



Dominik Scelza

Hello, I am Dominik Scelza and I will be in charge of writing the Navigare newsletters for the next few months. Welcome to the beginning of the adventure of a lifetime! Our adventure starts with our much anticipated yet exhausting flight and arrival in Spain...

¡Bienvenidos a España!

Ladies and gentlemen, we finally made it here to the enchanted land of Spain! After much anticipation, more paperwork than I have seen in my life, and exhaustive travels, all the Navigare finally landed in Spain in the last weeks of August. As soon as we stepped off the plane, it was all “GO, GO, GO!” We all made a quick stop at the House of Formation in Madrid to grab camping gear before making another trip to Villaescusa, a common place of retreat for the Disciples. In fact, when we arrived, the Disciples were finishing their Spiritual Exercises of the year. After a couple days in silence, the Disciples ended their exercises with some fine wine and an extravagant dinner, celebrating Fr. Luis Granados’ American citizenship (making this year’s first Exercises with an American citizen)! The Disciples were able to verbally and emotionally welcome us to Spain and the community. Unbeknownst to us, there is a tradition in which we are “baptized” (in further context, there is a pool outside the retreat house in Villaescusa). Fr. Luis was the first victim (he was thrown in Superman-style). As I was watching this take place, little did I know I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Not too long after I was “baptized,” all the Navigare eventually got the same treatment (some of us twice). We haven’t been in Spain for a week and our schedule was already jam-packed. And we’re just getting started...

Convivencias Regionales y La Peregrinación a Valvanera

Soon after our time at Villaescusa, a small town outside the city of Cuenca in the province of Castilla-La Mancha (prepare for some Spain geography lessons in some of these newsletters along the way), we headed to Derroñadas for the Convivencias Regionales (Convocations). The “Convocations” consisted of centering on the theme of Hope for the year with the Disciples’ schools Stella Maris

Colegio La Gavia and Stella Maris College, asking fascinating questions about the students and their studies, the relationship between teacher and student, families, and much more.

After all the elegant dinners and glasses of wine, us Navigare, along with some of the junior Disciples, began our 5-day pilgrimage to Monasterio de Valvanera, home to the Marian site of “La Virgen de Valvanera.” The image was found in the hollow of an oak, among bees. It’s not known when the image was found or carved but the details and restorations try to match the age of the image. Soon after the image’s discovery, a community of hermits populates the area. By the first half of the 11th century there were already the Benedictine Monks, and even then the area was famous as a pilgrimage site. It suffered the attack of the Napoleonic hosts, who burned and looted it. Then came the Confiscations, and the total abandonment between 1835 and 1880. The Virgin ends up being transferred. Three years later, the monks returned to live there, and in 1885, La Virgen. In 1914, the first abbot was blessed. The Virgin was canonically crowned on October 15, 1954. Paul VI proclaimed her Principal Patron of the Diocese on October 23, 1965.



At the top of Pico Urbion!

Boy, were we in for quite the adventure! Mountain peak after peak, early mornings, rain, heat... Mother Nature sure wanted us to remember this pilgrimage. Not to mention the fact that all the Navigare were not used to hiking days at a time, much less by kilometers (which felt so much shorter than miles). The altitude was also something to keep in mind during our climbs as well (hydration a close second; I learned that the hard way). We certainly haven't felt this kind of sore before. I felt pain in places I didn't even know I could. Hiking, bathing in cold mountain water-quite the wake-up call, doing makeshift laundry, finding the best place to sleep with shelter among many other things. A

couple of us may or may not have had some stomach issues as well. In spite of all that, this pilgrimage certainly set the standard for what was to come ahead and provided glimpses into what this year of Navigare will give us, especially the desire to be great in all our activities and daily life. And to top it all off, a little extra spiritual help from Our Lady of Valvanera and the Lord with daily prayer, Liturgy of the Hours, and some homemade liquor from the Monastery of “La Virgen de Valvanera.”



The Americans after arriving to Monasterio de Valvanera!

Madrid and “Settling In”



Harvesting grapes on a Saturday!



¡El bocadillo de calamares!



Navigare by the Palacio Cristal

After the final stretch of the pilgrimage and one final trip, all the Navigare have made it to Madrid at last! We finally laid claim to our territory (our names are on the doors, so it's official). Following a nice and much-needed weekend to relax (our feet, especially), we began our Spanish studies at Universidad Eclesiastica San Damaso (Stephen) and a Spanish academy *Inhispania* (Robert and yours truly). I guess you could say we had another first day of school. Robert, Stephen, and I have this month of September to speak in English along with the Disciples while learning Spanish, however once October hits, we are still able to speak in English, but the Disciples can or have to answer in Spanish. Once November comes around, all the cards come down and it's Español the rest of the year. We have been getting used to the bell at 6am with Mass at 7:30 along with a light and quick breakfast (Mothers, when I say light breakfast, I mean light; however, coffee and chocolate milk are involved). In order to get to class, we learned how to take the Metro (meaning we save money on gas). To make sure we exercise once a week after eating filling meals and not counting calories, we have soccer or futbol on Wednesdays at 8 with the community.

In regards to how good the Navigare are at futbol, well... let's just say we Navigare aren't going to get an invitation to play for Spain at the next World Cup (but we're making progress... slowly). In addition to our studies, we also help 4th-6th graders how to speak and read English from 3-4pm at Stella Maris Colegio. The kids have been so fun to meet; they always ask where we have been when we don't see them. We also get to see how hard English is to learn when it's not your native language (English is a pretty weird language, come to think of it). The Navigare also have started to work with some of the apostolates the Disciples lead as well. Hikes to the mountains, countryside drives, inaugural Masses, you name it. On weekends, we sometimes make trips to the ever so wonderful land of Villaescusa for a place of retreat.

In the midst of studies and chores, we have done some cultural exploration of the magical city that is Madrid, trying typical Spanish foods, going to the movies (we actually got to go to a premiere event for the film “Claret” before it debuted in cinemas September 24th), city walks in Parque del Retiro alongside a visit to the “Feria del Libro,” among many other wonderful and exciting new adventures!



One last note: earlier this month, Br. Tomas introduced the Navigare to the “rites of passage”. The Disciples have these rites all throughout the year and this first rite revolves around the theme of greatness. We celebrated our first rite of passage (pictured above) with an Adoration, followed by a speech from our very own Br. Tomas Sastre, offering our greatness to Our Lady with our studies and the year at large. All us Navigare then lined up beside each other in front of the altar, reciting the Navigare prayer.

“Our Lady, Star of the Sea Help me to always sail under your protection, Stretch my heart so that I may embrace the greatness that God is calling me to and open my heart to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Guide me on the journey towards Christ, that no matter the storms I will encounter or the difficulties I will face, that I will never stop sailing towards Him. Amen.”

As we have been given our challenge to be great this year, I’m reminded of when I used to play soccer as a child. My team had potential, but most of the time, our goal was to keep a shut-out for the first half of the game. A shut-out means no goals scored for either team (0-0). In other words, our objective was to play safe. But this year is not a year to **“play it safe.”** When all the cards are down, this year is a year of greatness. In other words, let’s play to **WIN**.