

## **PILGRIMAGE TO ROME VIA NEW YORK, 2007**

Brother Paul Fennelly is my usual driver to and from the San Jose airport but he doesn't drive to San Francisco so Mrs. Nancy Romano, who graciously does so much for so many of us here, offered to take me to the city very early on Monday, October 22, for a coast to coast flight to New York. At JFK, Brothers John Collins and Tom Trager were waiting to take me to Saint John's community nearby at Rockaway Beach, New York, where we joined the rest of the community for dinner. I know the community well and I am very much at home there. I had a room overlooking the boardwalk and was inspired by the painting in my room featuring the great quote from John Donne: "No man is an island; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main ... "

The next morning I joined the community for Morning Prayer and Mass. Later I took a long walk on the boardwalk alongside a wide stretch of sand to the sea. Aggressive gulls were looking for food. Giant planes taking off from nearby JFK flew close overhead. One man was losing his struggle with a large kite. After thirty five blocks I turned around. Along the way I marveled at the construction that had taken place since my last visit. There were huge blocks of apartments mercifully separated to allow for playgrounds and parking. There were many new condos and others on the way. The weather was exceptionally pleasant for late October and the sea air was invigorating. Although there were several other walkers, the place seemed deserted in contrast to the summer crowds that I remembered from previous visits.

In the afternoon I had a lively conference call with other members of the Province "Aging with Grace" committee and that evening I was a guest of the community at a splendid dinner honoring Brother Tom Trager for his 50 years as a Marianist and 36 years at Saint John's home. I met some old friends there, but most of the 197 guests I did not know. I did follow the video of Brother Tom's life with great interest, having known him for nearly forty years. Our provincial Brother Steve Glodek gave some colorful remarks about Brother Tom after Bishop Joe Sullivan's opening prayer. The silent auction gifts were remarkable and I am sure added to the profits

to make this a great fundraiser for Saint John's which has served the community so well for so many years.

Originally an orphanage, it is now a supervised residence for juveniles. Several of the graduates were present for the dinner and had great success stories to share with us. One of them was my friend Father Paul Landolfi with whom I entered the SM in 1944. At the close of the dinner one of his friends, a classmate in 1937, drove Brother Joe Markel and me back to Saint John's. We had come with Brother Tom, but we knew that he would not be returning until having said goodbye to the last guest. Meanwhile, back at Saint John's, the other members of our Province Peace and Justice committee had arrived.

The next morning after an early Mass we set off for Brother Steve O'Neil's office near the United Nations. It was a quick walk to the crowded subway, a rushed change of trains along the way and then we competed with vigorous New Yorkers who were determined to reach their destinations quickly no matter what!

Once settled in to Brother Steve's office, however, we got to work promptly and peacefully. Brother Steve heads a certified non-governmental organization (NGO) at the UN and serves the entire Marianist Family in keeping us informed about international human rights issues. We met with three other NGOs who serve their religious communities in the same way. Their excitement about their mission was stimulating.

From there we went to the UN for the Thursday meeting of the NGOs, but this week it was in the form of a midday piano concert to celebrate United Nations Day. This was a welcome moment of peace in the midst of our rushed day. After lunch and a debriefing of our UN visit we launched into our own agenda, which revolved around ways to make the Province statement "Advancing Justice" more operative. We had dinner at a nearby restaurant and then in the light of a bright full moon we made the return to Saint John's after the rush hour traffic had somewhat subsided. The next morning we worked intensely to complete our agenda.

After lunch Father Ted Cassidy graciously drove me through the rain to the airport where I found a quiet spot in the new American Airlines terminal. We boarded on time, but take off was delayed two hours because of the rain. Once we were in the air, however, it was a smooth and pleasant

flight across the Atlantic. I slept about two hours and read the rest of the time as the clock jumped ahead six hours.

The entry into Rome was surprisingly easy. Brother Mike McAward was waiting patiently for me and expertly drove me to my old home at Via Latina 22 while telling me about the program for the beatification. It was a fresh and bright morning as I made the rounds, visiting old friends and meeting new people. There were twenty names on the guest list. Some of the staff was still here from the 1970s; it was really great to see them again! In fact it was Lisa who welcomed me as we arrived at the front door. She has been working as a receptionist since the early 1970s – and doesn't look a day older! I explored the property; it is quite beautiful and well cared for, but the wonderful vegetable garden is no more as we have given some of our property to the parish. I remember how Brother Hermann Huber had worked here for twenty years from dawn to dusk with amazing results always providing fresh and tasty food for the kitchen.

