actions which exactly mirror those used to institute the Eucharist during his last 
supper\textsuperscript{165}—allow Jesus to be recognized. There is something about this particular set of 
actions which concretize the encounter that the disciples have had with Christ on the road 
and open their eyes to his identity. This is not a universal action, but a specific, concrete 
gesture which happens in a particular time and place. It is this exact encounter which 
allows the disciples to recognize Christ and come to know the universal truth that Christ is 
alive. The disciples move from dismay and disbelief at the beginning of the account to joy 
and belief as they set out to share their encounter with those who have been proclaiming 
the resurrection of the Lord. Thus, Christ uses embodiment and particularity to encounter 
individuals and effect their transformation as they are drawn toward the universal.

\textbf{EMBODIMENT: THE BODY AS SACRAMENTAL REALITY}

We have seen that a sacramental understanding of reality is integral to Catholic 
Christianity. This sacramental worldview recognizes that that which is infinite must be 
mediated by the finite, for we can only come to know the universal through the particular.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., Lk 24:30
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., Lk 24:31-35
\textsuperscript{165} See Lk 22:19
The human person provides perhaps one of the most fundamental instances of material reality functioning in a sacramental manner. Material and spiritual coinhere in the body and what is corporal mediates spiritual. Our historically concrete and particular bodies and our lived experiences become a location in which to encounter the infinite God, and in this way they are sacramental. Writing about the sacramental qualities of the human person,

Goizueta reasons:

One cannot love the universal and supernatural if one cannot love the particular and natural—and to love these precisely as particular and natural... If a central aspect... is the affirmation of the intrinsic value of the concrete and particular as a prerequisite for an encounter with the spiritual and universal, this affirmation reflects an underlying understanding of the human person. ... [for] To suggest that the particular mediates the universal is to suggest that there is no such thing as an isolated, individual entity that is not intrinsically related to others: every human person is a concrete, particular, and unique mediation of the universal. In other words, every ‘individual’ is a particular, unique mediation of universal humanity, universal creation, and, in the last analysis, a unique mediation of the Absolute. Each person (precisely as a person) is defined and constituted by his or her relationships, both personal and impersonal, natural and supernatural, material and spiritual.166

Pointing out that “there is no such thing as an isolated individual who is not intrinsically defined by his or her relationship to others,”167 Goizueta argues that a person is inherently relational. For Goizueta, each person is a particular embodiment of all of the relationships and communities to which he or she belongs: family, friends, community, ethnicity, culture, creation, God.168 Every person mediates a network of relationships, including relationship with the divine. For, created in the image and likeness of God, every person is a concrete and unique embodiment of relationship with Creator. As such, each person is sacramental.

166 Goizueta, Caminemos con Jesus, 49-50.
167 Ibid., 50.
168 Ibid.
Although sacramentality has been a crucial component of the Catholic worldview, this awareness has not always been applied to the Church’s understanding of the human person. This is perhaps because the history of Western Christianity has at times been clouded by “shortcomings, unfortunate consequences, and even tragic results of historical attitudes toward the body.” Such shortcomings have been reinforced by modernity’s propensity for dividing spiritual from corporal. Although signs of such a division can certainly be found in the works of pre-modern authors, modern philosophy brought about a deep epistemological shift because of its emphasis on instrumental reasoning and cognitive classification.

Liturgical theologian David Torevell explains:

> It is now generally accepted that one of the dominant epistemological shifts, which happened during modernity, was a move away from somatic experience towards cognitive assimilation. . . . As a result of the influences of the Protestant tradition, Cartesian and Kantian philosophy and modernity’s overriding association of progress with reason, the ‘modern’ moral self rested on a hierarchical division between the body and the mind. The moral order could only be established if the rational will was able to delimit and stabilize the interruptions of the dissolute body.

Modernity’s emphasis on reason set up a dichotomy between the body and the mind. The intellect and spirit were associated with the mind, all of which was thought to be detached and set over and above the emotions and the body. Tovell describes this situation as a hegemony in which reason “created an internally constructed moral vision separated off from the fleshy body and ‘nature’. The modern self, able to rise above its sensual nature,

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170 See for example Colleen M. Griffith, “Spirituality and the Body” in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice* ed. by Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 70-75. Here Griffith discusses two major historical portrayals of the body: hierarchical ordering and dualism. The former is evident in the writings of Augustine, who already displays dualistic tendencies because he describes personhood as a hierarchy in which the soul is ranked above the body.


172 Ibid.
set the moral agenda in relation to its own disengagement.”

In other words, a dualism was established in which the “I” was seen as a psychological center of the self, which possessed a body able to be used and controlled by the mind.

This isolation of rational from emotional and by extension spiritual from corporal proves problematic. According to Victor Sidler, this sort of dualism “fail[s] to recognize the dignity of our emotional lives and so fails to reinstate the subject in her or his fullness as an embodied mental, emotional, and spiritual being.” Although a dualistic rendering of soul/mind in relation to the body is no longer promulgated in current philosophical and scientific communities, it is the most common theory of mind in the public at large and in many ways remains entrenched in Western culture and religious traditions. However, contemporary sacramental theology has proven hopeful in perhaps providing a means of moving past this type of spiritual/corporal dualism.

As sacramental theology of the second half of the 20th century developed, it moved past understanding the sacraments as objects which dispense grace and instead moved towards embracing them as relational events which serve as embodied encounters with God. This development seems to have coincided with a more integrated understanding of body and spirit. Theologians like Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner opened sacramental theology to a field of inquiry which included the full range of human experience, including the embodied and symbolic ways in which God could be encountered.

