



Ernesto Bustio describing his journey on the road of the "University of Life."

Ernesto

- brother Daniel

AS WE GAINED ALTITUDE, THE RIDE THROUGH RURAL Cantabria was dotted with quaint stone houses whose red tile roofs playfully shone over the meadows. We were going to the mountain village of Güemes, where a friend of the Trinitarian Nuns, Ernesto Bustio was waiting for us.

Ernesto is the host at the Cabaña del Abuelo Peuto. He explained: "I named it in honor of my grandfather Peter." Ernesto, ordained as a priest 52 years ago, inherited the ancestral household after his grandfather died and turned it into a hostel for pilgrims on the Way of Saint James. He told us: "A gift is meant to be shared."

Previously he had served as a bricklayer worker-priest among poor laborers in Santander. Early on, he was also sent to serve in a very remote village of illiterate shepherds in the middle of the Picos de Europa, a high and inaccessible mountain range dividing the provinces of Cantabria and Asturias in northern Spain. As he poured coffee and gave us some local pastries, he said: "Those simple people taught me more about the gospel and my own call as a priest than all the books from my seminary training."

Ernesto began to show us the pictures that covered his walls and then told us: "... doctors, lawyers and other professionals have their degrees showing their credentials on the walls. These are my credentials from the

Universidad de la Vida (the University of Life) and all these photos of people and places that I remember with love and gratitude are my Ph.D.”

In 1979, after serving the poor of Santander, Ernesto wanted to experience how the poor live in other places. He restored a Land Rover and, with some friends, traveled through Europe into the Middle East, down to India, put the vehicle on a boat back to Africa, crisscrossed the continent, worked in the mines in Senegal and again went by boat to South America. To pay for the transportation they had to work on board in slave-like conditions. From Venezuela they drove up north and eventually returned to their beloved Cantabrian Mountains. He is now the pastor at Santa María de Bareyo, with its beautiful 12th century Romanesque church.

As we drove from Güemes to Santa María de Bareyo, the people of the different villages waved smilingly at him. He acknowledged them and also greeted the walking pilgrims on The Way of Saint James. They often put down their backpacks to exchange a few words with him. He loves these people!

Arriving at the hostel, he talked to the pilgrims about the way . . . “El camino de la vida”, describing it as the path we travel through life, how we journey and choose and learn to relate to our fellow travelers and to the world around us. He articulated Gospel values without mentioning religion; he told anecdotes from his prior experience as the young people listened attentively.

Many of these young pilgrims return to the hostel after completing their journey to Saint James’ Cathedral in Compostela to be of service in order to help others as well as themselves. They are deeply touched by his example, his hospitality, the warmth of other volunteers at the hostel, and the deep sense of community they find there. One of the social workers at the local jail often brings some of the inmates to share experiences with the pilgrims and the volunteers and also to do community work.

When we returned back to the sisters’ monastery in Suesa I remarked that it felt like going to visit an uncle. Sister Isabel replied: “Oh Ernesto is as good as bread, simple, down to earth and genuine. He likes to stay away from conflict; some time ago the bishop phoned him ranting and scolding him for being carefree with the rubrics — “I received complaints that you are not doing the *epiclesis!*” Ernesto responded “Bishop I am so sorry.” He chose not to get into a discussion. He was always polite with his bishop. After hanging up he called a fellow priest, a friend who teaches Theology. “Hello,” he said, “this is Ernesto. What is an *epiclesis?*”

We brothers are still questioning ourselves about the deep meaning of being a People of the Way — as the gospel describes the followers of Jesus. How do we continue to learn from the University of Life as we journey together? As monks we continue to explore! We felt inspired and challenged by this humble man who was so hospitable and loving, to become a truly Eucharistic community — loving, serving, welcoming, disarmingly free and hopefully “as good as bread.” ■