The main meal was at 1 p.m. and although it was breakfast time in New York and even earlier in Cupertino, I ate heartily. After a short nap I joined the group that was waiting for the chartered bus that took us to Saint Paul's Outside the Walls for the vigil service. The walk to Saint Paul's has always been one of my favorites so the route past the pyramid is very familiar to me. Throughout the pilgrimage the bus rides through Rome were fascinating, bringing back old memories and opening up new horizons. Rome is eternal but it is also changing. What is definitely the same is the traffic congestion. Imagine thousands coming to Saint Paul's in chartered buses and then finding places to meet after the services! That was the beginning of my pilgrimage.

Eventually we found places in the huge church for the 6:30 vigil service. And what a service it was! The huge church was packed with many standing on the sides. And it seemed as though everyone had a camera. There were many crimson and gold banners and the various groups had distinctive scarves. We had a badge identifying us as Marianistas along with golden scarves. On the attractive welcome booklet received at Via Latina 22 there is a Marianist logo for the beatification featuring four blots of color revealing interconnected crosses and a central M which unites these crosses. Red, the color of fire, passion and of blood and dark red, the

color of blood spilt on the ground. There is a flame of fire over a fragile clay lamp, an impetuous wind that stirs the flame and retells the story. A tree leaf that falls by this violent autumn wind in Madrid. The four crosses hold the delicate leaf together amidst the storm. Four names – Miguel, Sabino, Joaquin, Florencio – without any other references, without saying where, nor when, nor who. Four names written in capital letters, firm and stable, which invite us to remain strong in faith at the foot of the Cross, of our crosses.

Saint Paul's is a magnificent church and I had leisure to admire the splendid ceiling, the impressive mosaics in the sanctuary, the unique alabaster windows. As 6:30 approached more lights were turned on. It was here that I learned of the complexity of this great celebration. The 498 martyrs to be declared blessed on Sunday were from many different dioceses in Spain. There were 23 groups listed alphabetically. The Marianists were part of Group 15 from the archdiocese of Madrid: Buenaventura Garcia Paredes, OP, Miguel Leibar Garay, SM and 40 companions. Our numbers in the list of 498 were 408-411: Miguel Leibar Garay, Joaquin Ochoa Salazar, Sabino Ayastuy Errasti and Florencio Arnaiz Cejudo.

Bishops and religious superiors had collaborated to make this one celebration of many. The research done by dioceses and religious communities was outstanding. Many priests, sisters, brothers and lay people were killed during the persecution of the Church in Spain in the 1930s, but only those cases that were well documented, i.e., with eyewitness accounts, were presented as candidates for beatification. The obvious byproduct of this was a better working relationship between bishops and religious communities in the line of the great Vatican document: Mutual Relations. To date almost 1,000 people martyred during the religious persecution have been beatified. I understand there are still many more cases that could be recognized in the future, but there are no more Marianists on the list.

The vigil service was really designed as a welcome to pilgrims and I spent some time reflecting on the meaning of pilgrimage in the twenty-first century. We began by singing the traditional Veni Creator Spiritus followed by Cristo vence before a welcoming address. Then we heard "the

voice of the martyrs” with selected messages. The principal address was an inspiring talk: “Quienes son y de donde vienen” (Who are they and where do they come from) by Cardinal Carlos Amigo. There were more hymns with music provided by the Cathedral choir from Madrid and the Roman Philharmonic. Meanwhile, back at Via Latina 22, a large group of young people from Spain – Marianists and students - were having their own celebrations in our chapel and garden area.

After a light supper I appreciated the fact that during the night we turned back the time an hour, giving me more time to readjust my body clock. Sunday morning we left the house by chartered bus at 7:15 and when we arrived at Saint Peter's we joined the long line waiting to get into the Piazza. I had been given a special pass to concelebrate so I joined a huge group that was vesting in a special hall and processed with them to our places well in advance of the 10 a.m. Mass. The Mass was celebrated at the special outdoor altar on a raised platform that overlooks the piazza. I was seated on that level a short distance away from the choir. The public address system was perfect, at least for our section. Below the altar and extending out to the end of the piazza was a sea of people. Estimates varied from ten to a hundred thousand.