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173 Ibid., 28.
175 Victor Sidler, Recovering the Self: Morality and Social Theory (London: Routelidge, 1994), 159.
in the world. This recognition of the full human experience as being capable of
embodying an encounter with God makes evident the impossibility of a separation of
spiritual from corporal. Edward Schillebeeckx argues, for example, that “there is no such
thing as a ‘free spiritual act’ that is ‘achieved in pure interiority’ prior to or independent of
the body.” Indeed, the body is the location point for the spiritual since “the most spiritual
of realities can only be experienced or known in and through the materiality of our
bodies.” This recognition represents an important shift from previous models, for
historical conceptions of the human person as either a hierarchical or dualistic ordering of
body and soul seem to understand the body as a mere afterthought or adornment of the
soul. Schillebeeckx represents a theological shift which gives greater prominence to the
body because of its role as the locality of the soul.

As we have seen in the work of Goizueta, Chauvet, Godzieba, and Griffith,
contemporary theologians have embraced a greater theological commitment to the
embodied character of our sanctification, recognizing that “there is no disembodied realm
where we are being saved.” This shift, however, continues to be held in tension with
previous perceptions of the body in relationship to the mind/soul which linger in the
popular imagination. This tension often presents itself in pastoral settings as two entirely
different approaches to corporal reality. Bruce Morrill explains: “the diverse complexity of
our bodily living [can be embraced] as opportunities for sacramentally encountering the
gracious favor of God or [can be suppressed] as an obstacle to what is ‘truly’ holy and

\[178\] Ibid.
\[179\] Ibid., 2.
\[180\] Ibid., 3.
spiritual.”183 Perhaps these contrasting approaches can be better understood in light of Chauvet. Chauvet makes the insightful comment that “each of us does not have a body but, rather, is a body.”184 Of the two approaches mentioned above, it seems those viewing their bodies as an obstacle to be suppressed might understand themselves to have a body, while those viewing their bodies as an opportunity to embrace would perceive themselves as being a body. This second, more integrated/reconciled interpretation of body and soul makes room for a more holistic conception of the human person which allows the body to be understood sacramentally. Rather than perceiving the physicality of the body as an obstacle to be overcome, the body is appreciated as a holy vessel which mediates the sacred. Chauvet explains:

Are not all these things the ‘flesh’ which Christ assumed to save it [sic]? On the basis of faith in the incarnation of God in Jesus, Christians confess that they go to God not in spite of the heavy ambiguity of their humanity but at the very core of it; not in spite of their bodies . . . but in their very bodies which through faith in Christ have become ‘temples of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor 6:19; 3:16); therefore, not in spite of historical and social mediations but within them . . . Among the various mediations of the faith, the sacraments are the highest figure of the impossibility for the faith to be lived in what is most spiritual in it . . . outside the most ‘bodily’ and most ‘religious.’ The sacraments thus serve as a buffer which repels every temptation Christians might have to ignore body, history, society in order to enter without any mediation into communication with God . . . The sacraments state that the word of God wants to enter our bodies, that is, our lives, and that for anyone in-dwelt by the Spirit the road of the God of Jesus Christ necessarily uses the human road.185

Taking into consideration the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, we see the dignity of the human body is reinforced:

Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator. For this

183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., 12.
reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.\textsuperscript{186}

Here we find that the council fathers address the problematic relationship of Western Christianity with the body. While thus far arguments for the sacramental nature of the body have primarily been predicated on the implications of the Incarnation, the selected text from GS provides greater depth to discussion of the body, building its point about the relevance of bodily life on creation and eschatology.

In order to clarify claims which have hitherto been made regarding the problematic attitudes of Christianity towards the body, it is perhaps necessary to consider the sentences which follow the above excerpt from GS: “Nevertheless, wounded by sin, man experiences rebellious stirrings in his body. But the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God in his body and forbid it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart.”\textsuperscript{187} Initially this statement might lead one to wonder whether the council is reinforcing the very attitude toward the body which has been critiqued throughout the course of this section. It is plausible that this statement was derived from something like Romans 7:14-8:13 which very much sets up a dichotomy between spirit and body, describing the latter as something to be conquered. Given its Scriptural foundation, it must be acknowledged that humanity has indeed been wounded by sin; to ignore this would be to overlook a crucial truth. Because the corporal is fallen, the corporal experience necessarily includes sin.

Yet, we can perhaps hold in tension this seeming conflict between perceptions of the body as location of sin and mediator of the divine. Let us revisit the second sentence from GS quoted above: “But the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God \textit{in his}


\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
body and forbid it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart.” Whether choosing to use his or her body to “glorify God” or “serve the evil inclinations of the heart,” a person is nevertheless acting in the body. Thus, the body is not something to be overcome; it is something to be acted through. Reading further in GS, we are told: “by his incarnation the Father’s Word assumed, and sanctified through His cross and resurrection, the whole of man, body and soul, and through that totality the whole of nature created by God for man’s use. Thanks to this belief, the Church can anchor the dignity of human nature against all tides of opinion, for example those which undervalue the human body or idolize it.”

Here, we see that the document calls for a balanced understanding of the body which neither undervalues nor idolizes.

Taking into account this call for balance, we must acknowledge that this chapter has focused primarily on bringing forth theological arguments which might offset an imbalance in the direction of undervaluing the body; however, it is also important to recognize that a second imbalance may occur in which the body is idolized or glorified. It is crucial, therefore, to point out that the project of this chapter has not been to idolize the body; rather, it has been to affirm the body as (to borrow a phrase from Godzieba) an “access point” to the transcendent. Holding the two understandings of the body in tension, we can acknowledge the body as wounded while affirming its goodness. Even as the body is both wounded and good, it is a receptor of the divine. It is the concrete and particular location in which we are enabled to experience the universal and spiritual. To repeat a truth which has been previously stated: “the most spiritual of realities can only be experienced or known in

188 Ibid., italics added.
189 Ibid., para. 41.
and through the materiality of our bodies”\textsuperscript{190} for “it is through concrete corporeal mediations that the spiritual is communicated and lived.”\textsuperscript{191}

LITURGY AND PILGRIMAGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF EMBODIED PRACTICE

We have seen that it is through our lived experience—and by extension our bodies—that Christ continues to be incarnated, for our bodies provide a vehicle through which Christ may be made present to the world. Furthermore, it is through the particularity of our lived bodily experiences that the spiritual is encountered. As Wright reminds us, “to encounter the infinite one must go through the finite—not around or below or above the finite—not by passing or eliminating the finite but going through it, in all its unique, unrepeateable particularity.”\textsuperscript{192} For this reason, embodied practice is key to our faith tradition. This section will examine more closely the importance of embodied practice, examining in a particular way the role of embodiment in the liturgy and in the practice of pilgrimage.

