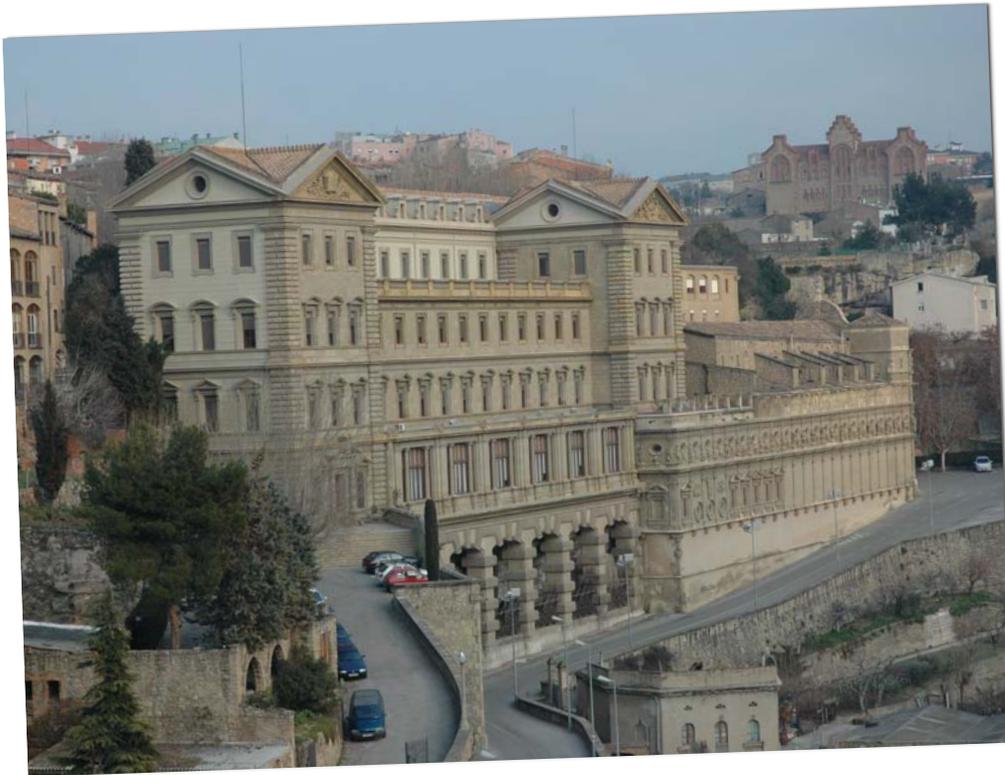




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Pope Francis asked the workers at the Vatican (some 4000 of them) to make a retreat, spend some time in prayer and renew themselves. He was concerned not only for the security of their jobs, but also for their spiritual welfare. They needed to have peace in their hearts which would bring joy to their work.

In the footsteps of Francis.

Following the example of the Pope, we at Manresa, Pickering decided to make a retreat as a staff. We had often heard how the 2000+retreatants who come to Pickering, tried to obtain the same graces that St. Ignatius had experienced at Montserrat-Manresa. But it would a unique experience for our staff and auxiliary workers to experience the spirit of St. Ignatius. We would do this by going to Manresa, Spain. The work at our Manresa Spirituality Centre at times seems to be a business enterprise. We worry about the bottom dollar and try to be responsible in our expenses. Manresa Spirituality Centre is primarily an apostolate, to bring the men and women who come here to have an experience of God – the God who has carved us on the palm of God's hand. (Isaiah 49:16)



The Envisaged Goal.

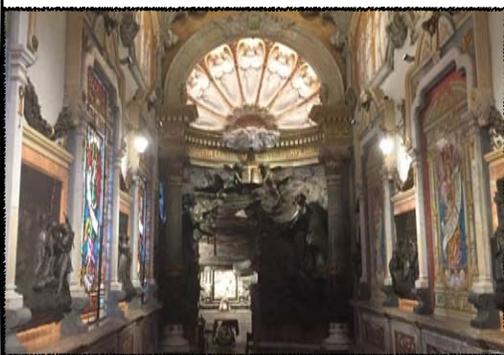
The goal was two-fold. First a spiritual goal: Like the Disciples of Emmaus we wanted our hearts to burn in an encounter with Jesus Christ. The staff here at Manresa, Pickering is a dedicated group. The front office, house-keeping and the kitchen have continually showed their care and concern for the men, women and school students who come here to spend some time in peace and reflection. But who would care for these “shepherds” who care for the people who come to Manresa, Pickering? It was time, we spent some period as a group in prayer and reflection on what we were doing here.

The second purpose of the trip was for the staff to bond together as a group even more closely as a team.

