

Heartbeats

Servants of the
Holy Heart of Mary

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Italian Pilgrimage Part I

Because of the kindness of the people of Church of the Holy Spirit in Carterville, IL, where I had been privileged to minister for 14 years, I was given a gift of a lifetime...a Catholic Pilgrimage to the Shrines of Italy. It will take me a while to really plumb the depths of this experience but before too much time goes by, I will share some highlights with you in words and photos. Everything that occurs and everyone one encounters on pilgrimage is part of the whole experience. My partner on this excursion was my cousin Susan Zlatos. Sue's father and my mother were siblings. The whole tour was co-ordinated by Globus Tours. We had a full-time guide named Giuseppe. Our bus driver was Maximo. There were 33 of us on pilgrimage. The group dynamic was cordial and loving.

Note: at each new city we had guides who particularized in the history, art and spirituality of the area. All were knowledgeable and articulate. Some even added a touch of humor to the tour.



Sue and Carol

Rome & Vatican City

About two full days were spent in the Eternal City. My first impressions were of very small vehicles parked willy-nilly on very narrow streets. Some were parked in line, others perpendicular to their neighbors. One guide said that even with her expertise in knowing the city, she had the experience of searching for hours trying to find her car. There was much graffiti. The city has tried to set aside sites for "street art" but the graffiti prevails any way. Our hotel was within walking distance of the Vatican. Pope Francis lived just down the street.

My focus for this part of the journey was to pray at St. Peter's tomb and to ask for my dear patron's blessing. I also wanted to be in Pope Francis' presence. We were part of a Wednesday audience that was

held in St. Peter's Square. Although we were not too close, I did catch glimpses of the Pontiff as he was driven around the crowd. Huge media screens helped him come closer to us. His Holiness' talk was centered on the gift of the Spirit and Confirmation. He read his talk. I was intrigued when he went off script and spoke spontaneously. There was a warm and gentle way about him.



Carol and Peter's Statue

The rest of the time there, we were whisked through the Vatican Museum and overwhelmed by the Sistine Chapel. It was an awesome experience to be in the space in which Popes had been elected. The tombs of John Paul II and

John XXIII were visited. The latter was MIA...it was the 55th anniversary of his death and his body had been transported to his home town for a celebration. The rainy afternoon found us visiting the three major basilicas of Rome: St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls and St. Mary Major. Names I had heard numerous times became real edifices to me. I was amazed at the size of these basilicas, built in the post-Constantine era.



St. Paul Outside the Walls

After the rain subsided, we wended our way through the streets of Rome, to the Trevi fountain. There I found joyful people rows deep surrounding the display. Although the fountain is not considered an exceptional work if art, the groups of happy visitors made it a memorable stop. I did not throw a coin into its depths. One trip is more than enough.



Cassia

We traveled by bus to Cassia and Assisi, taking in the rolling verdant hills on our way. I liked Cassia, the hometown of St. Rita. I remembered that Augustinians ran St. Rita parish and high school near my neighborhood in Chicago. St. Rita was a widow and became a woman religious after the loss of her husband and two children. She had always had a deep mystical sense and was regarded as a miracle worker even when she was alive. She is considered "the saint of the impossible". Her shrine was of modern design. Her incorrupt body was placed to the side of the altar which was designed to represent thorns. An invisible thorn was said to pierce Rita's forehead, honoring the crown of thorns that Jesus wore. The day we were there was the commemoration of her canonization. Many groups were there. The concelebrated Mass had 14 priests in the sanctuary.



Altar at St. Rita

The shrine of the bleeding Host is found in the crypt Church. The Host is said to show blood on the feast of Corpus Christi. In one darkened area, we viewed a book in which the Host had been transported. I was not able to see the blood marks on the pages. The adoration chapel was beautiful in its simplicity. The Sunday after I returned home, the readings for the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ emphasized the importance of the Blood Covenant. I could not help but remember this tiny chapel and the faith in the Eucharistic Presence that it reflected so beautifully.