In her work exploring material Christianity, Colleen McDannell points out that religion must be \textit{practiced}, “as one would practice the piano in order to become a competent pianist.”\textsuperscript{193} This statement indicates that there is a performative dimension to religion; we do not simply think about it (although we do this) . . . we \textit{practice} it. This means that we engage with tangibilities: concrete objects, specific rituals, particular gestures, etc. McDannell goes on to explain that “the symbol systems of a particular religious language are not merely handed down, they must be learned through doing, seeing, and touching. . . .

\textsuperscript{190} Morrill, ”Theory and Practice of the Body,” 3.
\textsuperscript{191} Boeve, “Theology in a Postmodern Context,” 22.
\textsuperscript{192} Wright, “Family Life as Spiritual Practice,” 87-88.
\textsuperscript{193} McDannell, \textit{Material Christianity}, 2.
Experiencing the physical dimension of religion helps bring about religious thinking.”\textsuperscript{194}

Thus, the embodied practices of Christianity are not only expressive, but formative as well. Since this study is concerned in a particular way with the liturgy, let us begin by examining the role that embodiment plays in the liturgy. Perhaps the single most critical point to emerge from the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council was its call for “fully conscious, and active participation”\textsuperscript{195} in the liturgy, an exhortation which is repeated throughout the council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. It is clear that participation plays a critical role in the liturgy...that performing the liturgy somehow does something. The liturgy stands as a location in which complementary actions coalesce: the actions of expression and formation; of activity and receptivity; and our encountering God and God’s encounter with us. The medium in which these actions take place is our corporal reality. Subsequently, the liturgy must be (and is) prepared to engage our entire material being—our body, senses, imagination, and intellect.\textsuperscript{196} Although remnant dualism causes us to “leave much of our physicality behind when we pray and worship,”\textsuperscript{197} truly embodied liturgical experiences demand a reaffirmation of the physicality inherent in liturgy. For this reason, it is crucial to understand the liturgy as something which is to be performed and not merely something to be contemplated since “In order for us to receive the action of the liturgy, we must also perform it.”\textsuperscript{198} This emphasis on performance over mere contemplation means not only is it crucial to be physically present at the liturgy (as opposed

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Pickstock, “Liturgy and the Senses,” 724.
to simply thinking about it), but to be actively/bodily engaged in the ritual, rather than being only passively present.

Embodied worship is mindful of a connection between external action and interior disposition. Interior dispositions are expressed in external actions such as words, gestures, postures, songs, prayers, and processions. These expressive actions and more are present throughout the liturgy; however, for the sake of space and clarity, the remainder of this discussion will be directed especially toward gesture and posture in the liturgy.

Theologian James L. Empereur explains that “Bodily gestures and movements are necessary if our personal realities are not to remain hidden. Such gestures symbolize our interior reality. Unless we as individuals and the church as a . . . community make gestures, [neither] we nor the church can exist in full. Something of transcendence will never reach visibility if our worshipping communities are not physical in their expression.” Our bodies have an active, expressive dimension. What we do with them allows us to externalize our interior reality. In the same way that the body serves as a real symbol of the soul, so our physical gestures work as real symbols of the attitudes that flow from our human souls.

The participatory role that our bodies play in the liturgy is not limited to an expressive dimension. Gestures and movements in the liturgy also play a formative role. Theologian C.J.C. Pickstock points out that “Liturgy is not simply an outward and symbolic honoring of a God whom we know already through internal experience or conceptual

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200 Much of the subsequent discussion can be applied to any aspect of the liturgy which engages the human body; hence, according to the understanding of the body which has been put forth throughout the course of this paper (which regards corporal as unified with spiritual), the discussion may be applied to the liturgy in its entirety.
reflection. Rather, it is the most important initial way in which we come to know God.”

Furthermore, she argues that “sacramental signs have a heuristic function; they are not just illustrative or metaphorical. They prompt us to new thought and guide us into deeper modes of meditation because they contain a surplus that thought can never fully fathom.” Thus, we are affected by the embodied worship of the liturgy . . . whether concretized in sacramentals such as bread, wine, oil, and water, or in our bodies through active participation like movement and gesture. Since I have limited this discussion to posture and gesture in the liturgy, let us take these as our starting point for examining the way in which embodied worship is formative.

Theologians John K. Leonard and Nathan D. Mitchell point out that the gestures of our bodies during liturgy do not merely describe an attitude; instead they “enact the relationship described by that attitude.” Embracing another during the sign of peace embodies fellowship, forgiveness, unity, charity, and/or peace; in a similar way, falling to one’s knees renders adoration, contrition, supplication, thanksgiving, and/or repentance. In neither of these two cases does the gesture simply describe or educate; rather, it enacts. The gesture of embracing during the sign of peace, for example, does describe or express the inner attitudes listed above (fellowship, forgiveness, etc.); furthermore, this gesture also educates the person performing it, teaching him or her to have the attitudes named by the very act of engaging in the gesture which is expressive of that attitude. However, something more is going on as well; for the gesture enacts (that is, makes happen) something which would otherwise not happen or become real. If, for example, I attend

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204 Ibid.
205 Leonard and Mitchell, Postures of the Assembly, 16.
206 Ibid.
Mass with my mother with whom I have recently been arguing, the gesture of embracing during the sign of peace enables the relationship to develop in the particular way embodied by the gesture; for, if I am fully and actively participating in that gesture, I am embracing the one with whom I had previously been in contention and wishing her peace. This gesture not only expresses unity, but brings it about through physical proximity and expressed words.

