

AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM: AN EXPRESSION OF COMMUNION WITH ROME

In Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians (1:18), we read: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas and remained with him for fifteen days." Why Paul included that detail is a matter of speculation. Perhaps he did so to fill out his travelogue, maybe he wanted readers to know that he took seriously the role of Cephas (Peter), or to show that they were working together, reading of the same sheet music, or better yet, **sailing in the same direction**. But it may well signal the vital unity that undergirds the Church's mission in a universal Church—fostering unity and communion. This past week, the bishops from Region VIII (Minnesota, North and South Dakota) travelled together to Rome to take part in a venerable Catholic tradition, the visit *Ad Limina Apostolorum*. It could certainly go by another name—some would try to pass it off as "branch managers" visiting the "Central Office" for a progress report. There are myriad theological problems with that characterization, but I shall save that for another article.

Indeed, there is a sense in which Rome desires to remain informed about how the Church fares in diverse parts of the world, but that is only a part of the ancient exercise. At its core, the title speaks volumes. The phrase is translated literally as "to the thresholds of the apostles." What on earth does that mean? For one, the word *limina* could also be translated as **entrances**—in that case referring to the entrances to the tombs. That's right, the exercise has to do with **venerating the tombs** of the apostles, Saints Peter and Paul. In the Church's **canonical legislation** (Code of Canon Law Can. 400) prescribing the visit, the two basic purposes for it are clearly stated: (a) to venerate the tombs of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul; (b) to meet with the Successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.



Venerating the Tomb of St. Peter

Thus, it is both a **pilgrimage and a meeting**. And this is one meeting for which the respective dioceses are prepared. They produce a *quinquennial report* (lit. every five years) that summarizes key aspects of the life of the individual diocese and they send it to Rome **six months in advance**. It forms the basis for the discussions with the Holy Father and other Curial officials. It is frankly the best way to inform Rome about the life of the Church in any particular diocese. The Directory that guides the visit says this about the report: "The value of the Report will be its combination of brevity with clarity, its precision, its concreteness and its objectivity in describing the actual situation of the particular Church for which the Ordinary is responsible, its problems, its relations with other non-Catholic and non-Christian religious communities, with civil society and with the public authorities." Brevity? The report—147 pages plus 130 pages of appendices!

I very much hope to be able to share some **key findings** from that report in the near future, as I am sure they are well-prepared and exhaustive. The health of the Church is examined through many different lenses, including an up to date portrait of our parishes, schools and institutions. Though *quinquennial* means "five," in reality no longer do bishops travel to Rome every five years. The **sheer number of dioceses** in the world has grown such that the meetings are being held closer to every seven or eight years. The group meeting of the Region VIII bishops with Pope Francis took place last Monday, January 13. Archbishop Hebda reported that the Holy Father shared "some things that were on his mind, but also wanted to hear from us what are the issues we are facing." As a former diocesan bishop himself, Pope Francis shared some reflections from his time leading a diocese in Buenos Aires, signaling that he understands the challenges and joys faced by diocesan bishops.

Believe it or not, there was even a section in the *Quinquennial Report* in which the Cathedral was asked to detail how we are **caring for the Cathedral** building, including the artwork, etc. I was amazed at that level of detail and was happy to share what we have done since 2011-12 in caring for this building. Still, the report rightly focuses the most attention, not on buildings or statistics, but on the spiritual life and health of the Archdiocese. That is always the priority. I suspect that the challenges we face in the Church in this country were discussed at some length. I hope that our bishops spoke of the importance of transparency and resolve in facing up to the serious failures that have scandalized and wearied our people. That is the only way to move forward—in faith, hope and honesty.

There was an added dimension to the visit. The group meeting with the Holy Father lasted two and a half hours (replacing the practice of the 15-minute individual meeting between a bishop and the Pope). That change began under Pope Benedict XVI, and I think it is an improvement, as a more comprehensive exchange can happen. Before the two-hour private meeting with the bishops began, the Pope greeted the seminarians and student priests from the Region. Reportedly, he was impressed with the large number of young men studying in Rome from the region. The Archbishop also shared with Pope Francis that a group of **young adults** had accompanied the bishops to Rome on their own pilgrimage. They participated in the Masses with our bishops at the various basilicas and took a side pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy. That these young adults would sacrifice to make this pilgrimage, demonstrates my fervent hope for our Church's future.

- Speaking of Young Adults, I encourage our young adults ages 18-39 to join us at Gabe's By the Park (991 Lexington Pkwy N, St. Paul) for our six-part **Theology on Tap** winter series, continuing each Wednesday evening at 6:30 p.m. through February 19.
- As 2019 drew to a close, our nation's population grew by just 0.5% (July 1, 2018 to July 1, 2019), its slowest pace in decades. The natural increase came in at less than a million, an even smaller growth than during the Great Depression. In 2019, there were 3,791,712 births, a rate of **11.6 per 1,000** out of a total US population of 329 million. By contrast, I was among 4,098,020 babies in my birth year, a rate of **21 per 1000**, out of a total U.S. population then of 189 million.
- Safe, legal and rare? Despite the rhetoric of abortion accounting for just a fraction of their services, Planned Parenthood's *raison d'être* is abortion-related services, pure and simple. While in recent years, the overall incidence of abortion in the U.S. has been **reduced**, Planned Parenthood itself saw a **3.88% increase** in 2018. PP's doctors **aborted 345,672 lives** in 2018, nearly 1000 per day. The organization continues to receive **your** tax dollars, to the tune of \$1.7 million dollars per day!
- Please join us for our annual Prayer Service for Life this **Wednesday, January 22 at 10:30 a.m.**, the 47th anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. Your voice is needed, your prayers and actions **can make a difference**. Let's pack the Cathedral in prayerful and hope-filled defense of life!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



Bishops from Region VIII (Minnesota, North and South Dakota)
in Rome, January 13, 2020 for the *Ad Limina Apostolorum*.