

Retreat workshops in Assisi bolster faith

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark
Saturday, November 3

While the members of our Diocesan Pastoral Council are hard at work contributing to the development of a mission statement for our diocese, I have a moment to begin my first column in three weeks. It's good to be back at it and in touch with you again.

Let me begin by thanking you very much for your prayerful support of the priests from the dioceses of Rockville Centre and Brooklyn who made their annual priests' retreat in Assisi, Italy, last week. I am happy to tell you that it was a peaceful, joyful experience for all of us. My intuition is that it was such a pleasing time because

there was so much prayer for us from the people of the three dioceses represented there.

We left New York on Sunday, Oct. 21, and landed in Rome on Monday morning. Upon arrival we boarded buses for the three-hour journey to Assisi and got settled in the Casa Papa Giovanni, a pilgrim retreat center just off the principal piazza of Assisi. We had the rest of the day to unpack and get settled, and after a good night's sleep, we opened the retreat with a Eucharistic Liturgy on Tuesday morning. We continued the retreat until Sunday morning, when we concluded our time in Assisi and returned to Rome.

We spent the five days in prayer, visiting the holy places of Assisi, enjoying one an-

other's company and generally sharing our faith, our experience of ministry and our hope for the church.

My responsibility as the one invited to direct the retreat was to present two conferences each day. I was left free to do that in any way I chose. I tried to keep our sessions informal and made an effort to be responsive to the interests and questions of my brother priests as those were shared through the week. I had brought materials I had written and others I had read that helped me very much, and used both of these resources in the shaping and refining of the material I presented.

It was a stimulating retreat and, as so often happens, when we finished I felt much strengthened by the goodness of the men I had been asked to serve in some way. They helped me to realize that the special attraction of Assisi is due not only to the holiness of Ruffino, Clare and Francis, but also to the holiness of the people who go there to seek deeper union with the Lord.

Our schedule included two days in Rome before we returned home on Wednesday morning. Those brief hours we filled with



delightful reunions. I had a chance to visit with Father Winfried Kellner, chaplain at Monroe Community Hospital, who is enjoying his sabbatical at the North American College's Institute for Continuing Theological Education. Win and I had a meal and enjoyed a concert together on Sunday evening, and I had a chance the next day to sit in on one of his classes. It was most enjoyable.

On Tuesday morning, we joined Pope John Paul II for the Eucharistic Liturgy in one of the chapels in the Vatican. As always, to be with the Bishop of Rome was a gift. At the conclusion of the liturgy, the Holy Father greeted each of us and asked us to convey his affection and blessings to all of the people at home.

It is good to be home, but even now those days in Assisi and Rome continue to carry very pleasant memories for me. Thanks again for all of your prayers and encouragement.

Peace to all.



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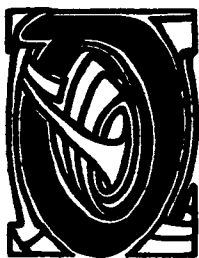
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