

Along The Way

With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



Yes, it was a great time! - all that I hoped for and more.

For those of you new to this page I refer to the almost six weeks of study, travel, new and renewed friendships, prayers and thinking which I enjoyed in Italy and the Holy Land with 90 other bishops from the United States.

In these paragraphs I'll try to share something of the experience of these graced days. As I address these words to you I am aware that I write them for friends who, although not physically present, were very much a part of me during those happy weeks.

It would be impossible to describe fully either the physical or spiritual journey I have just completed. But let me try to offer you something of the flavor of both by sharing reflections and memories which call to mind the deepest joys of those days.

I shall mention places, studies and people.

Places: I left Rochester on Aug. 23 and returned on Oct. 2. Of those 40 days our group spent seven days in the Holy Land and the remainder in Italy. During our stay in Italy our group left Rome only once and that for a delightful stay of two days in Assisi.

With the exception of group trips for Mass at St. Peter's, St. Mary Major and St. Peter and Paul (where we celebrated for Cardinal Cooke) our travels in Rome were left to our own initiative. We were also free to roam where we liked in Assisi.

In the Holy Land we moved as a group most of the time and we did so with the expert guidance of Father Raymond Brown, the noted American scripture scholar and Father Godfrey, a Franciscan friar of long experience in the holy places.

We saw sights of stunning beauty and depressing ugliness. We saw sheen and dust. We saw sights as new as tomorrow and others which stretch to the edge of human memory.

Our journey encompassed the tranquil simplicity of Assisi, the layered and colorful exuberance of Rome, the stark beauty and the complexity of Israel.

The names of some places visited come back to me now and as they do they carry with them some of the questions they raise and spiritual values they evoke which I think will remain with me for a long time.

The hermitage of St. Francis of Assisi reminds me of my own need for silence and prayer and encourages me to suggest to you once again that we can find the Lord in all of life when we seek Him in prayer each day.

The tomb of St. Peter stands as a symbol of our call to faith and reminds me to contemplate the love of a God who entrusts the proclamation of the Gospel to you and me who are so fragile.

The Garden of Gethsemane stands as a place which speaks to us so richly of the humanity of Jesus, his oneness with us and our call in Him to serve our suffering brothers and sisters.

The Holy places of Jew, Moslem and Christian in Jerusalem at once symbolize worship of the one God and the deep and bitter divisions which scar the human family.

There is also Nazareth where one contemplates the importance of the hidden and the common place which give strength to the soul. Here as well Mary our beloved mother emerges as a person whose deep faith freed her to serve her Son even through terrible agony.

The breathtaking vista of the Sea of Galilee evokes memories of Jesus as He taught us of the Father through stories of fish and bread, serpents and stones, pearls and prodigals. And it makes me wonder if we think about and teach and live our faith as though it related to the world around us. Or is it abstract, disembodied and unrelated to our daily coming and going?

Jacob's Well and the mysterious conversation between Jesus and the woman with five husbands strengthened me in the conviction that the Lord always leads us patiently and lovingly to deeper things -- and stays with us to open to us the mystery of Himself.

All of these places are much more than stone and steel. They are of the spirit and speak to the spirit of all people. Finally, if one looks, one finds Jesus in all of this because there is nothing of creation which does not find expression and fullness in Him.

Studies: We studied the sacramental life of the Church at the Gregorian University and were blessed in that work by professors who shared with us the fruits of their labors: Fathers Anscan Chupungco, OSB, a Filipino; Gerard Bekes, OSB, from Hungary; German Jesuit Karl Becker; Urban Navarette, SJ, from Spain; and Raymond Brown.

On an ordinary day we had four sessions of an hour or more each. Most of these were lecture/discussions with the above mentioned professors. At other times representatives of the Roman Curia joined us for exchanges on pastoral questions of common interest.

It was a blessing to have that time for instruction, reflection and prayer about our sacramental life. And it was especially to have that in the company of many friends so willing to share their experience of the ministry of bishops.

All of it deepened our awareness of the precious gift of life we share and the faith which transforms it. We talked about life's most touching moments -- the beginning of new life and its endings, the experience of pain along the way and our need for healing reconciliation all through the years, our hungers of body and spirit, and our precious moments of commitment which call for sacrifice but which when lived out faithfully lead to ever deeper life.

To realize that the sacraments make present to us the redeeming love of Christ in our deepest human needs is to be fired with the hope that we can all grow in our knowledge and love of these precious gifts.

I know that my own understandings of the sacraments has changed considerably from the days 20 years ago when I studied them in the same class rooms.

There are two reasons for that. One is that I understand a lot more about human life and need -- my own and others -- then I did then. Realities like hunger and vulnerability and the need for forgiveness help me to understand a little better the depth of the self gift Christ offers to us.

The second is the call to renewed and deepened self understanding which we have come to as a Church as a result of Vatican Council II. That call, painful though it can be, is nonetheless an invitation to a deeper understanding of the mystery of God's love for us in Christ.

In light of all this I have thought a lot and prayed for our beloved sisters and brothers in our family of faith for whom these years of transition have been particularly difficult. So many have said to me in their own voice or through others that they feel the Church has deserted them, that the Church which strengthened, challenged and comforted them for so many years is no longer the same.

I know of no easy way to console such friends but among the suggestions and hopes I have for all of us are:

1.) That we all might realize that the story of the Church through history is much more one of growth and development than of changelessness and uniformity.

2.) That pastoral ministers and other friends will never tire of their call to explain faithfully and fully the teaching of the Church.