At Face Value

We received a warm welcome from Fina Conchillo, at the front office in Spain, who is the counterpart of Fiona Bertok, here at Manresa, Pickering. We had to make several changes to the dates of our stay in Spain to make it most conducive to our needs. Kim States, our chef/chief in the Kitchen did the online booking and hotel reservation. It was a lot hard work and checking with the Director to see that we were within the budget. We had already planned this in September of 2015, but because of the fall of the loonie, we had given up the hopes of making the trip. But I believe, God had other plans.

At face value, at the end of the day and trip, we achieved both the goals with flying colours. The group had fun. We had time to pray. We had time for quiet reflection. We had time for a contemplation input each of the four days at Manresa Spain.

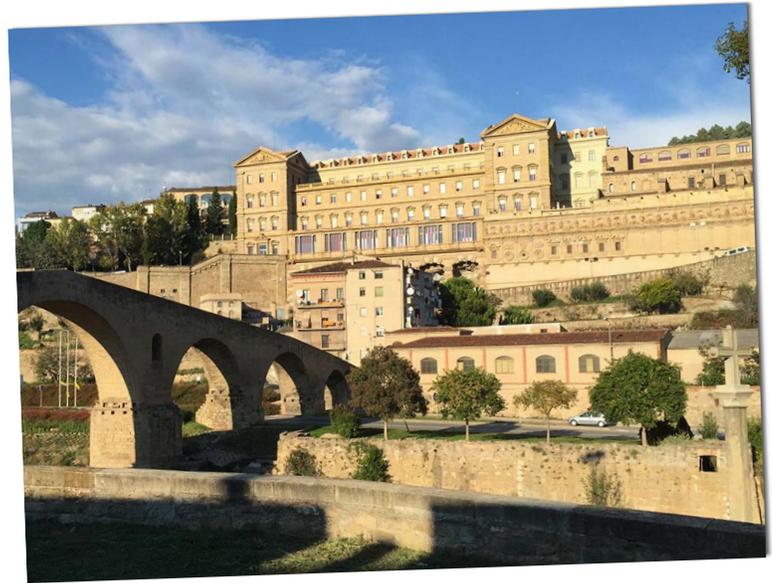


May they rest in peace

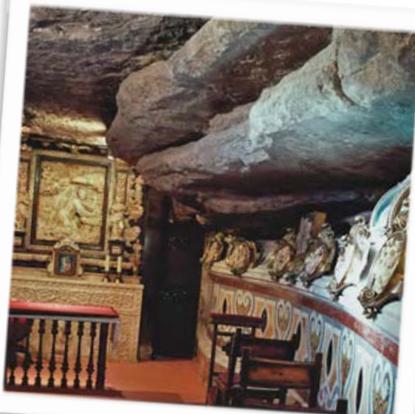
Prayer Themes



Basilica of Maria



Interior of Basilica



Manresa Cave

Themes: We prayed on the following themes:

Day One: Mark 6:31. The Lord invited the Disciples to come away to a deserted place and rest.

Day Two: Matthew 13 and Romans 1:20. It was the grace to open our eyes so we could see, and ears that we could hear, the wonders that the Lord did for us.

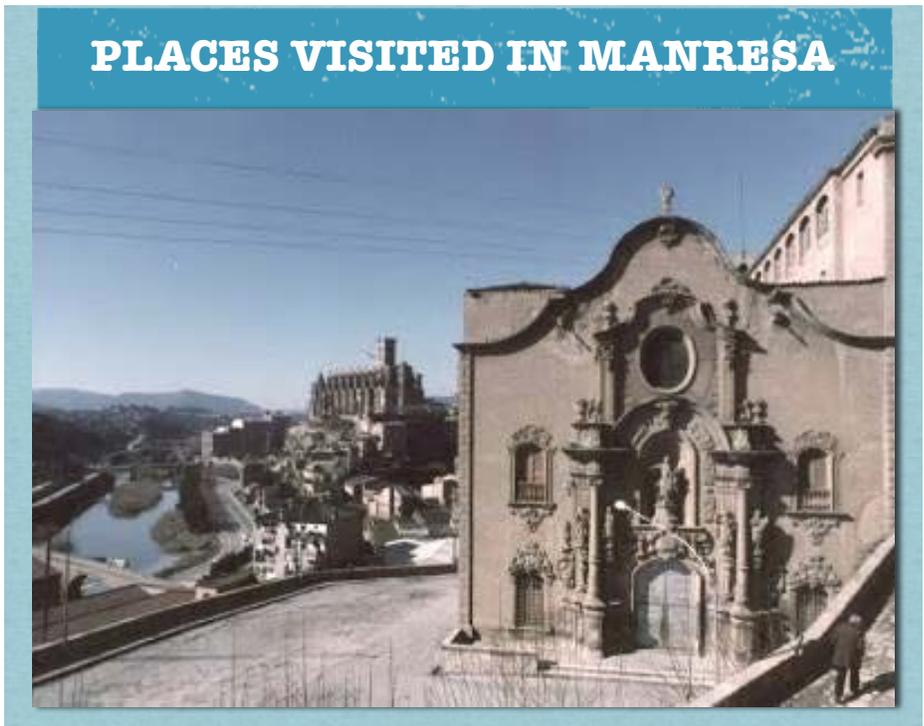
Day Three: A Trip to Montserrat: The contemplation of the Transfiguration. We went up a high mountain. Like Moses, we asked the grace to see the face of God. We found this in the care and concern of each other.

