



THE WAY

Written and directed by Emilio Estevez and starring his father, Martin Sheen, *The Way* is a well-executed road trip movie, in the tradition of the Wizard of Oz, set against the backdrop of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

The story follows the cranky, emotionally withdrawn Tom who learns that his son, Daniel, has been killed in freak accident just as he was beginning his pilgrimage. To make matters worse, Tom and Daniel had recently had a falling out over the planned trip, Tom insisting that it would be a foolish waste of time and angry that Daniel could so easily walk away from all that Tom had prepared for him. Tom travels to the French/Spanish border to identify and cremate his son's body. Trying to work

through his anger and grief, Tom decides to complete the Camino himself, partly to honour his son's intentions and partly to discover what it was that motivated Daniel to undertake the trek.

Tom is not looking for company, yet he is drawn into the company of three other pilgrims en route; an overweight Dutchman, a feisty Canadian chain-smoker and a highly irritating and irascible Irish travel writer. Together they make their way to Santiago, Tom carrying his son's ashes in his rucksack and spreading them along the trail as he goes. Tom keeps having hallucinations, seeing Daniel turning up at various points. I found this aspect of the movie disconcerting, and at times embarrassingly corny. The dialogue is not exactly riveting, but Sheen's acting holds the movie together admirably. He convincingly portrays Tom as a man pursuing resolution over inner questions too deep for words.

One by one, Estevez turns the blowtorch on his main characters, dismantling their outward personas, revealing their weaknesses, compulsions and insecurities. This could have been excruciating and depressing, but the characters also show their basic goodness and resilience as flawed, noble people who are still on a journey towards who they are becoming. We learn not to judge the characters too hastily or too harshly. There are reasons why they behave badly, and there is scope for healing and change. Little by little Tom's hardness and bitterness melts away.

At the end of the movie each of the characters is asked why they walked the Camino - whether there was any religious or spiritual motivation. They stumble over the question as many do when asked about their spirituality. If the movie takes a position at all on this question, it is to favour the kind of Catholicism that, while short on grace and long on works, is nevertheless warm and generous in its estimation of people. The gentle message is that we all just need to go easy on others and ourselves a little more, accept the foibles of those who irritate us and our own limitations and simply do the best we can. Even if you disagree sharply with the thrust of this message, the movie is still a good discussion starter about the journey of life and spirituality in general.

Having recently experienced this pilgrimage I would recommend The Way as an excellent introduction for those considering walking the Camino. The portrayal of daily life as a modern pilgrim is true to life and the location selections and cinematography are brilliant. The characters may be painted larger-than-life in order to make the movie work, but the nature of their issues and the way they engage with the Camino as a spiritual quest are completely genuine.



Rick Lewis

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