

## From Fr. Fleming's Desk

Spending the first week of Lent in Rome with a group from our parish was certainly a great blessing! There's no denying there was an aspect of vacation about our time away but our main purpose was pilgrimage and the city and places we visited offered us pilgrims plenty of opportunity for prayer and spirituality.

Altogether we were 38 travelers, teens and adults from Holy Family and some friends of parishioners, too. Our parish pilgrimage was organized by Rick Chasse, our Family and Youth Minister whose work before and during the trip made everything run smoothly. We stayed at the Domus Carmelitana, a hotel that's only a five minute walk from St. Peter's Square: we could not have had a better location or a cleaner, more well equipped home base for our time in the Eternal City. There was a beautiful view of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica from the garden roof deck of our hotel.

Our days began early and on four days I celebrated Mass for our group at the basilicas of St. Peter's, St. Mary Major, St. Francis in Assisi and St. Paul Outside the Walls. It was a unique experience to celebrate the Eucharist in these ancient Churches where millions have prayed over the centuries right to this day. It was especially at Mass that we highlighted our journey as a pilgrimage. As I preached each day I drew our attention to many and different ways the Lord might be moving in our minds and hearts as we visited so many holy places. It was at Mass, too, that we prayed each day for you and for all who had asked for our prayers. We prayed especially for those we left at home and for whom we were concerned and worried. I can assure you that you were very much in our hearts and prayers!

We visited the Vatican Museum that includes the Sistine Chapel. It was all very beautiful but the press of the crowds made it difficult to stop very long in any one place and really take in the beauty of what was all around us. A similar experience was our gathering in the rain in St. Peter's Square on Sunday for the pope's praying of the angelus and a brief talk he gives each week (in Italian). So, in the company of several thousand other people I can say I met Pope Francis! Truth be told he appeared as a white dot in the window of the Vatican palace - but I knew it was him!

The food was amazing but I limited myself according to my new eating habits. The hotel served a good and healthful breakfast and I had lots of prosciutto and melon (which I love) for lunch. I limited myself to one gelato (coffee flavored) that was awesome! For evening meals I ordered more off the main menu. Still, my favorite meal of the week was lunch at *Aquasalada* near the Spanish Steps. I ordered tuna tartare which came as a large portion of fresh, raw, tender tuna studded with bits of vegetables and crowned with small chunks of avocado - just perfect! Believe it or not, I lost about 7 pounds while in Rome! That was due, however, more to all the walking we did than to my fidelity to my eating plan. My FitBit was recording 5-7 miles a day with a top of 10 miles one day (the day I walked to the Spanish Steps).

A day trip to Assisi to visit the hometown of St. Francis was in some ways the best day of the week. Assisi draws crowds on weekends but we were there midweek and the open space and quiet were most welcome. Assisi is a beautiful town overlooking a breathtaking landscape. It has the feel of a medieval town where you might expect the Montagues and the Capulets to break out their swords in the town square! I'd love to spend a week there in warmer weather!

Weather! It rained every day but not all day long and it was on the cool side but we fared well with spirits and umbrellas held high. Leading us through these rainy days were our two guides Georgio and Daniello. Their knowledge of the city and the country was amazing - there wasn't a single question we asked for which they did not have a complete answer. And they did a great job of keeping our group together as we moved all around Rome.

I loved Rome and was grateful for the opportunity to celebrate the liturgy in such holy places but, truth be told, I'm glad to be back in our own sanctuary in prayer with all of you - my pilgrimage finally brought me back to where my heart is most at home.

P.S.

It's not too early - NOW is the time - to mark your calendar and plan to be with us for the liturgies of Holy Week. Palm Sunday is March 25; Holy Thursday is March 29; Good Friday is March 30 and we will celebrate the Easter Vigil on Saturday night, March 31. We will not be initiating any new people this year so the Vigil will be shorter than usual - a good opportunity especially for those who have never participated in this celebration which is the first Mass of Easter. No other liturgies in the course of the year are more beautiful than those of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. Come this year and savor the beauty of the church's prayer!

### **JOIN US FOR HOLY WEEK**

**HOLY THURSDAY: MAR 29 7:30 PM**

**GOOD FRIDAY: MAR 30**

**4:00 PM: Children's Service *All are Welcome!*  
& 7:30 PM Mass**

**HOLY SATURDAY: MAR 31 8:00 PM**

**EASTER SUNDAY: APR 1 7:30, 9:30, & 11:30 AM**  
(Please note change in Mass times)