Colorful banners identified the various groups but were not seated by groups. Prior to the Mass there was music and a series of reflections including a recording of a stirring message Pope John Paul II had given about martyrdom many years ago. Other messages were quotes from some of the martyrs or short descriptions of their life. It was a simply gorgeous day. There wasn't a cloud in the bright blue sky and it was unseasonably warm. Some of the vested priests had caps to protect themselves from the bright sun, but I disdained that and I am still glowing as a result. I admired the colossal statues high overhead the Piazza San Pietro and realized how magnificent they were when I spotted a man alongside one of the statues looking pathetically small and helpless alongside these giant sculptures! There are 140 statues, each twelve feet tall!

Pope Benedict XVI has the policy of delegating the celebration of a beatification to a cardinal and setting the celebration in the home country of the blessed. An exception to this policy was made at the request of the Spanish bishops so it was a true pilgrimage to Rome and a celebration of the universal church. I believe most of the bishops of Spain were present

but I have no list of participants. Our Superior General, Father Manuel Cortes, who was with us for the Province Assembly in Tucson, was pleased to see the bishop of Tucson at the beatification.

Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints presided and gave the homily as well. He urged us to look at our own lives to discover whether the faith of the martyrs shows itself in the way we live our faith. He gave some concrete examples about how we contribute to the common good of society by “defending the dignity of the person, life from conception until natural death, the family founded on the sacramental and unbreakable union between a man and a woman, and the right and primary duty of parents in educating their children.”

The ceremony moved along solemnly – never rushed, but never sluggish. The fundamental idea was that this was a celebration of 498 men and women who had given their lives for the faith in Spain in the twentieth century. The dramatic moment was the actual declaration: “Whereas in Spain during the twentieth century they shed their blood in witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, henceforth let them be known as Blessed and their feast be celebrated annually on November 6 in the places and manner established by law.”

At that point all of us watched the unveiling of the symbol of the martyrs at the time of the proclamation. In other ceremonies, the unveiling is of a portrait. For the 498 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish martyrs the symbol was a cross and flames with the simple inscription: Beatificacion Martires de Espana, Rome 2007, with the years of martyrdom: 1934 – 36 – 37.

The Mass ended about twenty minutes before twelve, but no one left as we all awaited the appearance of the Holy Father from his top floor window. Promptly at noon he greeted the crowd in various languages and made these remarks about the beatification: “Adding such a great number of martyrs to the list of beatified persons shows that the supreme witness of giving blood is not an exception reserved only to some individuals, but a realistic possibility for all Christian people. It includes men and women of different ages, vocations and social conditions, who pay with their lives in fidelity to Christ and his Church.” (Interestingly, he referred to the recent beatification in Austria of Franz Jägerstätter that our representative of

Austria-Germany, Brother Alfred Aigner, had witnessed.) He went on to say “Certainly not everyone is called to a bloody martyrdom. There is also an unbloody “martyrdom,” which is no less significant ... It is the silent and heroic testimony of many Christians who live the Gospel without compromises, fulfilling their duty and dedicating themselves generously in service to the poor.” Then we began the exit which was almost as complicated as the entry, but we finally met at the agreed upon spot and from there walked to the bus which was parked nearby. We drove across town to Santa Maria where the Province of Italy and the Marianist communities of Rome had prepared a great dinner for us.

The final event was a Mass of Thanksgiving on Monday morning, again at Saint Peter’s, this time inside the magnificent church rather than outside in the Piazza. We left Via Latina 22 at 7:30 and arrived in record time but then faced the long wait in line to get into the Basilica. Once inside we settled down to wait for the 10 a.m. Mass to begin. I was between Father Enrique Torres, who had worked long and hard to help bring this cause to its completion. On the other side was Brother Pierre Taue, representing the Japanese Marianists at this celebration. The Church was quickly filled. From time to time we spotted various Marianists from Spain who were lodged elsewhere in Rome as were the many students who had come to Rome on pilgrimage.

Mrs. Jeanne Martin, one of my walking companions in Cupertino, had loaned me a book “Basilica” which was a marvelous guide to understanding Saint Peter’s and the centuries of history it took to bring this great monument to completion. From my place I could admire Bernini’s famous Baldacchino over the papal altar, the marble floors and the exquisite gold painted ceiling. Most striking were the colossal statues – everything in Saint Peter’s is huge, but also in proportion so it is hard to realize how big each item actually is. Surprisingly, for this Mass there were no books – not even a printed program. But it was all first class, with the Sistine Chapel Choir providing the music.