Day Four: Journey from the mountains of Manresa to the plains of Barcelona. The grace was: Create a clean heart in me O God. Contemplation on Acts Ch. 1:1-11. "Ye men of Galilee why do you stand looking up to the heavens."

The group found time in the Manresa, Spain gardens, in the chapel, in the Cave of Manresa to reflect on these themes. We were privileged to celebrate Mass in the Cave. Although it was stifling hot – there was a sense of sacred space and some priceless grace that each one experienced in one's own heart. We came down to Barcelona with joyful hearts.

The Basilica: When St. Ignatius came from Montserrat to Manresa, he spent most of those months in the Cave, which is now known as Cova Ignasi. In the evenings, he would go to the Basilica dedicated to Mary, known commonly as “La Seu” where he would sit at the Basilica door and listen to the vespers being sung. On our first day we went to the Basilica and we were greeted warmly by the receptionist. The entrance to the Basilica was € 1, but this was waved in our case.

There were works of art, which included altarpieces of St. Mark, St. Michael and St. Nicholas, the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity dating from the 14th to the 16th century. They were worth a long time to admire and grasp.



At the Basilica we spent time, together and individually in the silence of contemplation.

The Cardener River. Saint Ignatius stay in Manresa included a unique event that took place in front of river Cardoner. There he had a vision, the so-called

‘enlightenment of river Cardoner’. The Spaniards call it Cardener, but it is commonly known as Cardoner by Jesuits across the world.



Manresa Memories



Food at Manresa

Modus Vivendi. At Manresa, Ignatius lived on the alms that he daily begged. He never ate meat nor partook of wine, though they were offered him. On Sundays, however, he never fasted, and if wine were offered him, he drank of it sparingly. His favourite place to pray was the cave on which the Centre of Spirituality is built at present. The experience felt by Saint Ignatius here would flourish later and would bear its fruit: “The book of the Spiritual Exercises.”

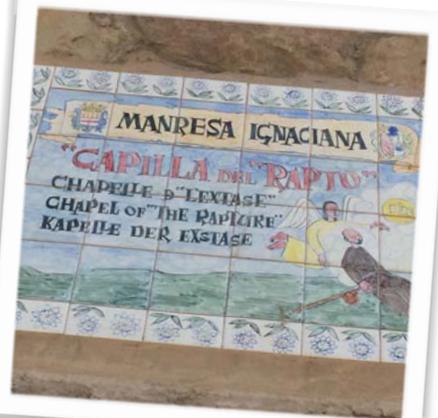
We were fortunate to be sumptuously fed each day at Manresa, and that included a bottle of wine at each meal. Wine was cheaper than water, besides it brought cheer to our hearts.

Some disappointment: We had planned to visit the various places that were connected to the stay of Ignatius at Manresa some five centuries ago. There was the place where he had an eight-day experience of God. It is called the Chapel of the Rapture. There was a place where a miracle apparently took place through the intercession of Ignatius. It is called the Well of the Hen. There was the Hospital of St. Lucy where Ignatius took care of the sick. Finally, there were the houses of the Caynelles and Amigant on Sobrerroca Street.

Unfortunately, everyone seems to take a holiday in August. Consequently, most of these places were shut. As we went from one place to another, someone would say: “Oh, it is closed” to which the group would respond: “Because it is August.” Or another would say, “It is August,” and we would answer, “then it must be closed.”



Miracle of the hen in the well



The Chapel of the Rapture

Some highlights.

Among the many very deeply felt experiences were:

1. The trip to Montserrat: Even though we did not have a guide to explain the various significant things to view, we split up in groups or went individually to the Church. Some stood in a long line to meet the “Morenetta” – as the blackened statue of our Lady of Montserrat is called.

