

Dear Parishioners,

Saluti da Roma! (Greetings from Rome!)

In addition to our regular sabbatical schedule, these have been some of the highlights of the sabbatical program since I last wrote to you:

- 1) Our classroom sessions (with visiting professors) have focused on the following topics:
 - St. Paul, and his letters
 - Canon Law
 - Christology
 - Mariology
 - Moral Theology
 - Medieval Church History
- 2) We visited the Dicastery for the Defense of the Faith: we were given a tour there by Fr. Andrew Liaugminas (a priest of the USA who works in the dicastery).
- 3) We travelled to and took in tours of:
 - the Church of *Tre Fontane* (meaning “three fountains”) on the outskirts of central Rome (the place of St. Paul’s execution by beheading)
 - the Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (the burial place of St. Paul)
 - the oldest Jewish Synagogue in Rome
 - the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere (one of the oldest churches in Rome, originally constructed in the 300s!)
- 4) I concelebrated with Pope Francis, and approximately two hundred cardinals, bishops, and priests at a Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica on Sunday, February 11th. The Mass also celebrated the canonization of Santa Maria Antonia di San Giuseppe Paz y Figueroa (the first female saint of Argentina). I was there with two priests from the sabbatical program: Fr. Pat Breeze, SM, from New Zealand, and Fr. Bill John Acosta Escobar, from Raleigh, North Carolina, USA; he is originally from Colombia. The three of us were delighted to be chosen by the papal master of ceremonies to distribute Holy Communion. As promised, I offered prayer in that papal Mass for each member of the parish-school community of IC and your needs.
- 5) I met an Italian mother (by the name of Leonora) and her son (Edward) at a Starbucks in Rome and we ended up having a very pleasant conversation with each other. Leonora wanted to practice her English, and I practiced my Italian. Before, I knew it, I was invited for dinner to their family home. I have included a picture of the family taken at their home (including daughter, Charlotte, and father, Theodore), and another photo of Charlotte and the family dog, Harry. 😊

- 6) I took two personal trips during a couple of our sabbatical long weekends: (a) one to Bari, Italy: where San Nicola (St. Nicholas) is buried; and (b) one to Lisbon, Portugal (and also the shrine at Fatima). I prayed for you at the various churches in Bari and Lisbon (including at the burial crypt of St. Nicholas, and also at the crypt of the birthplace of St. Anthony of Padua – who the Portuguese proudly claim as one of their own since he was born in Lisbon 😊) and the shrine churches at Fatima.
- 7) The sabbatical program recently included a six-day retreat in Assisi, Italy, where we visited and prayed at the tombs of St. Francis and St. Clare. I remembered each of you in prayer at these holy sites.

The sabbatical program's last few weeks will include the following events:

- 1) a tour of the ***Basilica of St. John Lateran*** (which is the cathedral church of the Holy Father as the Bishop of Rome);
- 2) a tour of the ***Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*** (which contains relics of the Holy Cross of our Lord, brought from the Holy Land to Rome by the Empress Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine I). Helena also had soil brought from Jerusalem to cover the floor of the Santa Croce Basilica; hence, the basilica was considered to "be", spiritually at least, "in" Jerusalem, and, therefore, given the title, "*in Gerusalemme*."
- 3) a tour of the Borghese Gallery;
- 4) a day trip to Caprarola and the ancient, Palazzo Farnese (Farnese Palace);
- 5) our sabbatical group will concelebrate at the Palm Sunday Mass to be celebrated by Pope Francis at St. Peter's Basilica (if the weather is good, this Mass will be celebrated outside in St. Peter's Square).

I will also be concelebrating/assisting at the Triduum Liturgies (Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper; Service of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday; Easter Vigil Mass; and Easter Sunday Mass) at St. Peter's Basilica on the days of March 28-31. Please be assured that I will remember all of you in prayer at each of those celebrations! 😊

Please pray for me.

I will be home in approximately three-week's time. I look forward to seeing all of you again!

God bless!

Fr. John

P.S. I have posted some photos of the above-mentioned events below.



The newly-canonized saint:
Santa Maria Antonia di San Giuseppe Paz y
Figueroa
(the first female saint of Argentina)

This is in a hallway in the Apostolic Palace, next door to St. Peter's Basilica. The cardinals and bishops vest in a separate area in the basilica itself, and the priests in this hallway. The priests are waiting word from the papal MC on when we should start processing toward the nave of St. Peter's Basilica, and then down the aisle of the basilica to our seats.



