

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Roman Reflections

PART III

For years I have been hearing about the beauty of the Borgo and the town of Licciana Nardi from Father Beatini whose parents were born there and where countless cousins still dwell. Now that I have seen the reality so often described in dramatic words and gestures by Don Giuseppe, I must admit that he has not been exaggerating.



I just returned from a weekend there that will always be a joy to recall. The occasion for the visit was a celebration of his Silver Jubilee of priestly ordination. I presided at the first celebration on June 5 at St. Francis Xavier Church and preached the first sermon in Italian. But that was but the beginning of a series of celebrations in the States in preparation for the great Jubilee day in Licciana.

Some 30 Rochester friends motored by bus from Rome on Saturday, Sept. 14, with stops along the way at Siena and Pisa. We arrived at Licciana at 9:30 in the evening and were warmly greeted by a large gathering in the town square (piazza) and then were distributed among the homes of friends and cousins for lodging, abundance of food and generous hospitality.

Came Sunday morning, the long awaited day, and I was awakened by a 5:15 announcement by our fine feathered friends from the poultry kingdom who had decided the day had begun. Lest there be a temptation to settle for further slumber, the church bells called us at 8 to arise and be alive for this was to be "the day the Lord had made."

At 8 I was in the parish church for the first liturgy of the day — my first Mass in Italian and Latin. The local pastor had come only half-way to acceptance of the new liturgy as he had hoped for a successor who would be open to all that Vatican II had recommended. Not so with one of his neighbors who seemed so dour during the whole joyous occasion. When I asked him if he had read the documents of Vatican II, he replied: "Yes, but upside down." I cannot say this of most of the churches I have visited here where they seem to be accepting the challenges of the Council.

Returning from Church after the Mass I had breakfast with Father Joe's "cousins" (he has them all over the world). And now for the dramatic moment. It is 10:30 a.m. and a band in full uniform arrives from a neighboring town to salute the Vescovo di Rochester and



Bishop Hogan with members of the Class of 1949 from St. Bernard's during the celebration of Father Joseph Beatini's 25th anniversary in Licciana. From left are Fathers Patrick Grace, Edward W. Steinkirchner, Charles Bennett, Bishop Hogan, Fathers Beatini, Biaggio Cortello of Connecticut and Lawrence [Pat] Ward.

his Missionary Church that has derived such strength in faith from Italian immigrants, especially those from Licciana.

The procession forms at the cousins' casa where I am residing. In it are priest friends from the diocese who have come to concelebrate with father Joe. These are Fathers James Marvin, Charles Bennett, Edward Steinkirchner, Lawrence Ward, Patrick Grace, Biaggio Cortello, William Roche. Along the half-mile route to the church, we pass through the narrow streets of the old part of the town (the Borgo, one time walled in and closed at sunset as the entrance gates were locked). All along the walls were a variety of posters announcing the benvenuto of the town to the Bishop of Rochester and Don Giuseppe and the program of highlights of the day's celebration. I presided at the beautiful liturgy. The theme of sermons and my greetings after Mass seemed to be a proclamation of the possible eventual canonization of Don Giuseppe. At least superlatives abounded.

Following the Mass, the local hotel provided a three-hour meal with courses beyond count. Then a bus trip around the countryside offered a great view of the beautiful scenery of the marble mountains of Carrara which give the distant impression of perpetual snow.

Then came darkness and the square was lighted for a two-hour concert by some 60 youngsters, 7 to 13 years of age, from a suburb of nearby LaSpezia who had gained deserved recognition on radio and television for their musical talent.

But there was more to come — a half-hour of fireworks with aerial bombs lighting the sky over Licciana. Then to bed to be awakened again at 5:15 by my feathered friends. Then off to the church and a celebrated Mass with the jubilarian and classmates — this time in the usual quiet setting of a daily Mass without the solemnity of the day before.

After a quick trip to the Italian Riviera and the beautiful towns of Porto Venere, Rapallo, Camogli, and Santa Margarita, we were off to Genoa to return by train to Rome, arriving near midnight tired in body but refreshed in spirit.

I thank God for the joy of this Jubilee celebration and for the opportunity to have seen the beauty of the Italian countryside and to have enjoyed the simplicity of people who lived an uncluttered life miles removed from the confusion of the usual places that are on the tourists' itinerary.



Enzo David Belli, mayor of 23 townships in the Licciana area presents Bishop Hogan a special citation honoring him and brotherhood between Italians and Americans. Father James Marvin is at left and Father Joseph Beatini center.



Bishop Hogan, Msgr. Richard K. Burns talk with Licciana woman.