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The Ordinary Becomes Sacred

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Fielding Lord: The Ordinary Becomes Sacred

Experiencing *the Spirit*

Mannheim Jesuit Church, Mannheim, Germany
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I Stood in the Founder's Cave

By Kaye Wise Whitehead

I believe that we are all pilgrims on some type of journey. We learn early in life that our parents are our first, and in many ways, our best guides. They are the ones who love us long before we even know who we are. They name us, train us, and then send us on our way. There are moments in our journey when we must walk on an uncharted path: I think of my first day at college when I realized (with a sigh) that I would have to trust that my alarm clock would wake me up since my mother was too far away to do it, and of the moment when I first arrived in Kenya for my study abroad when I realized (with a shudder) that I would *really* have to be, for the first time in my life, the “master of my fate and the captain of my soul.”

And then, there are moments when you learn that there are benefits to walking and journeying in a path already worn by another. This was my experience earlier this summer when I participated in the Ignatian Pilgrimage: a ten-day trip to Italy and Spain retracing the steps of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Prior to joining the faculty, I was only somewhat familiar with Ignatius and with Jesuit education. I received my master's degree in international peace studies from the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of Notre Dame and we had spent some significant time talking about Jesuits and their philosophies around the ideas of peace and justice. Although I vaguely remember the content of the lectures, because, like most compulsory classroom experiences, it sits somewhere on the edges of my memory.

I do remember that my professor felt that the Jesuits were passionate in their pursuit of a better and more just and peaceful world.

If I had known then that I would someday find myself standing in the cave where St. Ignatius had lived for ten months writing the Spiritual Exercises, I probably would have paid more attention. It did not seem real to me when I was sitting in my classroom in South Bend, Indiana, nor was it real when I read his *Autobiography* in preparation for this trip; but, when I stood in that cave and I studied the carvings of the cross that he had made on the wall, and when I laid my hand on the floor of the cave and tried to imagine him living and sleeping here while he concentrated on doing the active work of the Lord, then it was real to me. It was that moment when I understood that the choice that I had made to work at a Jesuit institution was only the next step in the journey that I had been walking in all of my life. I am not a Jesuit, but as a result of this pilgrimage, I have realized how much I firmly believe in cultivating the ideas of *cura personalis* and *magis*, and in becoming an active citizen of my academic community.

It was there, in a little cave in Manresa, Spain where I realized (with a smile) that the path of St. Ignatius of Loyola had led me back to myself. ■

Kaye Wise Whitehead is assistant professor communications at Loyola University Maryland.

The Ordinary Becomes Sacred

By Jeanne Fielding Lord

The invitation to participate in the 19th Annotation retreat arrived amidst the press of fall semester correspondence. For a day or two, I reflected; curiosity in conflict with the quotidian. At the end, I accepted, drawn powerfully by the example of others who had experienced the Exercises, seek-

ing the joy and peace they seemed to find in their prayer.

Under the skilled and sensitive guidance of my spiritual director, I began, slowly, to find prayer accessible, letting go of my familiar intellectual and rational approach, and beginning to pray with my whole being, entering into the imagination Ignatius recommends to us.

The ordinary became the sacred, illuminated by a new awareness of the gifts of friendship, love and worthy work. My morning walk across campus, too often dominated by a litany of anxious thoughts, became a time for gratitude and for small expressions of thanksgiving, for freeing prayer. The shared experience of the Exercises has nurtured and strengthened bonds of trust with colleagues and an understanding of our shared mission and for that I am especially grateful. ■

Jeanne Fielding Lord is vice president for student affairs at Georgetown University.