

# Ad limina visit resurrects fond memories

Some notes — along the way — on our *ad limina* visit to the Holy See with the bishops of the eight dioceses of New York state.

**Feb. 19, Philadelphia:** Bishops Jim Moynihan and Howard Hubbard and I are on the same flight to Rome tonight. Being here with them is an early reminder that our visit bespeaks themes of communion, faith and mutual growth. We go to Rome to share the faith of our local churches, to be strengthened, in turn, by their witness of faith.

People at home have been great. Generous and gifted co-workers leave me free from worry about leaving. And so many people I've met on the streets, in shops, at meetings, in the airport, have said "Bon Voyage," "Greet the Pope for me," "Pray for us while you are there." Such moments are beautiful. As I write about them now, I remember and relish the kindness they expressed.

Susan Koeppen, a reporter for Channel 10 NBC News, travels with us. We had a brief chat about how we could work together through the week. I think we can do it without a lot of trouble.

**Feb. 19-20, In flight:** There are only six empty places on this large plane but I don't feel crowded. Howard and I are sitting together and talk for quite a while. After the meal service we quiet down and rest. Howard manages to sleep more than I, but I do get some rest, and manage to stay reasonably comfortable through the night. Without making a project of it, I try to move from attention to the daily rhythms of life at home to anticipation of the events of the days ahead.

**Feb. 20, Rome:** Susan and I tape an interview as we stroll on the grounds of the North American College. Her interest this day is the beginnings of my vocation, those who have and do influence it, and what it has been like over the years.

During and since the conversation with Susan, I realize that her questions put me in touch with a lot of life. And the associations, memories and current awareness she elicited have been good food for thought.

That experience reminds me that memory is not just about recalling dates and facts. It is about the possibility of new insight, fresh understanding that arise from reviewing the past through the lens of life's continuing lessons.

When I recalled my ordinations as priest and bishop today it was much more than reciting a set of facts that will never change. It was about understanding how those unrepeatable realities continue to be a source of life and growth to me. I wonder if there is some analogy with the experience of spouses who remember their wedding day, or with men and women religious who remember their day of profession, or with workers who recall the first day of an exciting new job.

The differences are fairly obvious. But I wonder if the commonality might be a realization that practical, everyday experience — the good and the bad — continually shapes and reshapes our understanding of important things, and the ways in which we live out such understanding.

## along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



I know that I understand and live out the ministry of bishop now in ways that are different from my understanding and practice of 19 years ago. As I spent some time with that idea today, I smiled at the irony that when I came to Rochester a fair number of people (so I am told) were convinced that I had come with the intention of imposing "the heavy hand of Rome" on our local church. Now, 19 years later, some people are convinced that I am intent on weakening, or even severing, our ties to Rome.

What a delight it has been to see old friends; other bishops here for *ad limina* visits or for the celebrations in honor of the new cardinals; students whom I worked with who now, themselves, serve in Rome; and Eric Philips, our seminarian here.

Before supper today I went for a run on the grounds of the college. That gave birth to another good memory. That was of May 11, 1975, the day on which I both quit smoking after almost 20 years and took up running. Today, I was a lot faster and had much more endurance than I had on that day 23 years ago. You'll understand it when I say that I have lost a step or two from the peak year between then and now!

**Feb. 21, Casa Santa Maria:** I went to visit the Chapel at the Casa Santa Maria this morning. The Casa, as we call it, is the site of the original North American College. Since the early 1950s, when the new seminary was built on the Janiculum Hill, this building has housed the graduate department. I lived there for two years while studying Canon Law in the mid 1960s, and again in 1972 when I was studying Spiritual Theology. Many memories here. The greatest memory may be that of my first Mass as a priest, which we celebrated in this chapel on December 20, 1962. Mom and Dad, God rest them both, were here as were my sister and other relatives from home. Howard served as Master of Ceremonies for the celebration and my father served Mass that day. It seems both like a hundred years ago and like yesterday.

I walked there this morning on familiar paths. The weather was favorable. In the shade a light jacket or sweater helped. In the sun they seemed too much. Before leaving the college for the walk downtown, I had a delightful conversation with Monsignor Tim Dolan, a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, who is rector of the seminary community.

Tim was a student when I was on staff there. He was always a delight and still is. We had a good reunion and a chance to share news about old friends of ours. Susan came this afternoon to interview Eric. Both seemed pleased about what happened. When they finished their work Susan inter-

viewed me about priestly vocations and ministry. The team from Channel 10 (cameraperson Todd Rogenthien arrived this morning) then did a story with Howard Hubbard which they will send to the NBC affiliate in Albany.

Eric and I had a chance this evening for a good conversation over dinner at a restaurant called Walter's, not far from the college. It was a pleasure to hear Eric reflect on his afternoon's television work, his studies in Spirituality at the University of St. Thomas (the Angelicum), life here at the College and his pastoral year at Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community. I look forward to ordaining Eric to priesthood in June. We'll have a good one in him.

**Sunday, Feb. 22:** Hundreds of visitors came to the college today to honor the Archbishop of Chicago, Francis George, a new member of the College of Cardinals. Susan and Eric wanted to talk about what gatherings in St. Peter's Square, such as the one this morning, had meant to me over the years. At the top of my list of deep and lasting associations with St. Peter are the universality and diversity of the church and a profound respect for the Petrine ministry that strengthens our bonds of faith and charity.

This afternoon our full group of bishops — minus Bishop Pat Sheridan of New York, who arrives tomorrow — met to go over our schedule for the week. All events are scheduled now except whatever meetings we may have with the Holy Father. Those are always scheduled on a day-to-day basis.

**Monday, Feb. 23:** Cardinal John O'Connor presided and preached at our Eucharist at the tomb of St. Peter this morning. The event is always a highlight of our *ad limina* journey (together with a visit to St. Paul's) because it is at its core. My awareness and prayer through that act of worship embraced you, the bishops with whom I gathered and the people of their particular churches, and, of course, our Holy Father, John Paul II.

Before leaving for St. Peter's this morning, I presided and preached at the community liturgy here at the college. That always brings back tons of memories. A moment of quiet joy was provided to me by the rector, Monsignor Dolan. In his gracious introduction of me to the community, Tim mentioned that I had been his spiritual director when he was a student. I was also delighted that Eric was deacon at the Liturgy.

At 10:30 we met with the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Secular Institutes. A number of themes were raised: vocations, institutions founded and sponsored by men and women religious, their present opportunities and difficulties. As the meeting concluded, Cardinal O'Connor received the very good news that tomorrow our Holy Father will be receiving and then having lunch with the Cardinal, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese and Bishop Mansell of Buffalo. The rest of us look forward to receiving our appointments.

To be continued next week. Peace to all.