The 'Three Amigos' waiting for the instruction to start processing toward and into St. Peter's Basilica for the Mass.

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Charlotte, Leonora,
Edward, and Theodore. A
wonderful Italian family!

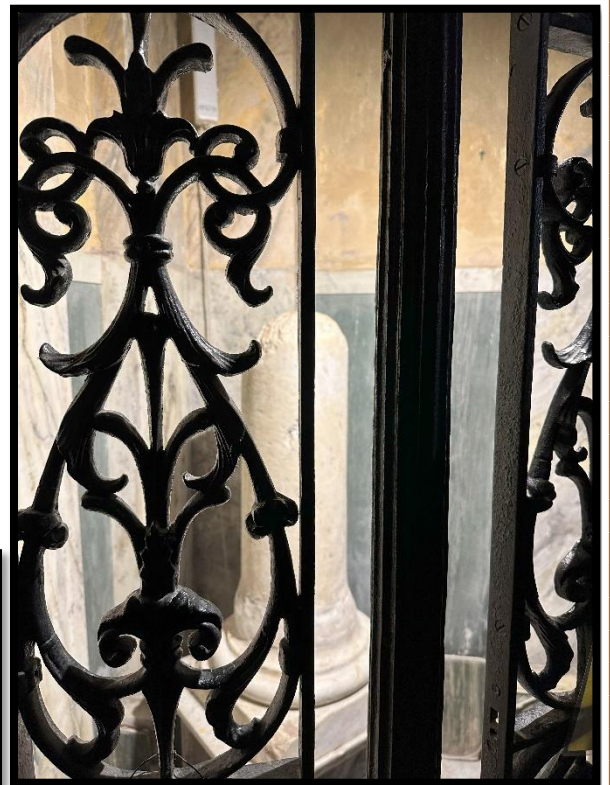


Charlotte and Harry.



Visiting the oldest Jewish Synagogue in Rome

The pillar at *Tre Fontane Church* (on the outskirts of Rome) which marks the spot where St. Paul was beheaded



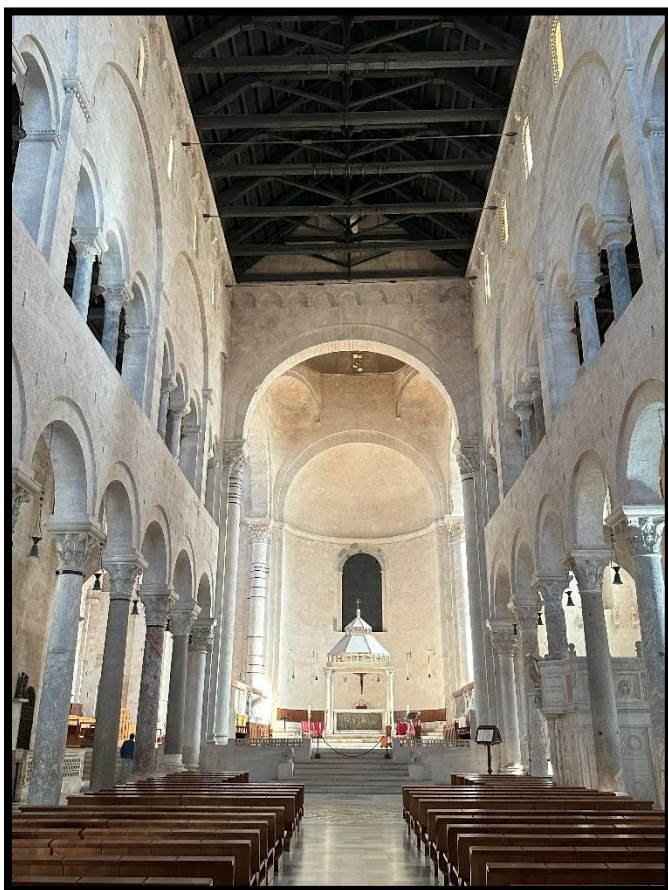
The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (where St. Paul's remains are entombed)

The Basilica of San Nicola (St.
Nicholas) in Bari, Italy

The tomb of San Nicola (St. Nicholas) below
the altar of the lower crypt



The upper portion of the Basilica of San Nicola
(St. Nicholas)





