

Fr. Jason's Wishful Thinking... Sacred Art in Our Cluster

Dear Friends:

I want to take the opportunity to wish all of you a Happy and Blessed Easter! Lent has been a fruitful time for many of our parishioners as I have heard a lot of your confessions... and it seems that my Ash Wednesday challenge of watching our speech and refraining from bad words was heeded seriously. I have about \$25.75 to give to Catholic Relief Services at the end of Lent, and while I feel that I did better, I was certainly not perfect in our efforts. ☺

We should recall that Lent calls us to conversion, so governed speech and a well-trained tongue would serve us well throughout our lives... not just for 40 days of Lent! So keep up your commitment! Remember that the Book of James, chapter 3, tells us that one who can control his/her tongue can really control their whole body. That is good and sound biblical advice!

Many of you have been very complimentary on the Stations of the Cross that started circulating last week. Thanks to those of you who shared text messages and personal comments this week as you made your first read-through this week. I appreciate the encouragement as many hours were spent writing those meditations. There is one mistake in the book, which was God's little way to keep me humble... it is in the fourth station—the Scriptural quote is from Proverbs 31, not Ecclesiastes 31. That was a 2:00 am error when I was finishing that particular station... I wrote most of the meditations late at night because that was the only time I had to do so.

I want to share two stories of hope with you this week. The first story goes back to the Eastern Europe trip in October 2017. I didn't get a chance to finish the travel journal, but our last stop (after visiting Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria) was a day and a half spent in Prague, located in the Czech Republic. For years, I had searched for a particular statue of the Infant Jesus of Prague that I heard about at St. Stephen. I was disappointed to never find it, so I wanted to purchase a new one in Prague that was an exact replica of the original, famous one found there. I will be perfectly frank and honest to tell you that I was not a huge fan of Prague, mostly because we saw a beautiful and blossoming faith in all the countries we visited on our journey—until we arrived in Prague. We found the Czech Republic to be somewhat devoid of faith. The Communists discouraged faith and closed many of the churches that dotted the landscape for over three generations. So most of the churches that we saw were closed and deteriorating. It is only a recent phenomenon that some of the people are embracing faith and trying to save the churches from years of abandonment. Our local guide in Prague told us on several occasions during our walking tour that the people of Prague respect the churches for their architecture and art, but don't attend Sunday services. Our guide felt that churches were really social centers, but the same socialization could be conducted in bars or nightclubs. Yeah... he said that.

As we walked closer and closer to the church on our tour, we saw more and more cheaply-made, plastic statues of the Infant Jesus. I walked into the church where the famous Infant Jesus is on display. The church was filled with tourists—all wanting to get that coveted picture of the “famous religious doll” as I heard a few English-speaking tourists say. It was a spiritual turn-off in many ways. I entered the sacristy with Julia, our tour manager, and she introduced me to a Carmelite priest. He was very happy to hear that I was interested in a statue of the Infant Jesus, and he was very anxious to bring Julia, Wade Waguespack (my altar server for the day), and myself into a daily Mass chapel next to the sacristy. He pulled out a large duffel bag and spread it open on top of the altar (!!!) and started to tell me that this was a special statue made by the Carmelite nuns and how I couldn't find this statue anywhere else, and he would be happy to sell it to me at a “discount” for \$2,000 Euros CASH ONLY. I felt somewhat uncomfortable spending that much of St. Stephen's money and I certainly didn't have that much money in cash. I tried to explain to the Carmelite priest that we were unprepared to pay cash, but I had a perfectly good credit card. He simply said, “Look Father, go to your group and tell them how much you need, and I'm sure that they will want you to have Infant Jesus!” I looked at him