The celebrant for this Mass was the Cardinal Secretary of State, an Italian bishop who is also a member of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales – a Salesian. His message was clear and simple: The martyrs were a gift to the Church in Spain – and to the world. The beatification was also a call to live

the gospel radically. Acoustics were excellent as was the lighting. And somehow the various ushers and masters of ceremonies maintained order and decorum throughout the three day celebration. Pilgrimage was the key word for all these events, and I was struck by the antiphon for the first psalm of Monday morning prayer: "When will I come to the end of my pilgrimage and enter the presence of God?" The Mass of thanksgiving featured the great reading from the Book of Revelation about martyrdom with the inspiring response that those who sow in tears will reap in joy. The "grain of wheat" gospel was wonderfully appropriate because the martyrs did bring about a fascinating growth of the Church in Spain. Although the celebration was focused on the twentieth century Spanish martyrs, the fact that it was celebrated in Rome, not in Spain, underlined the fact that this was truly an ecclesial event – a celebration for the church everywhere.

The crimson and gold of Spain was dominant, as were chants of Christ the King, but the celebration was certainly for and by the Church throughout the world. Moreover, the message of the martyrs was universal, calling all Christians everywhere to be men and women of great hope, always looking forward confidently to the resurrection. The Spanish bishops and the Vatican had gone to great pains to emphasize this was a religious celebration, but the next day the Paris-based *Herald Tribune* had a front page photo and article declaring it was a pro-Franco demonstration!

Father Jose Maria Salaverri, who had followed me as superior general and subsequently devoted his life to promoting the causes sponsored by the Society of Mary, had sent me a copy of his book "Madrid, Verano 1936" describing the lives of the Marianist martyrs. This was really my guide for the pilgrimage. What's next? If a cure attributed to Blessed William Joseph Chaminade is verified, we could see our founder canonized a few years from now; the cause of Faustino, a teenager who lived a remarkable life, is a very popular cause in Spain and many other countries. The director of the community at Via Latina 22 is Father Antonio Gascon who is also responsible for advancing these causes with the Vatican.

I have already mentioned Brother Alfred Aigner (from Austria), Brother Pierre Taue, who represented the Region of Japan, and the great promoter

of the cause, Father Enrique Torres, from Madrid. All the members of the General Administration were present with the exception of Brother Ed Violett who was in Texas caring for his mother who is seriously ill.

Throughout the pilgrimage I had chats with many old friends beginning with Brother George Lytle (born in 1918!) who had come from Peru with Father Eduardo Rodriguez. I was especially pleased to see Father Dave Fleming who had returned to India after completing his years of service as superior general. The seminary community was out in force, especially in contact with the youths who had come from Spain. Father Urs Schenker and I had several conversations before he returned to Switzerland to publish his own report of the beatification. The former secretary general, Brother Peter Pontolillo, and I represented the Province of the United States.

The districts of Ivory Coast and Togo were represented by their regional superiors, Brothers Dominique Le Brenn and Max Magnan. Marianist laity who were guests of the General Administration were Lorna Mueni from Kenya and Isabelle de Contelleuve from France. Meribah had two representatives: the provincial, Father Tom Cardone and Brother Tom Cleary, a member of the provincial council. Brother Joseph Okoth was here from Eastern Africa. Father Pascal Lee, regional superior in Korea, was accompanied by Father Francis Chang. The delegates from France were registered but a strike by Air France kept them from coming to Rome.

Monday afternoon I began my debriefing of the celebration by taking a brisk walk down to the pyramid and back. I followed the massive wall that encircles the inner city. It was a good workout, and very familiar. The wall is holding up, but the sidewalks or paths are a shambles. Traffic was noisy: the usual horns of impatient drivers, screeching ambulances, and police escorts fighting their way through. I was amazed at the popularity of the little car built by BMW called the SMART car.

