

MY JOURNEY CONTINUES...

WRITTEN BY: GAIL NAMPEL

You may remember during the fall of 2014, I shared that I was excited to be on a stewardship journey and invited anyone that felt called, to join me. Recently, my journey took me to Italy and I'm thrilled and honored to share the experience with you.

This past December, while doing some work on my computer, I received an email from Mountain Butorac 'The Catholic Traveler' announcing that he was offering "A Low Season" pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi. A one-week, all-inclusive pilgrimage that included daily Mass at destinations like The Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, The Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine, The Pontifical North American College. Plus, we'd step through six sets of Holy Doors, tour the Basilicas of St. Clare, St Mary Major, St. Paul Outside the Walls, St. John Lateran, the Vatican Museum, attend the Pope's General Audience on Ash Wednesday, take the Scavi Tour, climb The Holy Stairs at the Chapel of San Lorenzo and much, much, more!

This trip was being offered to the first sixteen people that replied...for a price that was FAR less than one might expect! What was there to think about? I've been wanting to do this for so long and finally had the opportunity! I immediately replied with a HUGE affirmative! I'm in! I'm going!

My fellow pilgrims and I landed at the airport in Rome on Sunday, February 7th at 10:30 AM, boarded a bus and headed to the incredibly picturesque city of Assisi, situated in the slopes of Mount Subasio. We checked into our hotel and were allowed to freshen up before we met up with Marco, our guide. His knowledge of the rich history of this amazing city was incredible! Walking down the narrow alleyways between centuries old buildings added to the excitement of arriving at our carefully chosen destinations.



Our first stop was The Basilica of St. Clare where we were invited to walk through The Holy Door, ceremoniously opened up for this Jubilee of Mercy. Upon stepping in, we were able to feast our eyes on THE authentic San Damiano Crucifix that spoke to St. Francis, instructing him to rebuild the church, beautifully suspended from the ceiling inside the Basilica. It was here where we saw relics of the actual clothing worn by St. Clare and St Francis and the centuries old font used during St. Francis' baptism. From here we visited St. Ruffino Cathedral and then headed to St. Stephen's for Sunday Mass.

Fr. Nick Fleming was available throughout our pilgrimage to celebrate Mass and hear our confession. I was so blessed to have been asked to lector during for our first Mass of the pilgrimage. I was further blessed to lector at our final Mass of the pilgrimage at St. Peter's Basilica.

Monday, we toured The Basilica of St. Francis, celebrating Mass in the chapel where he is laid to rest. This photo was taken inside the chapel, with his final resting place just above the altar. Following Mass, our pilgrimage led us to the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, followed by a tour of the Hermitage located where St. Francis used to escape for days on end to pray and do penance.



Scripture for thought: Ephesians 3

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Parish Mission:
**Praise God, Love People,
Equip Disciples to Trans-
form our Community.**

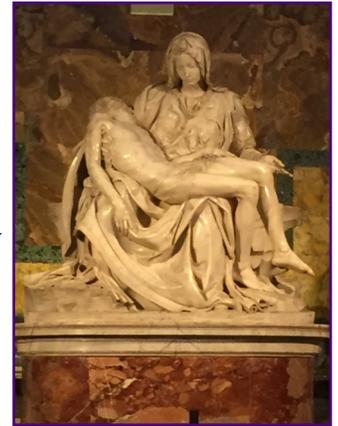


Interested in a Parish Pilgrimage?

I'd love to go back and share in the experience with parishioners of St. Katharine Drexel. Arrangements can be made for groups of 15 to 30 pilgrims. Call the office to express your interest in learning more.

On Tuesday morning, we departed for Rome and arrived with just enough time to shop for items to have blessed during Wednesday's General Audience, before we set off to tour St. Mary Major and St. Paul Outside the Walls. We were able to walk through additional Holy Doors at each of these Papal Basilicas. Aside from the incredible beauty of these basilicas, the religious experience moved me with such intensity, I was brought to tears. It added such a realistic component to the faith I've practiced all my life.

Wednesday, we awoke bright and early and walked to St. Peter's Square to go through security in preparation for the General Audience. Going through security, our group was separated a bit, so following Mountain's instructions, we walked near a gated area and waited for everyone in our group to gather. He knew exactly where to be and his timing was impeccable because the guards opened the gate and we were fortunate enough to be in the front row near the path the Pope mobile would take prior to Pope Francis' address to the audience. We were just a few feet away as he rode past us, stopping to kiss a baby right in front of us! As he pulled away, he looked in our direction and gave us a loving wave. To see the Vicar of Christ in person would have been the experience of a lifetime in and of itself...to see him so close was indescribable!



Another highlight of the pilgrimage, was taking the Scavi Tour.

This is something I have wanted to do for years and years. I cannot possibly do justice to the experience by using mere words. Taking this tour, under St. Peter's Basilica, and seeing the excavated remains of St. Peter, himself, once again reinforced the reality of my faith. To have shared in this moment with pilgrims of such strong faith, made it so special, so unforgettable. I'm brought to tears just thinking about it.

In addition to what I've already shared, our pilgrimage included visits to St. John Lateran, The Church of the 12 Apostles, St. Augustine's, St. Agnes, Basilica of The Holy Cross of Jerusalem, Ancient Rome, the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the Vatican Museum, the Sistine Chapel, Pontifical North American College, and more. I'm hoping to be able to put a slide show together to share with anyone that might be interested in hearing and seeing more. Stay tuned for more information.

On our last full day, we visited the Chapel of San Lorenzo that houses Scala Sancta, the 28 marble steps that Jesus climbed during His passion. Explaining that these steps must be taken on our knees, Mountain warned us it would be painful. But, reminded us of the pain Jesus suffered during His persecution. I have never had such an incredible prayer experience and was, once again, brought to tears.

On Friday night, we gathered for dinner at a wonderful restaurant in Rome, and after our blessing, took time to reflect over the past week. Everyone took a turn sharing their most powerful moment. As I sat and listened to what everyone had to say, I was in awe of the undeniable Catholic conviction of everyone in the room, including 12 year old Kendall, who begged her mother to bring her along.

When it was my turn, I was overcome with emotion as I thought about the many incredible experiences that had only been a figment of my imagination prior to this trip. Breaking down into tears I shared that I lived a dream for an entire week, and the religious connection I felt in each experience was overwhelming and beautiful. I felt so blessed to have taken part in this trip and was grateful for having developed a bond with my fellow pilgrims that can never be broken. This trip strengthened my relationship with Jesus Christ and has already provided me with so many opportunities for evangelization. I am truly blessed and thank God for the wonderful journey I'm on, and the remarkable people He arranged for me to meet along the way.