The gestures of liturgy have a receptive dimension in which we are enabled to embody and internalize those realities which appear external to our beings. We encounter God, and our encounter is made tangible and internalized through the body. Thus, bodily gestures are “‘doors to the transcendent’ that actually open us to the presence and impact of Mystery.”

While internal participation in the liturgy is rightly emphasized as more important than external participation, one’s internal relationship with God is capable of being enriched by such outward bodily participation because these expressions also have a receptive dimension which actually open one to God more deeply and therefore enhance one’s internal relationship in ways that would not be accessible without bodily participation.

The formative importance of the ritual gestures and bodily actions of the sacraments are perhaps best captured in a description provided by Tertullian:

The flesh is the hinge on which salvation depends. As a result, when the soul is dedicated to God, it is the flesh that actually makes it capable of such dedication. For surely the flesh is washed, that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is sealed, that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed by the imposition of hands, that the soul too may be illumined by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul as well may fatten on God. What is united in service [viz., flesh and spirit] cannot be separated in destiny.

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208 Qtd. in Ibid.,17.
Tertullian’s description of the relationship between physical and spiritual demonstrates a working knowledge of spiritual senses. Pickstock describes spiritual senses as “psychic equivalents for physical sensations and even parts of the body.”\(^\text{209}\) In order to illustrate this concept, she cites as examples the liturgical *sursum corda*, “lift up your hearts” and the concept of the soul as being able to “hear.” In the case of the latter, she explains that “The soul ‘hears’ . . . in its imaginative recollection or in its mental attention to God, because it is primarily conjoined to the hearing function of the physical body.”\(^\text{210}\) What is being explained here is that the ability to sense entails both an inner and outer aspect. The bodily awareness allows us to enter into an interior awareness. Even in contemplation we are never removed from our literal bodies. In terms of liturgical practice, recognition of spiritual senses implies that “we are always making a response of our incarnate souls . . . to the incarnate God. This response is immediately inscribed in our bodies and requires no interpretation.”\(^\text{211}\) Our bodies become a repository for our encounter with God, and we are invited to respond with postures and gestures which embody the various stances that we take before God.\(^\text{212}\)

The postures and gestures enacted in the liturgy are far too extensive to innumerate or examine in any kind of detail. Each posture and gesture has evolved over the course of a long tradition and been influenced by social, historical, and anthropological contexts.\(^\text{213}\) However, responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal stipulates that “The gestures and bodily postures of both the Priest, the

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\(^{209}\) Pickstock, “Liturgy and the Senses,” 726.

\(^{210}\) Ibid., 727.

\(^{211}\) Ibid., 728.

\(^{212}\) Ibid.

\(^{213}\) A good historical and anthropological study of gesture in the Mass (particularly standing and kneeling) is provided in John K. Leonard and Nathan D. Mitchell, *The Postures of the Assembly During the Eucharistic Prayer* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).
Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to...making clear the true and full meaning of . . . [the] different parts [of the liturgy], and to fostering the participation of all.”

As previously mentioned, the many gestures of the liturgy embody the various attitudes we take before God. At times these movements and postures are ones of open receptivity toward the divine. At other times they actively and collectively produce a spiritual attitude. As the liturgy unfolds, the ministers and the assembled seamlessly move between postures of activity and receptivity, embodying the meaning of the liturgy and enabling all to participate both internally and externally.

Hitherto the body has been discussed on a very individualistic level. However, the individual body not only mediates between inner and outer reality—between God and the individual—but also mediates between the inner soul and collective body. For it is through our individual bodies that we are made aware of other bodies. James L. Empereur explains this at least in part when he points out that “our bodies do not stop at our skin.”

We are made aware of this when we experience what feels like an invasion of our personal space, when we react to people moving around us, when we have a kinesthetic response to an athlete or dancer, when we feel drawn to a person from across the room, or when we feel connected to people who are far away. Empereur calls this the “larger world” of our physicality. During the experience of the liturgy, an expanded view of our individual physicalities allows our experiences to be grounded in community. The “larger world” of my

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217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.

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physicality is connected with the “larger world” of the other worshippers and a liturgical assembly is born.\textsuperscript{219}

Together, we are an assembly of bodies in prayer. What we do communally with our bodies makes a great deal of difference, for it is among one of the reasons that we gather in public worship in the first place: to express who we are as a community before God.\textsuperscript{220} In this way, the physical gathering of the assembly and its fully active participation in worship has ecclesiological significance. It is precisely for this reason that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal necessitates unity of posture among the assembly during the liturgy. According to the GIRM, “A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.”\textsuperscript{221} Here we can see that, just as at the individual level, posture and gesture at the corporate level have both expressive and formative dimensions. Since they foster what they signify—that is, unity—the corporal bodies of the assembly become sacramental signs of the spiritual Body of Christ.

Let us now move from discussing embodiment in the liturgy and begin to examine the role of embodiment in the Christian practice of pilgrimage. While this practice certainly does not operate on the same level as liturgy (that is, it does not facilitate the unfolding of the economy of salvation), it can nevertheless be identified and discussed as an embodied reality. It is a practice, and therefore is something to be performed or enacted. It involves movement through space and time toward a destination. By its very nature, pilgrimage is

\textsuperscript{219} See Ibid., 142-143.
\textsuperscript{220} Leonard and Mitchell, \textit{Postures of the Assembly}, 3.
\textsuperscript{221} General Instruction of the Roman Missal, GIRM (Washington: USCCB, 2011), para. 42.
centered in and carried out by the body. Like participation in the liturgy, it has an internal and external dimension which might be thought of in terms of expression and formation. Thomas Merton’s writing on the subject perhaps describes these complementary characteristics most clearly. He explains: “The geographical pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out of an inner journey. The inner journey is the interpolation of the meanings and signs of the outer journey.”