Pasta Alley in Bari, Italy. Women sell home-made pasta (and form it right in front of you) in this alley market

Our sabbatical group having coffee before visiting the Dicastery for Defense of the Faith

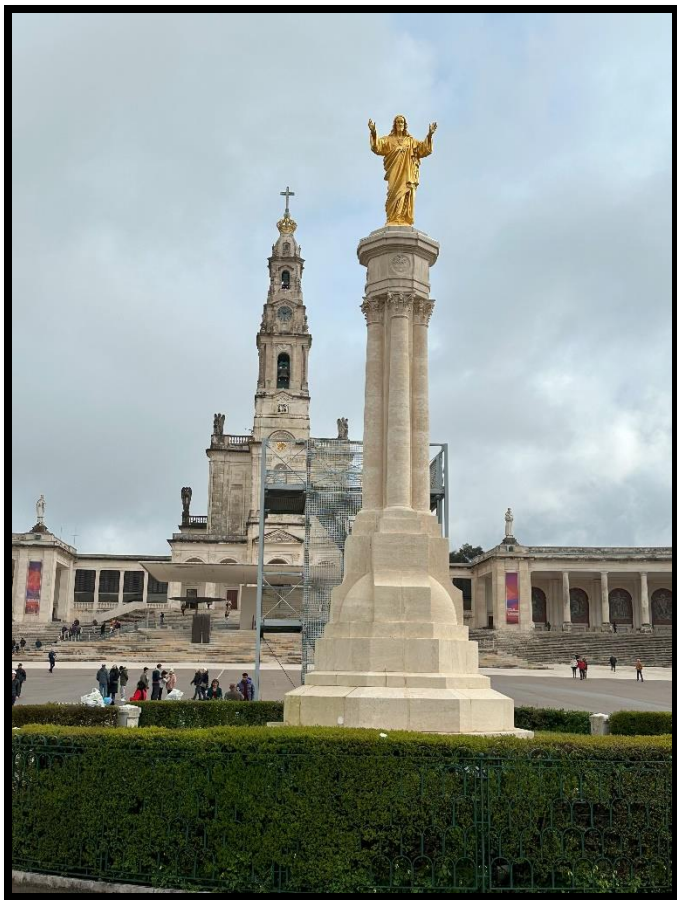




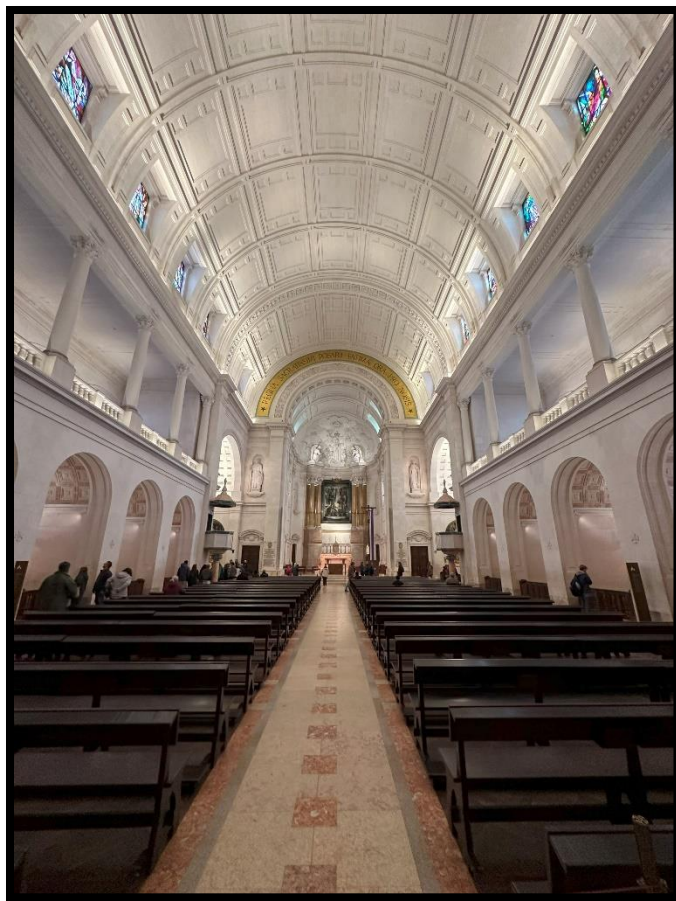
Fr. Andrew Liaugminas (a priest of the USA who works in the Dicastery for Defense of the Faith) gave us a tour of the dicastery building on February 22nd, the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter – which also happens to be my birthday 😊.

