

Asturias

By Mark Lederhos

12/5 – 12/9

Monday, December 9th of this past year, was the solemnity of The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Naturally our ecclesiastical college did not have class on this day and since we also got the Friday



before off of school, we were given a five-day weekend! The four of us Navigare students along with Fr. Fernando and Br. Tomás took advantage of this by going to Asturias, a province in the north of Spain, where we spent five days seeing one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. We stayed in a house of Fr. Fernando's parents that overlooked the sea. To the left is a picture from my window of the spectacular sunrise that we experienced many of the mornings during our stay. We were lucky enough to be able to go down to the harbor and walk through the town

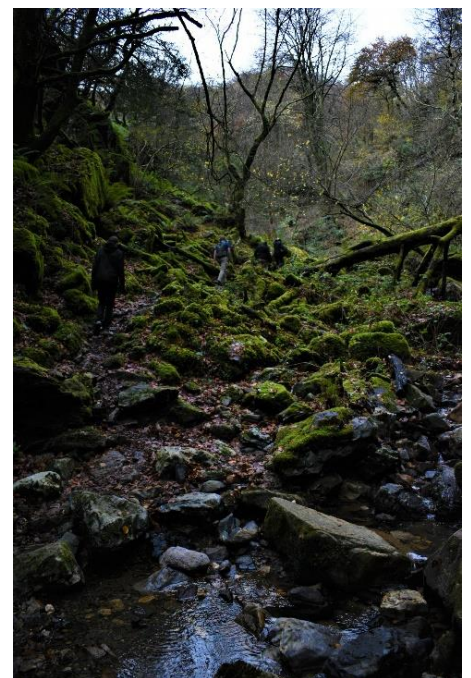
experiencing it in all of its beauty.

We arrived late on Dec. 5th and it amazed us how warm and green it was. The next day we woke up and hiked a mountain near our house which belonged to the mountain range known as the "Picos de Europa."



The plants and trees looked like they were taken out of a picture book of Ireland and while the hike up was very wet and at times slippery, it did not deter us from making the climb up the mountain. The weather was very nice and while we were worried about fog being a

problem, it turned out to be a blessing because it stayed in the valley and offered us a stunning view. We arrived at the top of the mountain with a gorgeous view of the ocean and the surrounding villages. Though it was cold and windy we warmed our stomachs with bollo preñado, a Spanish appetizer, which consists of a roll stuffed with chorizo. After heading back down the mountain, we drove to the beach to enjoy the cold and refreshing water.





When we got to the beach, we jumped right into the freezing water of the Cantabrian Sea. While Asturias did seem like a world apart from the normal winter in Colorado, the sea was still very cold considering that it was December. After we got out of the sea we dried off and had lunch at a sea side restaurant enjoying the crashing waves.

On Saturday we headed over to Covadonga to see the Holy Cave and the Basílica de Santa María



la Real. Covadonga is one of the cities that, during the time of Moorish conquest of Spain, was able to defeat the Moors and stop their advance into Asturias. This was possible by the help of the Virgin Mary when she appeared to them in the Holy Cave of Covadonga and offered support to the outnumbered and battered soldiers under the command of Pelayo (pictured to the left), the first king of



With her support, they were able to overtake the Muslim attackers and win a crucial battle in the history of Spain. A thirty second walk from the Holy Cave takes you to the Basílica de Santa María la Real de Covadonga which was built after a fire destroyed the previous temple in 1777. While it did take over 200 years for the Basilica to be built, that is nothing compared to the over 700 years of construction to complete the Cathedral of Oviedo, the capital of Asturias (pictured to the left and right).



It was here that we spent Sunday exploring the gothic architecture and the 60-meter-high altar piece shown to the right. The cathedral started construction in 781 A.D by King Fruela I of Asturias and didn't finish completion of its magnificent tower until 1551 A.D. We attended Mass that was said by Archbishop Jesús Sanz Montes who we were able to have dinner with in November.



On Monday we packed up our bags and said goodbye to the beautiful view of



the beach but couldn't leave without seeing the church of Santa María del Naranco. It was completed in the year 848 A.D. and is famous for its Pre-Romanesque style. It was originally built as a palace for the King of Oviedo but in the 12th century was converted into a church dedicated to Mary. And thus, we ended our amazing trip to Asturias.