Working from the first half of this statement, let us first examine the expressive quality of pilgrimage. Like the practice of liturgy, pilgrimage is an embodied practice which externalizes an interior reality. As Merton points out, the internal reality being expressed is an inner journey. More specifically, this inner journey is the pathway of discipleship—the Christian journey. The likening of the spiritual life to a journey has been present in the Christian tradition since its earliest days. We find evidence of this in Scripture, most notably in the book of Hebrews. Although 1Peter and Hebrews both refer to those who live in faith as sojourners, it is the book of Hebrews which connects this notion with a journey to a city to come, making it highly influential in the development of pilgrimage as a metaphor for Christian existence. In his study on pilgrimage in the New Testament, scripture scholar Andrew Lincoln explains that “Key elements of the phenomenology of a religious pilgrimage—separation from one place, transition or journey to a sacred place with difficulties, trials, and the threat of failure en route, and incorporation rites on arrival at the

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224 Ibid.
goal—have all been taken up and transformed in Hebrews’ view of Christian existence.”

Although reasons for undertaking pilgrimage have varied, this sort of correlation of inner journey with pilgrimage has enjoyed a long history in the Christian tradition, based as we have seen in Scripture and popularized in particular way by the monastic tradition. In fact, Merton points out that “Historically, we find a progressive ‘interiorization’ of the pilgrimage theme, until in monastic literature the ‘peregrinatio’ of the monk is entirely spiritual and is in fact synonymous with monastic stability.”

Having established, then, that the Christian tradition has viewed the spiritual life as a kind of journey or pilgrimage toward greater unity with Christ (the destination of which is full unity in the heavenly Jerusalem), we can come to understand the physical or geographical pilgrimage as a metaphorical embodiment of the Christian journey. In this way the practice of pilgrimage has an expressive dimension, exteriorizing in particular time and space the inward reality of the Christian journey.

The relationship between outward/embodied pilgrimage (or geographical journey) and inward pilgrimage (or spiritual journey) has not only an expressive dimension, but also a formative dimension. As previously seen in the explanation provided by Andrew Lincoln, the geographical pilgrimage is capable of describing the interior journey. The practice of pilgrimage, however, is capable of more than simply describing; it has a formative component since by the very act of engaging in it, one is capable of learning something about the inner journey which is being metaphorically enacted. As mentioned, Merton

225 Ibid.
226 As we have seen, the practice of pilgrimage has been undertaken for reasons which have included journeys to holy sites, veneration of martyrs, travels to take in the presence of holy persons, penitential journeys, and holy wandering. See for example Merton, “From Pilgrimage to Crusade,” 91-112.
227 Merton, “From Pilgrimage to Crusade,” 93.
describes this process as an “interpolation of the meanings and signs of the outer pilgrimage”\textsuperscript{228} into the inner journey. Taking into consideration my own experience as a pilgrim of Santiago, there were countless instances when events and circumstances of the physical journey provided insight for my spiritual journey. External realities such as changes in landscape, the message in the crypt of St. James, and the thurible at the pilgrims’ Mass in Santiago were internalized and inserted meaning that clarified my inner journey.

In order to examine the didactic potentiality of the practiced pilgrimage more closely, let us take into consideration a more specific example of the way in which my Camino experience informed my inner journey. The sense of community that I experienced along the Camino led to an awakening to the role that community played in my spiritual life. As I began the pilgrimage, I expected that my journey would be a very individual experience; however, as the journey progressed I found it impossible to complete without the companionship and aid of others. I relied on fellow pilgrims and locals alike for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual support. As I became aware of my dependence on others, it became clear that I had been approaching my spiritual journey in much the same way that I had first approached the embodied journey of the pilgrimage; my relationship with God was highly individualistic and I began to realize how one-dimensional it remained as a result. This realization proved to be the beginning of an awakening to the role of community in my faith. It became clear that my faith was not simply about myself and God; rather, I gradually became aware that I was an individual situated within a whole universal community that transcended space and time and with whom I was deeply connected. This realization has

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 92.
had a lasting impact on the way I perceive my spiritual life and my role in the community of faith, as well as the manner in which I relate to others.

As was the case with the role of gesture in the liturgy, there is something about the embodied, geographical pilgrimage which goes beyond the descriptive and educative and actually *enacts* or causes to happen that which is described by the action or circumstance. Working from the example given above, the presence of other people on the Camino did more than provide instruction about the role of community in my spiritual life; the very act of participating in the pilgrimage placed me in circumstances where I was physically walking with others. This activity enacted the relationship described by the activity; that is, the circumstances of the pilgrimage placed me in a position of walking alongside others, and this physical accompaniment became the catalyst for the spiritual accompaniment which subsequently evolved.

Another example of external experience enacting an inner reality can perhaps be seen in my experience of injury on the Camino. While trust is a spiritual posture which we are called to take before God, it is by no means a given and must be cultivated . . . at times with great difficulty. The physical circumstances in which I found myself due to the act of engaging in the pilgrimage—circumstances which included being incapacitated by injury in an unfamiliar place with an unfamiliar language—left me in a position in which I was rendered helpless. Emptied of control over the situation, I was left with no choice but to abandon myself to God. Thus, the physical experience of injury in a foreign location mediated the inner experience of dependence on God.
The Christian faith is built on a tradition of understanding reality in a sacramental manner. Drawing from its understanding of creation and the Incarnation, the Church understands material reality to be the arena for God’s self-revelation. For God is so wholly other than ourselves that mediation is necessary to bridge the disparity between humanity and divinity. This mediation must lie within our receptive capacity; as such, it is always embodied, for the spiritual can only be encountered through the corporal. Thus, the human body plays a critical role in our relationship with the sacred.

