

ON THE RIGHT SIDE



Fr. Paul J. Cuddy

Catacombs: Besides the Holy Year Pilgrimage, the Grand Tour included excursions to Tivoli, with its gorgeous fountains and gardens, and Roman historic places, especially the Catacombs of St. Sebastian. Those who have read Henryk Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis, will recall the scene of St. Peter addressing the Christians in the catacombs. Some had expressed a desire to visit the catacombs, so several piled into three yellow cabs to the colosseum bus stop, and from there took the bus to the catacombs. There is a divided opinion about which was more thrilling, the hair raising cab and bus ride, or the sights and history of the catacombs. "Live dangerously" must be the motto of Roman cab and bus drivers.

Padua: From Rome we thundered by bus north to Florence, toward Venice by way of Padua, the city of St. Anthony. We all hoped to be able to have Mass in St. Anthony's basilica. But could we? Padua is a beautiful city of about 150,000 people. It has the famous University of Padua, founded in 1227, which still enjoys a worldwide reputation both for scholarship and a remarkable conservatism, quite unlike the communist strongholds of Milan, Bologna and Turin. We got to the church about 11:15, and asked a Franciscan who is on the church staff: "Father, we are 42 Americans. Would it be possible to celebrate Mass here?" "Of course. The altar of St. Anthony will be free at 11:30, and you can have it then." So I hustled to the sacristy, vested and was proceeding to the altar by 11:30. Father Lane had celebrated Mass earlier in the hotel, so he acted as Master of Ceremonies and lector. To reach the altar of Sacrifice the priest ascends about 20 steps, so the celebrant is way up like a man on a mountain; and the congregation gazes upwards from below. The body of St. Anthony is just below the altar top, as the relics of the saints have been wont to be placed since the time early Christians celebrated Mass on the tombs of the martyrs in the catacombs. The electronic loud-speaking system is superb. Our own pilgrims gathered at the foot of the altar; but when the words of the English language sounded throughout the Church, about 200 people joined together for Mass and Holy Communion.

Heart-ache: After divesting in the sacristy I headed outside to join all at the bus. To the left of the church are some outside stalls selling cards, beads and medals: souvenirs so dear to pilgrims. Near one, two handsome, clean-cut young men in their early twenties, obviously Americans, called out cordially: "Hello, Father. Where are you from?" "Rochester, New York. And you?" "Youngstown, Ohio." "Oh. Are you students here?" "No. We are Mormon missionaries." "Good heavens! In the very shadow of St. Anthony. Would to God that you were Catholics, and were working with the same zeal for the Church. I do hope that you will be Catholics some day." And this came from the depths of my soul.

Mormons expect their young men to give two years as missionaries at their own expense. This is healthy both for their young men, and for their religious body. Mormons, Witnesses and Adventists have made impressive gains, not for what they have to offer, but because of the zeal of their people. "The axle that squeaks gets the grease" applies even in religion.

Next week: Venice, Germany, Holland — and inflation.

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