3.) That all of our sacramental celebrations be prayerfully prepared by our communities and that they will be so celebrated as to open to all who participate in them greater knowledge and love of Christ.

4.) That we'll recognize in all of our celebrations that worship of the Father, through Jesus is the power of the Spirit is the focus and center of our hearts.

5.) That at the same time there is in these celebrations ample and appropriate place for the expression of our humanity -- in song, in silence, in rising and sitting, in gesture and greeting and laughter. Sacraments are after all for flesh and blood men and women who are God's holy people.

A final word for your encouragement and my own -- for all of our struggles the Lord is always faithful to His people. The Church we were raised in is the Church which exists today. And if we have to keep moving and growing to remain at home in her, please remember that we always have been and always will be a pilgrim people until the Lord comes again in glory.

The People: I spent these days in the company of brother bishops -- with 90 in Rome and with 30 who continued on to the Holy Land.

It would be difficult to do justice to their importance to me. At least as much as the places and the studies they opened for me something more of the mystery of Christ.

This they did in many ways -- by the witness of their prayer, by their respectful and mature deference to others, by their humor and humility, by their obvious love for the people they serve, by their willingness to give of themselves, and by the honesty of their struggles to find the right road when their insights into effective pastoral service and the current norms of the Church do not mesh well.

But the most important gift they gave to me was the acknowledgement that they are pilgrims. They admit to being on the way -- aware that they are fragile and sinful -- and that is a gift for which I shall always be grateful.

Gerry O'Keefe of Davenport, Iowa, offered that gift in his self-effacing humor through which he called us to be servants unconcerned with power as the world knows it. (Gerry brought the point home by allowing that in Davenport, "One word from me and all do what they please!")

Dan Walsh of San Francisco did it with his gift of laughter which he reminded me that we put chains on ourselves when we take ourselves so seriously that humor is no longer a part of us. Humor can be a rich sign by which we acknowledge that finally we don't run the universe!

Tom Grady of Orlando, Florida, is a peaceful and tranquil person in whom I find a strong reminder of the gentleness of the Lord and His compassion for His people.

In LeRoy Matthiesen of Amarillo, Texas, I found a most appealing kind of simplicity. Now I can understand better the source of the resources he has needed to provide the strong witness he has offered in the quest to halt the nuclear arms race.

There was not a person present in whom I could not easily find gifts given by the Lord for the building of the Kingdom.

Perfect? No. They're just like you and me. They know human weakness and sin. Inadequacy, selfishness, and ambition can touch them, too. But I left them with the realization that when all is said and done -- no matter what happens -- they will cherish at their core the unshakable conviction that the love of the Risen Jesus has conquered sin and death and that He has made us irrevocably a part of His victory.

Although central to the grace of the days the bishops were not the only people who made this trip the joy that it was. If you have stayed with me this far, you may not mind the grateful mention of a few more:

-- Our Holy Father who in this Holy Year has made obvious and generous efforts to listen attentively to bishops and heads of religious congregations of men and women from all parts of the world.

-- Monsignor Mort Smith, Father Tom Powers and the staff of the Casa Santa Maria who were loving and generous in their hospitality to us.

-- The sisters and students at Marymount School whose renewed hospitality allowed me to remember friendships born here.

-- Sisters Bernadette Lechryse and Mary Milligan whose dedication to Christ in religious life continues to inspire me.

-- Paul Pucciarelli who gave such spirit to the neighborhood.

-- All of my colleagues at home whose generosity and competence sent me off worry free.

-- You, dear friends, who are the Church in our 12 counties and so always a beautiful sign of God's love.

Peace.

Vocation Awareness Week Oct. 9-15

By Terrance J. Brennan

More than 1,000 posters have been distributed to each parish, college campus, high school, hospital and retreat house in the diocese for the

Columbus Day Program Set

Casa Italiana of Nazareth College will celebrate Columbus Day and the discovery of America by presenting a musical program and a dramatic film, "The Children of Columbus: The Untold Story of Italians of America," at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 12, at the Arts Center.

The program and film are open to the public.

Guild Meets

The cathedral Rosary Guild will meet starting with a Mass at 7 p.m., Monday Oct. 10, followed by a short meeting in the rectory, after which a craft night, complete with refreshments, will be held.

The guild is also conducting its annual membership drive. Interested persons are asked to contact Mrs. DeLores Roth, 458-6850; Mrs. Alice McCarthy, 458-2012.

upcoming national observance of Church Vocation Awareness Week, Oct. 9-15.

The posters are 11 inches by 17 inches and feature the graphics work of Sister Estelle Martin, RSM. At the bottom of the poster are 10 postcards that can be sent to Father Thomas Valenti, diocesan director of vocations and seminarians, for those requesting more information regarding a vocation.

According to Father Valenti, the project this year is funded by the Bishop's Thanks Giving Appeal and has met with success in the past. "Fifty-seven responses have been received over the past two-year period," said Father Valenti. "A good number of that 57 are currently in formation programs (seminary or novitiate) and various other vocation discernment programs."

When a postcard is returned, there is automatically a followup, Father Valenti said. A meeting is set up with one of the vocations team members.

"In that interview, most respondents are looking for information dealing with their prospective vocation,"



Father Thomas Valenti and Sister Estelle Martin, RSM, discuss the vocations poster that will be on display in each parish, school and hospital in the diocese.

said Father Valenti. "Our policy has been to make personal contact with all who return a postcard. This is an opportunity for this person to share how he or she has come to this point in life and to receive answers to any questions," said Father Valenti.

Anyone requesting further information is invited to contact Father Valenti at the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, 14624; or call 328-3210.