Although it has not always been embraced favorably by the Christian tradition, Catholicism of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century has seen a shift in theological understanding of the body. In response to dualistic understandings of corporal and spiritual realities, contemporary sacramental theologians have come to recognize the inseparable nature of body and soul and perceive the human body as the seat of all spiritual reality. Such theologians have recognized that like all other material reality, the body is capable of being used by God to mediate grace. Since all that is spiritual occurs in the tangibility of our bodies, our bodies may be understood as sacramental. It is precisely because of their sacramental nature that Christianity requires us to be more and not less attentive to our bodies.\textsuperscript{229} Indeed, our spiritual practices are about being \textit{in} our bodies, not overcoming them.\textsuperscript{230} We see this when we consider the expressive and formative dimensions that embodied practices like liturgy and pilgrimage have. The embodied performance of these practices does something to us, for it is only through the particular, concrete experiences that we have in our bodies that we are enabled to perceive universal truths.

\textsuperscript{229} Pickstock, “Liturgy and the Senses,” 736.
\textsuperscript{230} Empereur, “The Physicality of Worship,” 142.
It is for this reason that the actual, embodied practice of pilgrimage is a valid Christian practice. Although it is not a *necessary* practice, pilgrimage offers a particular, concrete experience which embodies and becomes a metaphor of the Christian journey. As we have seen, pilgrimage is not limited to expressing this spiritual journey, but has the potential to help enact it. Having examined the interrelationship between liturgy and pilgrimage in the previous chapter, I therefore suggest that the actual, embodied *experience* of pilgrimage enhances the *concept* of pilgrimage which is so vital to our Christian journey. This in turn becomes a useful paradigm through which to approach Eucharistic theology.
CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study, we saw that the practice of Christian pilgrimage has taken place amidst some controversy. Questions have been raised concerning the appropriateness of the practice because it necessitates the acknowledgement of sacred space—a concept which has been brought under scrutiny because of its seeming inconsistency with the New Testament understanding of Christ. For, those authors who offer theological criticism of the practice understand Christ’s salvific action to have universalized the presence of God. Given the omnipresence of God, and moreover Christ’s spiritualizing of the Temple by taking it unto himself through his Pasch, how can God be understood to be present in a defined locus?

Yet, there are two problematic notions implied by this question which I hope this project has begun to work toward addressing. The first is that to conceive of God as capable of being present in a defined location would be to somehow limit or confine the omnipresence of the divine. Indeed, such an argument would seem to understand that God’s presence in a particular location would subsequently imply God’s absence from other locations. Such an implication would indeed be problematic if it were true. A sacramental understanding, however, does not quite take such an “all-or-nothing” approach to reality. As we saw in chapter three, sacraments are concrete and particular realities which provide an access point to the transcendent and bridge the disparity between God and humanity by
mediating and embodying the self-communication of God. The Celtic Christian understanding of “thin places” offers a particularly helpful understanding of sacred space which takes into account this sacramental conception of reality. Here the understanding is not so much that God is present in a particular place and not in others; rather, “thin places” are “those places where God is perceived to be particularly accessible . . . or where there is a palpable sense of the intermeshing of the visible material and invisible spiritual phenomena . . . [for] While Christian doctrine asserts that God is accessible anywhere, there are particular places where some believers perceive that this contact is somehow easier.”

This understanding is not unlike Godzieba’s treatment of sacraments as “access points”. Thus, the notion of sacred space which becomes a prerequisite for pilgrimage does not deny the omnipresence of God; it simply acknowledges the possibility that there are locations in which the divine presence is perhaps more easily accessible.

The second and perhaps more problematic notion that arises within the controversy is the immediacy implied by arguments against the possibility of sacred space. To argue that Christ’s salvific actions have universalized the presence of God in such a manner as to negate the possibility of sacred space is to imply an immediacy to the divine. Such an argument posits that through Christ the divine is made immediately accessible, thereby making the concept of sacred space superfluous. This seems to take a highly spiritualized approach which overlooks the necessity of embodiment and mediation.

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232 See chapter 3 discussion starting on page 135.
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger touches upon this issue in the first chapter of Part II of his work, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. He poses the very same questions that have been raised by ancient and modern authors considering the practice of pilgrimage:

Can there really be special holy places and holy times in the world of Christian faith? . . . Is sanctity not to be practiced by living one’s daily life in the right way? Is our divine worship not a matter of being loving people in our daily life? . . . Can the sacral be anything other than imitating Christ in the simple patience of daily life? Can there be any other holy time [or place] than the time [or place] for practicing love of neighbor, whenever and wherever the circumstances of our life demand it?233

Ratzinger raises a critical question: if sanctity takes place in the living out of our daily lives, how can we think sacred space and ritual necessary? He responds to this series of questions, however, pointing out that “Whoever asks questions like these touches on a crucial dimension of the Christian understanding of worship, but overlooks something essential about the permanent limits of human existence in this world, overlooks the ‘not yet’ that is part of Christian existence and talks as if the New Heaven and New Earth have already come.”234 Ratzinger goes on to explain this crucial oversight:

The Christ-event and the growth of the Church out of all the nations, the transition from Temple sacrifice to universal worship ‘in spirit and truth’, is the first important step across the frontier, a step toward the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. But it is obvious that hope has not yet fully attained its goal. The New Jerusalem needs no Temple because Almighty God and the Lamb are themselves its Temple. . . . But this City is not yet here. That is why the Church Fathers described the various stages of fulfillment, not just as a contrast between Old and New Testaments, but as the three steps of shadow, image, and reality. In the Church of the New Testament, the shadow has been scattered by the image. . . . The sun is rising, but it has still not reached its zenith. Thus the time of the New Testament is a peculiar kind of ‘in-between’, a mixture of ‘already and not yet’. The empirical conditions of life in this world are still in force, but they have been burst open, and must be more burst open, in preparation for the final fulfillment already

234 Ibid.
inaugurated in Christ. This idea of the New Testament as the between-time, as image between shadow and reality, gives liturgical theology its specific form.\textsuperscript{235}

In a related manner, this “between-time” also gives form to sacramental theology, since sacraments by their very nature exist in the realm of the intermediary. As we have seen, the Eucharist is a particularly potent liminal reality, holding within itself both humanity/finitude and divinity/infinitude.