2. The visit to the Cardener. Again in groups and as individuals, we spent time watching the lazy waters of the Cardener flow at the bottom of Manresa, very close to St. Mark’s chapel where Ignatius would sometimes spend time praying.

3. The Cova Ignasi. It was low, and at times claustrophobic. But you could go back five centuries and picture God forming Ignatius, just like he fashioned Paul at Damascus. “This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name” Acts 9:15.

There were other highlights, but words would be too poor to adequately express these.

It is good for us to be here: In the words of St. Peter after the Transfiguration, we felt it was good for us to be here. However, like Peter, James and John, we had to descend from the Mountain. We were taken into Barcelona, where we spent the last four days of our trip. This was fun and frolic – equally good for soul and body. The main and only thing we visited as a group was the famous Sagrada Familia. It was worth every effort and cost, to see this magnificent Church still in its uncompleted form.

Sagrada Familia

The Basílica de la Sagrada Família is a large Roman Catholic church in Barcelona, designed by Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926). The church is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Gaudí devoted his last years to the project, and at the time of his death at age 73 in 1926, less than a quarter of the project was complete. Sagrada Família's construction progressed slowly, it resumed intermittent progress in the 1950s. Construction passed the midpoint in 2010 with an anticipated completion date of 2026, the centenary of Gaudí's death

The Smiling Pilgrims



Trip to Montserrat



patiently waiting for the train

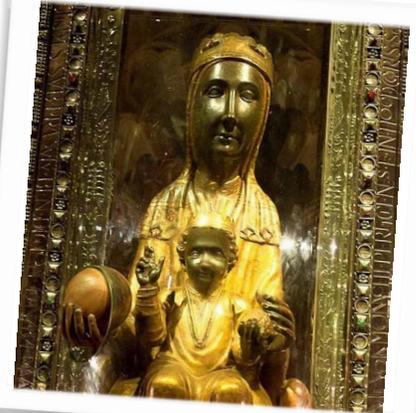
On the Third Day of our Stay at Manresa, we thought a pilgrimage to Montserrat would be a most conducive thing to do.

Ignatius wanted a radical change in his life and he resolved to follow Christ. With this resolution, he went to Montserrat and spent two days making a confession of all his sins. After his confession, he spent the night in prayer - as a knight in arms - before Our Lady of Montserrat. At the end of his prayer, he left his sword with our Lady and decided to spend the rest of his life as a pilgrim doing penance. This would eventually lead him to Manresa. Ignatius wrote down his insights in what we now know as the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. We visited Montserrat with the hope that we would be touched with the same grace experienced by Ignatius.

We arrived at 11:00 and decided to leave by 3:00 each one going with a companion to visit the Benedictine Church and pray. The experiences were marvellous, too intimate to share here. But like Peter at the Transfiguration, we felt "it was good to be here." We had hoped to see and hear the wonderful boys choir which is the rage at Montserrat, better than "One Direction" - but like the usual refrain, "they were on holiday, because it was August." However that gave us more time to sit in prayer and soak in the atmosphere. Closing our eyes we imagined Ignatius there about five hundred years ago. In spite of the crowds, there was general feeling of devotion and awe. The food at the cafeteria was very reasonable and very tasty. There was also a great variety - fish, flesh and vegan. Refreshed with this repast, we returned to Manresa. There we celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving for our safe trip and for graces received.



Cable Car



The Morenetta- Black Madonna



Montserrat



Barcelona. In this beautiful city, we did not have a fixed agenda. Some went on the Hop On, Hop Off buses to see the main sights of Barcelona. Since our interests in the cultural aspects and museums were so different, we each went our own way. However, each night we met at a Restaurant where we sat as a family and had a good meal.

Three out of the four nights were magnificent. The third night we decided to do the “tourist thing of Tapas and Paella.” It proved to be rather sad. The paella was soggy and so unlike the pictures advertising it. The tapas were good, some even thought it was excellent. But all in all, we gave it two stars.

The one redeeming feature at each meal was the famous “Una Jarra de Sangria” – a Jug of

Sangria. It came liberally and we quaffed in equal measure. Sadly, it was only the last night, that we realised that there were different varieties: Red wine, White wine, Beer and Champagne Sangrias. But we made up in quantity what our ignorance left us wanting in variety.

Visiting Jerusalem: When the Jews left the Temple in Jerusalem, their common greeting was “Same time, same place next year.” We felt the same way about Manresa, Montserrat and Barcelona. But there was one caveat: Not in August, because “it will be closed.”

If there is a captain or set of captains who will organise flights and hotel in Barcelona, this seems to be a worthwhile annual pilgrimage to get the spirit of Ignatius at Manresa.