There were few walkers on this road, and it was too early for the street walkers to begin their nightly vigil. I passed embassies and villas hidden behind the walls and then came to the heart of the pyramid traffic which always looks chaotic. Back at Via Latina I plunged into my editing of notes I had taken but only after checking e-mail. We had an excellent wireless

connection here so it was easy to keep in touch with the world learning that the Steelers had crushed the Bengals, that the Red Sox had won the World Series and that the earth had shaken violently near Cupertino. But I was quickly reassured that all was well back home. The superb weather we had for the beatification quickly gave way to cloudy skies, then light showers, followed by a real downpour with thunder and lightning and a dramatic drop in temperature. After all, it is almost November! It reminded me of the beatification weekend we had for Padre Jakob Gapp many years ago – cold and wet.

Throughout my stay I had time for leisurely prayer and reflection in the quiet morning hours. Moreover my rooftop room was on the garden side, just above Padre Miguel's fountain which is still functioning. As I reflected on the daily Scripture readings I was amazed at the way they related so well to the story of the Spanish martyrs. When I joined the community for Morning Prayer I noted that the custom here was to provide an hour of personal prayer in the morning rather than split the hour as we do in most of our communities.

The General Administration community now uses the main chapel which formerly had been used by the parish. It is a very beautiful chapel with marble floors and a fine mosaic sanctuary. And the lighting is much better now. 96 chairs with kneelers have replaced benches, but the community gathered in the large sanctuary for prayer and Mass. A nice feature of the community prayer was to pray for one of the communities each day by reading off the names from the personnel. The chanting of some of the psalms in Italian was also a pleasant surprise. It was also surprising how easy it was for me to understand Italian although I still struggled to express myself adequately.

While I was going through my writing period the General Administration began their visit with the Province of Italy. One by one the guests left until only a few of us remained.

As I was reflecting on the three day celebration of the beatification I realized that much time was spent in waiting. We waited in lines to get into Saint Paul's and Saint Peter's and even into the piazza. Even when we

were seated there were long waits before the ceremonies began. Some of the time was spent in visiting. Some in watching. And I remembered Cardinal Newman's great sermon on Advent in which he described Advent as the experience of waiting for a friend. Waiting patiently and expectantly can be a powerful form of prayer.

For the solemnity of All Saints we had several guests from the neighborhood for our morning Mass. They came with coats and umbrellas. We later enjoyed a festive dinner. All the meals were good, and there was always a plate of cheese of various kinds that proved very popular. Also attractive was the assortment of fresh fruit.

In the late afternoon after it had stopped raining Father Antonio Collicelli graciously drove me to the rehab hospital where my friend Brother Ambrogio Albano was being cared for. It happened to be his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday! We had worked together at the General Administration for many years. Years ago when I had asked him for a good book that wasn't too difficult to read he had given me Carlo Caretto's *Lettere del Deserto* and later revealed that he and the author were good friends from their youth. Father Antonio had given me a card to give to Ambrogio; the inscription was upbeat: *Il sole passa anche attraverso le nubi piu dense* (The sun cuts through the densest clouds) and I added my own greeting plus several packets of macadamia nuts from Hawaii.

We received an excellent memorial medal of the Marianist martyrs but there were no small medals available. Perhaps some souvenirs are available in Spain. I had to settle for some Roman medals to take back to Cupertino. Early Friday morning, November 2, Brother Mike drove Brother Peter, his cousin and me to the airport. After the crowds at the beatification ceremonies negotiating the Fiumicino airport was a piece of cake. And the new international terminal is like an elite shopping mall, clean and attractive, with names like Hermes, Prada, Bulgari.

We boarded on time and it was a pleasant nine hours to New York where it was easy to go through passport and baggage checks. I had a leisurely wait until boarding the plane to San Francisco. We actually left the gate early, but it was an hour and a half before takeoff so I didn't arrive in California until well after midnight. All Souls Day has always been special to me,

especially since my mother died on that date, so I celebrated All Souls Day in the privacy of planes and airports. In San Francisco Mrs. Nancy Romano was waiting patiently for me and briefed me on events at the Center as we drove back to Cupertino. It was 2 a.m. California time when I went to bed but I was up about two hours later and I am still readjusting. Sunday morning I was the celebrant for the community Mass and in the afternoon I gave a report of the beatification for those interested. On Tuesday, November 6, I am listed as the celebrant while Brother John Samaha will lead us in morning and evening prayer.

We hope to find in our Marianist confreres Blessed Miguel, Sabino, Joaquin and Florencio great intercessors to help us in our own efforts to follow Christ. In praying to them I shall also be mindful of you as we journey together on this lifelong pilgrimage.

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