Chapel of Eucharistic Miracle

Assisi

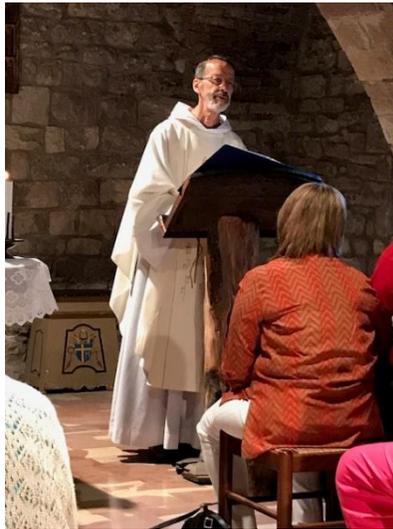
We spent a little over a day in Assisi. I consider what transpired here the central experience of the pilgrimage. Personally, I must honor the Franciscan spirit found in my heritage. Both my grandmothers were Third Order Franciscans who were buried in the simple, brown

habits of the Order. The town itself is considered a town of peace and the atmosphere certifies this fact to be true. Our first stop was at the basilica of St. Mary of the Angels. This 17th century edifice holds within it the small 9th century chapel, The Porziuncola, where St. Francis received his vocational call.



The Porziuncola

The Mass in which our pilgrimage group participated was the experience that solidified our group. We were the only participants. A Franciscan from New York was our celebrant. Various group members took on ministries. Father Daniel's message of love and peace was gently given and graciously received. One woman was grieving the one year anniversary of her mother's death. The group lovingly embraced her. It was there that we experienced being one in faith, the memory of which stayed with us for the rest of our travels and remains with me today.



Fr. Daniel

The most peaceful experience was followed by the most harrowing experience. We were led outdoors and carefully shepherded up a hill and through a steep and complex series of stairs and doorways to a spot where St. Francis was said to have slept – a hidden stone slab found in a cave-like structure. Doorways were barely 4 feet high. Steps had to be navigated side-ways. Some of us had to be gently “pushed” through the narrow doorways. Cheers went up whenever a pilgrim emerged from the cave into the sunlight.

At the convent of St. Claire, we learned about the first female follower of the Franciscan movement. Again, I was struck by the strong witness this woman gave by demanding that her Sisters be granted the privilege of living in total poverty as were the Brothers. Her wish was granted the day before she died.



St. Claire's Convent

To Be Continued.....
Siena, Florence, Padua and
Venice Part II, July 2018

A Reflection by Rama Canney's Sister

My sister shared this reflection below she wrote last year when we stayed at One Heart One Soul. She agreed I could share it. She is not a Catholic. She is a Baptist. ...Rama

I've seen birds worshipping Jesus. June 15, 2017.

At One Heart One Soul the retreat for Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary, Kankakee Illinois. I am at the Hermitage with my sister. There are two small tiny houses spread apart by just a couple hundred feet and many priests and nuns and others who love Jesus come here to be, to pray, to worship and to be silent. There is a grove of trees behind us and I've seen birds stop between the houses and just flutter and stay in one place (which birds do not do). It's as if to genuflect. Perhaps they stop there because Jesus is

present and they are worshipping. This has to be a very holy place between these two houses because so many people come here to love worship and be silent and be with Jesus amen.

I decided later to stand in the grove of trees and it did feel as if God was there. It was cooler, the wind was a beautiful gentle breeze as if a caress from God. It was peaceful, it was beautiful!



**May Wetherby's 90th
Birthday Celebration**

Sacred Heart Celebration

This beautiful lady is a parishioner of Sacred Heart and friend of ours. Mae is one of our gems here in Hopkins Park. She is referred to as the queen of the rodeo and mother to many. She never had children of her own yet she is mother to everyone here in Hopkins. Her husband was the founder of the African American rodeo association. Mae took Johanna to the rodeo when Johanna was 100. I'm so glad we were able to celebrate with her. She's a piece of joy out, plus she make great wine! when Carol returns, ask her about Mae's wine and pear preserves. Yum!