On February 22nd (the same day as the tour of the Dicastery of Defense of the Faith) we went over to St. Peter's Basilica (a short walk) to visit and say a prayer at the statue of the Chair of St. Peter. Every year on this feast day, they dress the statue of St. Peter in pontifical attire and mitre to recognize St. Peter as the first pontiff of the Church.





Shrine Church at Fatima, Portugal



Inside the Shrine Church at Fatima



Tomb of St. Jacinta (Fatima) on the left

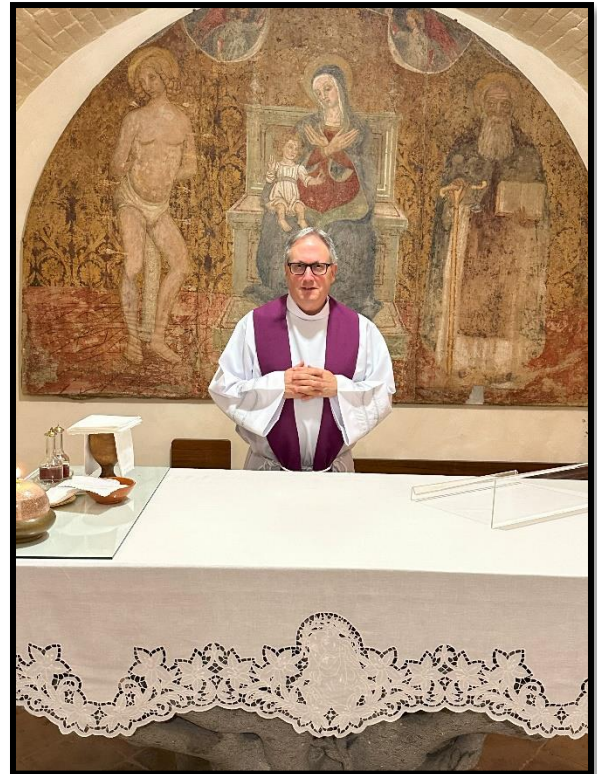
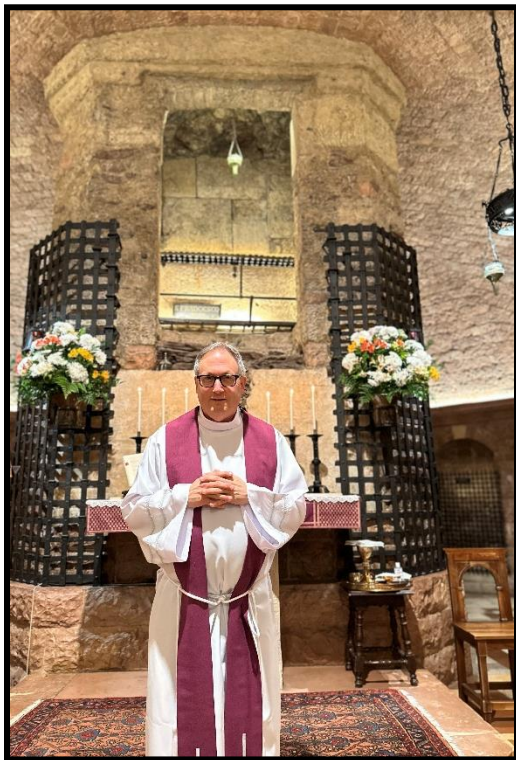
Tomb of St. Francisco (Fatima)



Basilica of St. Francis (Assisi, Italy)



We celebrated Mass at the tomb of St. Francis (he is entombed in the crypt above and behind my head)



We celebrated Mass in a chapel at San Damiano (previous monastery of the Poor Clares). The Poor Clares are now located at the Basilica of St. Clare in the main centre of Assisi; the Franciscan Friars now live at San Damiano, as well as at the Basilica of St. Francis.



San Damiano (the previous monastery of the Poor Clares, who were founded by St. Clare of Assisi). St. Francis and his friars fixed up this abandoned church and monastery for St. Clare and her community to live and pray in.

The San Damiano cross that St. Francis prayed before on many occasions.





Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere – one of the oldest churches in Rome (built in the 300s!)

Inside the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere.

