

MERCIFUL AS THE FATHER: MODELING MERCY IN AN OFTEN HEARTLESS WORLD

Sometimes the shortest trips turn out to be the best ones. My brief four-day conference for the **Missionaries of Mercy** held in Rome was an experience of the universal Church that was most powerful for me. On top of that, I did not accumulate too much dirty laundry, nor did I feel “too behind” upon my return. I am part of a worldwide group of 865 priests who have been given special faculties (fancy Church word for permission) to remove ecclesiastical censures that accompany certain sins that have traditionally been “reserved” to the Holy See. In some cases, individuals would need to write to the Holy Father through his representative at the Apostolic Penitentiary in order to have these penalties removed. Two of the specific cases in which these special faculties apply include the profanation of the Eucharist and the violation of the Seal of the Confessional. By allowing priests scattered throughout the world to act on behalf of the Holy Father, this process is made simpler.

Sitting at the dinner table with priests from Spain, Italy and Brazil, the only common language we could use in conversation was Italian, with yours truly clearly bringing up the rear in terms of the level of facility with *la bella lingua*. Nevertheless, we could compare notes, share the concerns of our own local Churches and realize that each of us is called to exercise this ministry in like manner, even if in very different ecclesial cultures. The Spanish priest had studied in Rome, but more than 40 years ago. So when he inquired as to the quickest way to get to the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, I was only too happy to oblige. “Let us go together,” I suggested, and we both enjoyed our visit, and stayed for Sung Vespers on Divine Mercy Sunday with the Benedictines who staff the Basilica.

While there, someone approached me from behind and tapped me on the shoulder. It was none other than **Fr. Evan Koop**, a priest of this Archdiocese who is pursuing graduate studies in Rome. He will make a fine professor someday at the seminary. Earlier in the day, we had concelebrated the Holy Eucharist with the Pope at a Mass in St. Peter’s Square on a picture-perfect morning. It was one of the most moving homilies I have ever heard from Pope Francis and I have included a link on our website in the section that contains my homilies. (www.cathedralsaintpaul.org/about/rectors-page). Clearly, the theme of mercy is a signature one in his exercise of his Petrine office. He never seems to tire of speaking about it, largely because he believes in his heart that the Lord never tires of offering mercy. But equally important is our duty to promote the sacrament, to be available on a very regular basis to celebrate it and teach about it, etc. One Australian priest was given seven months leave from his parish to focus exclusively on this sacrament, travelling all across his vast country.

The lectures we attended during the conference were simply outstanding. **Robert Cardinal Sarah**, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, spoke on some aspects of the sacrament, especially with respect to its essential matter and form. He indicated that **mercy and conversion are really indivisible**, one reality. He spoke about the most basic requirements of a penitent for a fruitful celebration of the sacrament. And he was quick to point out that we priests need to avail ourselves of the sacrament regularly in order to be ardent and gentle ministers of the same sacrament. He spoke beautifully of our need to seek and desire contrition, something our world too often avoids, seeing contrition somehow as a sign of weakness.

English **Archbishop Arthur Roche**, secretary of the same Congregation, spoke about the spirituality of the sacrament, and clearly spent a good deal of time preparing his reflection, quoting from literature, and spiritual writings. His was delivered to the English-speaking participants in what turned out to be a school chapel near the Basilica of St. John Lateran. If you can imagine 100 priests walking by the classrooms in the hallways on our way to their large chapel, we surely turned a few heads. It poured down rain during the ten-minute walk, but we managed.

Our principal sessions took place at the **Pontifical Lateran University**, one of Rome’s many venerable universities. The Aula Magna, (Great Hall) was recently named after Pope Benedict XVI and had been completely redone. The seats were comfortable and the acoustics incredible. **Archbishop Rino Fisichella** wryly reminded us that just as we can hear every word clearly through the speakers, so too can he hear every word spoken, even without the benefit of microphone coming from the cheap seats! As a former professor at

the Gregorian University, I am taking a wild guess that students did not talk during his lectures! The highlight was Tuesday's address of the Holy Father, after which he **greeted each of us individually**. We then proceeded to concelebrate Mass with him at the altar of the Chair in the back of St. Peter's Basilica.

- **Muchas gracias.** Through your tremendous generosity, we collected 345 pounds of medicine for the Cathedral in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It took a little work to get the shipment approved by the Postal Service, but thanks to Mike Snyder we did, and the shipment arrived on schedule. I'll report on my visit in more detail in next week's bulletin.
- If you see a member of our maintenance crew, please thank them for their care of our campus, especially given last weekend's blizzard! They would shovel only to have to go out again at the **very same spot** 20 minutes later, so much did the snow drift! But they did a remarkable job of keeping the path clear for those who braved the elements to attend Saturday and Sunday Masses. We also hosted two Confirmation Masses last weekend, if you can believe it!
- While other priests were enjoying our one free afternoon in Rome, I couldn't resist the temptation to dig around the archival stacks at the Propaganda Fide. Okay, okay— I'm a geek— but a happy one! I had sought permission to look at documents written by then 36-year-old **Bishop-elect John Ireland**, in 1875. It took a while, but I found the pertinent document and enjoyed perusing many others. He wrote in Latin, no less, and I am hoping to write more later about his "refusal" of a posting to Nebraska, prior to his being named bishop here. My, how things might have been different had he agreed. Stay tuned!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector

HANDMAIDS ANNOUNCEMENT

We have been blessed with the ministry of the Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus during these past months. As I have previously written, despite good faith efforts, we have encountered many roadblocks in converting a 1922 office building into residential use, given significant and time consuming changes required by the city code. Further delay is unworkable given the needs of the community.

Through much prayer and discussion, the sisters discerned that they should accept a decision from another diocese, one in which they can be accommodated immediately. I understand and support their decision. When God closes one door, He opens another. I will keep you informed as we consider next steps. - Fr. Ubel



**Fr. Ubel Greets Pope Francis as
Archbishop Fisichella looks on.**