



Christmas is one of those times where people come together with food, songs, and cheer in order to celebrate the coming of our Lord in a manger. For us four Navigare, this was our first Christmas away from home. And while we definitely missed spending it with our families and friends back home, the Disciples ensured that we celebrated Christmas in a way that made us feel at home. Our Christmas story starts in Villaescusa, a small town located about 90 miles southeast of Madrid. It's the location of the Disciples' motherhouse and a place that we often go for retreats and special occasions. Such was the case for Christmas. On the 23rd of December we began a retreat that would go until the night of Christmas Eve. This was a time that we were able to pray and prepare our hearts for the coming of our Lord. At about 8 o'clock



on the 24th the festivities began! We all started off with a glass of champagne and more types of Spanish meats than I even knew existed! As the platters of cheese and meat were being passed around the room all the brothers were reminding me that I needed to pace myself because there was much more to come! All the Disciples who live in Europe came to the motherhouse in order to celebrate with us. After finishing off the seemingly endless dishes of

jamón we headed into another room for dinner. It was amazing to see all the work from earlier that day come together in one special meal. Every place had a picture with a name on it and the places were arranged so that you could talk with people from every community. The food was fit for kings and many of the dishes were prepared by our very own Br. Erik. The atmosphere was full of



energy and just about every person in the room at one point in the dinner stood up to make a toast. I am glad that the brothers told me to pace myself because Christmas dinner is not a race, it's a marathon!

After dinner finished, we all helped to clean up and set up for midnight Mass. We washed dishes, practiced psalms, and made sure everything was in order all with the joy of the evening still in us. Mass started a little after 11 with more than half of the congregation being made up of priests. The altar and baby Jesus were beautifully decorated and every person was in their best dress. ("It's not a dress," Fr. Fernando told me. "It's a cassock!") Even Navigare were in suits and each one of us had a role in the mass. Calvin read the second reading, I sang the psalm, Gabe sang the Aleluya, and Stephen played the piano for the whole mass. It was really a beautiful thing to be able to celebrate Christmas Mass with a religious community. The celebrating never





stopped during the night. It started with dinner, continued through the mass and even as mass ended we processed out into the courtyard to sing to baby Jesus in a nativity built by the Novices. There we stayed, singing all of the traditional spanish Christmas songs and throwing in a couple of American one too! Afterwards was a time of community where every group within the Disciples performed a song. As the sweets were being passed around and the groups had all sung, individuals went up and sang songs or recited poems from their country to share with others their fond memories of Christmas back home. After a late night we all went to bed and slept as much as we could. For Christmas morning is not a morning that you sleep in. It's the day where all the Spanish Disciples get to go visit their families!

A great tradition that the Disciples have is that on Christmas Day is they travel to the houses of their families in Spain to celebrate the holiday with them. The best part is, if you don't have a family in Spain you get adopted for the day! The four of us Navigare, along with Br.

Andrej who is from Slovakia, all got adopted by Fr. Paco's family. His family lives in Valencia which is a province on the eastern most side of Spain that borders the Mediterranean Sea. We drove there early



the next morning and went to Christmas Day Mass with Fr. Paco at the town's church. After the Mass, we met Fr. Paco's parents and went with them to a restaurant to have lunch with the whole family! It was fun getting to play with Fr. Paco's two nephews, Santiago and Francisco, who had so much energy during the whole day! Francisco, who is the older of the two, not once thought that we didn't speak Spanish and was talking to us all day long so I guess it means that we pass as Spaniards to a four-year-old! We had an amazing meal at the restaurant

with whole shrimp and many dishes from Valencia. After a big lunch that went four almost four hours, we went over to Fr. Paco's parents' house to continue celebrating. We were there late into Christmas night singing songs, do magic



tricks and sharing the amazing time we had together with our adopted family. The next day we had breakfast with Fr. Paco's Parents and then went to the city of Xativa to finish our Christmas off with a Belén. Belén means Bethlehem in Spanish and it is what they call their nativity scene in Spain. However, in Spain the go all out and the one in Xativa is well

known for having live animals like ducks, a donkey, and even a camel! That along with the life size figures made this a very impressive Belén! From here in Spain, Feliz Navidad, Bon Nadal (Valencian), and Merry Christmas!