In his text, Ratzinger describes two different and yet related three-stage processes. The first is within the liturgy itself. Ratzinger explains:

The foundation of the liturgy, its source and support, is the historical Pasch of Jesus—his Cross and Resurrection. This once-for-all event has become the ever-abiding form of the liturgy. In the first stage the eternal is embodied in what is once-for-all. The Second stage is the entry of the eternal into our present moment in the liturgical action. And the third stage is the desire of the eternal to take hold of the worshipper’s life and ultimately of all historical reality.\textsuperscript{236}

This three-step process is remarkably reminiscent of the Chauvet tri-part structure of Christian identity (Scripture/gift, sacrament/reception, and ethics/return-gift) that was explored at length in chapter two. For, Ratzinger’s description of once-for-all historical event seems to parallel Chauvet’s element of Scripture, while Ratzinger’s description of the entrance of eternal into the present through liturgical action and the taking hold of the worshipper’s life and of all historical reality may be likened to Chauvet’s description of sacrament and ethics respectively.

The second three-stage process described by Ratzinger is previously referenced in his discussion of already/not yet. This process consists of a historical movement from shadow to image to reality.\textsuperscript{237} Ratzinger, as we saw, points out that our own time—the time

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 54, 60.
of the Church--exists in the “in-between”, the time of image. This “in-between” time is crucial, forming the liminal period between shadow and reality. Here, we are suspended “between the Cross of Christ and our living entry into him who suffered vicariously for us and wants to become ‘one’ with us . . .”238 Our middle, “image” stage of history is thus characterized by its progress toward the time of reality. Ratzinger describes this movement through the stages of history, explaining that the Pasch of Jesus ended the time of shadow and ushered in the time of image. He writes that “[Christ] has opened a way that we ourselves could not have pioneered, because our powers do not extend to building a bridge to God. He himself became that bridge. And now the challenge is to allow ourselves to be taken up into his being ‘for’ mankind, to let ourselves be embraced by his opened arms, which draw us to himself.”239 As we saw in chapter 2, we allow ourselves to be taken up into Christ’s “being-for” through our Eucharistic encounter. This allows us to move toward the time of reality as “we are incorporated into the great historical process by which the world moves toward the fulfillment of God being ‘all in all.’”240

Ratzinger’s discussion of the historical movement from shadow to image and ultimately to reality is notable because of the journey it connotes; moreover, however, the discussion is important because it leads to a point which becomes a crucial response to the immediacy implied by the sacred space debate. Ratzinger explains, “The curtain of the Temple has been torn. Heaven has been opened up by the union of the man Jesus, and thus of all human existence, with the living God.”241 He arrives at the crux of the issue as he continues: “But this new openness is only mediated by the signs of salvation. We need

238 Ibid., 59.
239 Ibid., 59.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid., 60.
mediation. As yet we do not see the Lord ‘as he is’ . . . [We need] a theology of symbols which connects us to what is present but hidden.”

It is precisely this notion of mediation which has been central to the project of this thesis. For, recognizing that questions regarding the appropriateness of the practice of Christian pilgrimage appear to take an all-or-nothing approach to sacredness which overlooks the anticipatory/not-yet dimension of the Christian faith, it has been my intention to pave a middle way for pilgrimage which recognizes embodiment and mediation as being at the heart of our Christian faith. I have, therefore, chosen to explore pilgrimage in a manner which highlights its function as an embodied practice. It is my belief that the embodied journey capacitates one to more fully and deeply understand the journey construct which has been so vital to the Church’s conception of the Christian life and its relationship to the Eucharist.

As we have seen, this project’s exploration of pilgrimage, liturgy, and embodiment is predicated on the notion that we come to know the universal/infinite through the particular/finite. For this reason, I took as my starting point one particular experience of pilgrimage. In chapter one I provided a narrative account of my experience as a pilgrim of El Camino de Santiago, illustrating how the pilgrimage functioned as a practiced microcosm of the Christian life. Because of its connection with the Christian life—one which is nourished by Eucharist—my Camino journey has served as a source for theological reflection on the liturgy.

Taking the Emmaus account as our guiding narrative, we explored the interrelatedness of liturgy and pilgrimage. We saw that spoken word and shared meal emerge as salient features of the Emmaus passage, my Camino journey, and the liturgy. The

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242 Ibid.
features of word and meal facilitate an experience within each event that leaves its participants altered and compels him or her to live life from a changed perspective. In this way, the three characteristics of Scripture, sacrament, and ethics that Chauvet uses to structure the Christian identity also serve to categorize the salient features of all three experiences. In the case of the Emmaus story, the conversational encounter that the disciples have with Jesus on the road to Emmaus is concretized in the breaking of the bread and effects a conversion from disbelief to belief. In the Camino narrative, conversation and meals shared along the journey provided opportunity for encountering others which in turn gave meaning to the experience as it was occurring. We saw that word and meal converged in a particularly potent way in the liturgy at Santiago, culminating and illuminating my journey in such way as to affect the manner in which I live my life. Finally, in the liturgy we understand that our encounter with Christ in the Word and especially in the Eucharist forms the Christian identity out of which we act.

