Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



A marker is pictured along the road leading to Santiago de Compostela, Spain. In 2021, Ana González walked the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrimage through Spain also known as the Way of St. James. (Courtesy of Ana González)



by Ana González

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I began 2025 with abundant gratitude for the experiences of the past year and anticipation for the unfolding of new adventures. As I reflected on my resolutions and dreams, an exciting awareness surfaced.

In addition to my personal journey, as a member of the Catholic Church, I enter an extraordinary year of intentional focus on faith and spirituality. The church unites in celebrating the Jubilee Year, a celebration observed every 25 years to reconnect with the roots of our salvific faith as the universal body of Christ. The 2025 Jubilee Year extends an invitation to all Catholics to be "Pilgrims of Hope." Step by step, we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. As a church, we journey together as the body of Christ.

The theme, "Pilgrims of Hope," reminded me of my own experience as a pilgrim. Though I walked the Camino de Santiago (the pilgrimage through Spain also known as the "Way of St. James") in 2021, the seed for that pilgrimage was planted in 2011. At the time, I was discerning religious life while working in a fast-paced environment where planning, preparing and achieving expectations were essential. That year, I attended a preached retreat with Brian Pierce, a Dominican friar, and Dominican Sr. Mary O'Driscoll, at the Heartland Center for Spirituality, an experience that changed my life. It was my first silent retreat, requiring me to slow down, embrace silence, and listen to God with my whole being. Initially, I struggled with the stillness, but to my surprise, I loved it.



Sr. Ana González and Sr. June Fitzgerald at the start of their pilgrimage (Courtesy of Ana González)

During their preaching, Brian and Mary introduced the idea of life as a pilgrimage with God — something I had never considered before. As I understood it, pilgrimage is a radical invitation to embark on a wild and exciting adventure with God. They emphasized that while the starting and ending points matter, the true essence of pilgrimage lies in the messiness, encounters and discoveries along the way. They spoke of the ancient pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and I heard a challenge: "*Mujer*, pack your bags, become an always pilgrim, and put El Camino on your bucket list."

Fast forward to 2021. My journey of discerning religious life had been affirmed, and I embarked on a pilgrimage that heightened my awareness of God's constant presence. I became open to God's abundant love for me and all creation. My lifestyle shifted from one focused on doing to one centered on being — with God and with the people of God. In April 2021, I had the great fortune of uniting my discernment journey with the *peregrina* (pilgrim) journey of El Camino.



Sr. June Fitzgerald, Sr. Barbara Kane and Sr. Ana González pose for a photo in Padron, Spain. (Courtesy of Ana González)

I was blessed to walk El Camino with two amazing Dominican Sisters of Peace: June Fitzgerald and Barbara Kane. Together, we prepared for our two-week journey — choosing our route, exploring options, and holding each other accountable as we trained for the trek. We were fortunate to travel with experienced companions who knew the route and its history. At the start of our pilgrimage, I felt overwhelmed by the thought of walking 275 kilometers to our destination.

Yet, my fellow *peregrinas* reminded me to take it one step at a time. The daunting numbers transformed: one step at a time, one mile at a time, one *cruceiro* at a time, one chapel at a time, one encounter at a time.

As I walked, I was awed by the milliaria — Roman mile markers that bore witness to the footsteps of merchants, travelers and armies who had walked this path for centuries. With each step, I felt connected to countless *peregrinos* who had journeyed before me and to those who would come after me. Along the journey, the

landscape shifted from urban settings to vineyards, forests, and medieval villages. With each change in scenery, my journey was enriched by encounters with fellow *peregrinos*. At first, the only thing we had in common was the shared journey. We came from different places and backgrounds, yet our pilgrimage united us. Walking together, we formed bonds of mutual support and care.



Ana González pauses for a photo along the route with *Las Musas*, a group of five best friends whose love and commitment to each other deeply inspired her. (Courtesy of Ana González)

One of my favorite encounters was with the *Musas*, a group of five best friends whose love and commitment to each other deeply inspired me. Two years earlier, one of them had been diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. Throughout her treatment, she and her friends prayed for healing. As she continued her treatment, she made a *manda* — a sacred vow — to walk the Camino if she recovered. When she was declared cancer-free, her friends upheld her vow and walked with her. I was honored to witness their story, celebrate her life, and walk alongside them.

Encounters like this were abundant. Strangers became close friends. My pilgrimage was more than a physical journey — it was a deep, spiritual communion with my fellow travelers, the landscape, and God.

I hold my pilgrim experience in my heart as a powerful lesson in the beauty of the journey. My pilgrimage began in 2011 as I discerned religious life. In 2021, I walked as a *peregrina*. Now, in 2025, I embrace the call to be a "Pilgrim of Hope" with my church. My hope for this Jubilee Year is that we, as a faith community, remain open to the wild and exciting journey where the Holy Spirit leads.

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  Scenic views along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (Courtesy of Ana González)

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Photo taken along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (Courtesy of Ana González)

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Scenic views along the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (Courtesy of Ana González)

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Pilgrims reach the end of their journey at Santiago de Compostela. (Courtesy of Ana González)

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Pilgrims walk together along the road to Santiago de Compostela. (Courtesy of Ana González)

As we walk together in faith, we do so with the awareness that we follow in the footsteps of many generations before us and hold in prayer those who will come after us. Our pilgrimage will lead us through diverse landscapes and bring us into communion with fellow travelers who will share in our joys, struggles and surprises. In this communal journey, I am challenged to walk with my faith community — not rushing, but allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us, ever attentive to God's presence.

For the Catholic Church, 2025 is a pretty big deal and it seems fitting to remember that we walk together toward a future filled with hope. We remember the church ancestors who convened 1,700 years ago at the Council of Nicaea to profess our faith. We recall St. Francis, who, 800 years ago, praised God's creation in the "Canticle of the Creatures." And we reflect on 10 years of *Laudato Si'*, which calls us to recognize God's presence in all creation and our responsibility as sojourners to be good stewards in our journey.

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Our Jubilee Year begins with a single step and a wide-open door. That step launches us into a pilgrimage of prayer. A journey where our feet follow Jesus, guided by the wisdom of those who have come before us. The focus of this pilgrimage is not the number of steps we take, but the encounters and mutual accompaniment along the way. The heart of our pilgrimage of hope lies in what happens between each step.

May our hearts and minds remain open to transformative grace we will encounter along our journey. May we recognize the divine presence in every step we take. During this Jubilee Year may we remain attentive to the unfolding richness of our pilgrimage toward a future filled with hope.

¡*Buen Camino* my fellow pilgrims of hope!

This story appears in the **2025 Holy Year** feature series. View the full series.