



## A new freedom and energy

The first question people ask on meeting me after my return is, “What were the highlights of your Camino?” Obviously they include climbing the Alps and arriving at the Monastery and Hospice of St. Bernard, which has welcomed pilgrims since the 11C as well as walking into St. Peter’s Square and visiting the Tomb of Peter. However, truth be told, it’s not the highlights that linger, but the “lowlights.”

This walk from the French/Swiss border to Rome, which took 61 days and covered around 730 miles, was exceptionally challenging due to the unseasonably high temperatures for most of the two months. The heat made for a very different walk and experience. I soon discovered the only way to manage was to walk in the early morning.

So, I would set the alarm for 3:45am and after packing, making tea and a light breakfast, I’d be out and on the road by 5:00am. I usually walked until 10:00/10:30, when the mercury was already around 95°F.

The early departure made me privy to gentle dawns and stunning sunrises, subtle scents and perfumes of wild figs and flowers, vines and trees. A phenomenon about the heat was that it didn’t peak at midday, but rather late afternoon and early evening, when it would be in the 100s, making going out to explore the town, as I usually do, impossible.

I braved it, most days, to go to Mass, which was around 7:30pm, an act of pure faith as the churches were like sauna baths. Then, a meal and back to my room which was as bad the church, very few having air conditioning or even a fan. Many people, I discovered, abandoned walking because of the heat. I only encountered, at the most, 12 other pilgrims during the whole walk.

So, solitary walking, shorter distances, debilitating heat, forced me to surrender to a new way of being a pilgrim. I didn’t stay in many refugios because of Covid, choosing

instead, “pensioni,” where at least I had my own room, basic as they were.

This surrender to a new way of pilgrimage silenced the inner critic, the “uber pilgrim,” or macho-me, forcing him to capitulate. In the absence of *shoulds*, *musts*, and *ought-tos*, a silence opened which was new. I began to feel an inner freedom and permission to enjoy, (even in the heat), and simply “be” in and with the inevitable. It was in this space, quiet and surrender, that the Divine Presence surfaced like the gentle dawns and bathed the little, ordinary and everyday in beauty.

So, “lowlights” linger in me, even now I am aware of a choice to return to the security of “inner dictator,” or surrender to a new freedom and energy, that is both different and exhilarating.

Blessings,

*Michael*

## Fighting the Instrument

Often the instruments of change are not kind or just and the hardest openness of all might be to embrace the change while not wasting your heart fighting the instrument.

The storm is not as important as the path it opens. The mistreatment in one life never as crucial as the clearing it makes in your heart.

This is very difficult to accept. The hammer or cruel one is always short-lived compared to the jewel in the center of the stone.

MARK NEPO

## Michael news

Michael is back a few days from his trek of the Via Francigena, and is trying to move from *pilgrim* steps to *ordinary* steps. It’s taking time. Reentry, after a Camino, is always challenging, this one particularly so, because it was a much longer walk. He hopes to be back in the *Levanté* videoing seat soon.

Later this month, Michael will be at the Hermitage for the Visitation of the Prior General for community as well as congregational discussions.

### Levanté 1 Retreat Schedule

**OCT 6-9 | Mercy Center Auburn  
Online & On-Site**  
535 Sacramento Street, Auburn, CA 95603  
(The online retreat is available worldwide)

**OCT 28-30 | Bethlehem Center  
Online & On-Site**  
2371 Arbot Road, Nanaimo, BC, Canada  
(The online retreat is available worldwide)

**NOV 18-20 | St. Francis Retreat  
On-Site Only** • 549 Mission Vineyard Road,  
San Juan Bautista, CA 95045

For information about *Levanté 1*, visit:  
<https://hermitfish.com/levanté-1-retreat-houses>

### Levanté 2 – 2023 Schedule

**JAN 6-8 | Mary & Joseph Retreat Center  
Online & On-Site** • Details coming soon

**MAY 18-21 | Mercy Center – Auburn  
Online & On-Site** • Details coming soon

## Thanks for your support

Michael is grateful to everyone for your continued prayers, good wishes and support. Donations to Hermit Fish, Michael’s 501(c)(3) nonprofit, are fully tax deductible. Gifts of any size are greatly appreciated. FID: 82-2489475

Visit: <https://www.hermitfish.com/donate>

Creative and logistical support for Michael, his *Buen Camino* newsletter and HermitFish.com website are provided by Enigma | LA, [enigma.com](http://enigma.com)