Taking into consideration the particularly important role that the Eucharist plays within each of the three aforementioned experiences, we conducted a more deep exploration of the Eucharistic encounter. Drawing in a particular way on the sacramental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, whose understanding of the Eucharist is constructed on the notion of a symbolic gift exchange, we came to understand the Eucharist a location of interpersonal and interactive encounter. Here, in the liminality of the Eucharist, we meet the actualized kenosis of Christ. We are pushed beyond ourselves to encounter what is other and experience our own self-emptying as we are attentive to the one we encounter. We grow to more closely image Christ as we are reoriented from self-centeredness to become a person-for-others. In this way, our experience of Eucharist is formative; for our
Eucharistic encounters draw us to more closely image Christ, and as a result, we more fully and authentically manifest the identity we received in baptism.

Our formative encounters with Scripture and especially Eucharist prompt us to live our lives in a manner that allows the presence of Christ to increasingly permeate the world. Our ethical living becomes our return-gift to God for the self-gift we are given in the Eucharist. As each member of the Body of Christ moves toward a more complete state of theosis, the Church itself moves toward God’s Kingdom. For, as Christ increasingly permeates his Church, it moves toward greater reality of God’s Kingdom. As Ratzinger puts it, “the world moves toward the fulfillment of God being ‘all in all.’”243 The Eucharist is thus source and summit of our Christian pilgrimage, providing spiritual nourishment and effecting our theosis along the way, while also serving as the divine-human communion toward which we strive.

Taking chapters one and two as evidence of the effectiveness of embodied practice, our final chapter explored the central role that embodiment takes in the practice of the Christian faith. We saw that the Christian faith is built on a tradition of understanding reality in a sacramental manner. For, drawing on its understanding of creation and the Incarnation, the Church understands material reality to be the arena for God’s self-revelation. God is so wholly other than ourselves that mediation is necessary to bridge the disparity between humanity and divinity. This mediation must lie within our receptive capacity, making visible what is already invisibly present. Because it must lie within our receptive capacity, mediation is always embodied, for the spiritual can only be encountered through the corporal. Thus, the human body plays a critical role in our relationship with the

243 Ibid., 59.
sacred. As we have seen, our spiritual practices must be about being in our bodies, not overcoming them.244 We saw that embodied practices like pilgrimage and liturgy have expressive and formative dimensions and established that the embodied performance of these practices does something to us; for it is through the particular, concrete experiences that we have in our bodies that we are enabled to begin to experience the universal/transcendent.

Let us return to the question posed at the beginning of this project: given the advent of Christ, do we still need sacred space, sacred time, mediating symbols?245 In the words of Ratzinger: “Yes, we do need them, precisely so that, through the ‘image’, through the sign, we learn to see the openness of heaven. We need them to give us the capacity to know the mystery of God . . . mediated to us through earthly signs.”246 As we have seen, God is wholly other than ourselves. We need mediation, experienced in the concreteness of our corporality, to bridge the disparity between God and ourselves. God uses the visible, material, and particular to mediate what is invisible, immaterial, and universal. It is this sacramental worldview which gives pilgrimage validity as a Christian practice and serves as a starting point on which to construct a theology of Christian pilgrimage. For the visible, material, and particular experience of a pilgrimage becomes a possible means through which the invisible, immaterial, and universal concept of the Christian journey is mediated.

As previously indicated, I am not suggesting that pilgrimage is a necessary Christian practice; pilgrimage is, however, capable of serving as a particular experience through which the invisible/transcendent journey of Christian discipleship may be mediated. It offers a

246 Ibid.
concrete embodiment of the Christian journey and is not only capable of expressing this spiritual journey, but also has the potential to help enact it. As we have seen, our Christian journey is inextricably connected to the Eucharist as its source and summit. Since pilgrimage embodies the Christian journey, it is inherently related to the Eucharist. I therefore suggest that the actual, embodied experience of pilgrimage enhances the concept of pilgrimage and becomes a form through which we may envisage of our Christian journey. This in turn becomes a useful paradigm through which to approach Eucharistic theology.

SOME FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

What has emerged from this study is something of a sacramental understanding of pilgrimage. There remain, however, opportunities for further exploration of the topic. In the first place, this study has in part sought to address questions raised the appropriateness of the practice in the context of Christianity. I have addressed this question by looking at the practice in light of the church’s tradition of embodiment and sacramentality. However, I have only set a theological foundation for this practice; there is room to expand this discussion and build a more complete theology of Christian pilgrimage.

Additionally, greater consideration might be given to the pastoral implications of this study. I have posited that the embodied geographical pilgrimage, when approached in a particular disposition, is capable of clarifying or even reframing one’s self-understanding in reference to the Christian life, as well as one’s understanding of and relationship to the Eucharist. Yet, how might Catholic Christians be prepared to approach this practice with the “proper disposition”? Referring once again to figure 2, we have seen that approaching the pilgrimage experience with a Christian framework—and in particular a liturgical framework—is necessary for the practice to have some meaning in connection with the
Christian journey. This engenders the sort of experience that deepens one’s understanding of liturgy in light of pilgrimage (figure 1). Furthermore, as we saw in the Camino narrative and in the Emmaus story when the disciples’ eyes were opened to a present absence, a posture of openness (or a dying to expectation) is necessary to receive the gift of the experience. How might this type of intentionality be communicated to those undertaking pilgrimage? Consideration of the post-pilgrimage experience could be helpful as well. What resources or support might be made available, for example, for those interested in unpacking or processing their experience after it has taken place?

Further possible considerations include the availability of pilgrimage: how might pilgrimage be made a more accessible practice, particularly if it imposes a financial burden? Moreover, how might the rich theological insights offered by pilgrimage in relationship to the liturgy be made accessible to the average Catholic Christian in the pew, particularly those unable to make a pilgrimage? Are there other embodied practices that might serve a similar role? I believe that the intentional physical journeying that occurs in the practice of pilgrimage can bring into one’s awareness certain aspects of the Church’s Eucharistic theology and subsequently enrich one’s participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist, and by extension in the Christian life. For this reason, I believe it is important that a theology of pilgrimage be made accessible to all Catholic Christians who might desire an opportunity to deepen their faith.


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