

## Greetings from GMT +1<sup>1</sup>

Since I have just found some free time to write, I thought I would let you all know that I have made it safely to Italy and am relishing my time here. My trip out was relatively uneventful after we had a big scare that I would not make my flight out of Albuquerque because I accidentally set my alarm for PM instead of AM, which left me having to wake up of my own devices 1hr before my flight left; thanks be to God, the lack of 5 am ABQ traffic, and the ingenuity and adroit driving of my father, I still made my gate 5 min before boarding time. Upon arrival at the NAC, the early orientation team greeted us and treated us to coronetti and succi di fruta<sup>2</sup>, and sent us out on busy work and tours of the NAC compound so that we would not fall asleep and further delay our adjustment to Rome time.

The remaining days of our early orientation consisted of optional excursions to holy sites in and around Rome in the AM, pronzi followed by free time to organize our rooms or venture into Rome to find important items like fans<sup>3</sup>, power converters and transformers for our American electronics, or anything else of which we could think to do. In the evening, we had socials and cene geared toward introducing us to each other and the various Italian with a brief explanation of the region from which it hails before we began. The only dish I remember by name, and would highly recommend, is pasta carbonara (it's like breakfast with pasta for dinner), which may or may not hail from the Abruzzo region (I was more interested in the eating than the history lesson).

I am able to recall 5 excursions from the first week in more or less accurate detail<sup>4</sup>. First, we traveled within the city of Rome to St John Lantern – SACROS LATERAN ECCLES OMNIUM URBIS ET ORBIS ECCLESARIUM MATER ET CAPUT<sup>5</sup> – on the Lateran hill and to another important basilica nearby whose name I cannot recall today. Our next trip was to see a massive cemetery and the Basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura where St Lawrence ('the saint grilled on the barbie', as our Aussi brother commented earlier today on his feast day), St Steven (Deacon, and the 1<sup>st</sup> martyr of the Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles), Bl. Pope Pius IX (who did much to alleviate the suffering of the people of this area after it was bombed in WWII), and St Justin of Rome (Deacon & Martyr). While touching the tomb of St Stephen, I made sure to remember in prayer all deacons, those currently and in formation, and their wives.



The front most side altar on the left in the Lateran Basilica

For our third excursion, we visited the catacombs of St Pricilla where we journeyed far below the surface and saw many ancient burial places, the oldest known image of the Madonna, and well preserved frescoes. Additionally, I was able to pray at the tomb of St Philomena for all young women and particularly for those with a special devotion to the saint as St John Vianney did during his ministry among the people of Ars. The next day I took a break from all the rush of the excursions since it was not a day planned for visiting holy sites and tried to get lost in Rome and successfully find my way back to the NAC, which I was able to do although all the churches I tried to visit were closed for pronzo and reposo when I arrived at them.

On Friday, we set out for Orvietto where a grandiose church was erected to house the Eucharistic miracle that took place nearby for which St Thomas Aquinas & St Bonaventure were commissioned by the Pope to write Eucharistic hymns to aid in the quickly growing devotion to the Blessed Sacrament during this time; it is said that when St Bonaventure heard the "*Pange Lingua*" of St Thomas, he was so moved that he shredded his hymns conceding greater excellence of those of St Thomas in comparison to his own compositions. We celebrated the Sacred Mysteries in every place we visited (catacombs, basilicas, etc.), but today was the most impressive as we celebrated Mass at the Altar where the Eucharistic miracle is kept. That was incredible!! An important

<sup>1</sup> 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. It's the international standard for how time zones relate to each other

<sup>2</sup> The former seem to be "breakfast pastries" though I haven't had it so well defined yet while the latter is "fruit juices"

<sup>3</sup> A much needed item as there is no air conditioning in the rooms and the temps were a muggy 85 degrees F well into the night. I am very proud that I, unlike many of my brothers, toughed it out and slept in my room all week without any thought moving to the air conditioned lounge despite my ceiling fan's failure after 2 days use, which proved to be a difficult burden to bear every night during that week.

<sup>4</sup> Sadly I left my camera cable in Rome so I am unable to transfer photos from it to my computer to share with you all at this time.

<sup>5</sup> The inscription on the front of the Basilica in English loosely reads: The Holy Lateran Church, the Church of the City (Rome) and the World, the Mother and Head of all Churches. I haven't had it fact checked yet so maybe you can best me on this one.

point to share is that I did get to see what is left of the monastery where St Thomas resided during his stay, or what little of the church is left since the bombings in of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the saint's enshrined chair, and what I was told was the corpus of Christ which spoke from the cross to him as I prayed for theologians, philosophers, students, and those with Thomistic devotions.

To conclude our orientation week, we ventured off to the house church of St Clement (the estate owner and early benefactor, not the slave St Clement<sup>6</sup>). This was an amazing church b/c we were able to go down 3 levels, from a ~17<sup>th</sup> century church, to a ~12 century church<sup>7</sup>, and then to the original 1<sup>st</sup> century church complete with underground spring and all. It had an original tabernacle from when they were first made mandatory after the 1<sup>st</sup> Lateran council<sup>8</sup> that was simple and yet very elegant.

Lest you think that all we do is travel to amazing places, which is true on the weekends during the summer since the convenience is great and travel is very economical when we already have a place to stay<sup>9</sup>, I have actually been studying Italian quite a bit. That is the real reason I haven't found time to write prior to this. Right now I am ignoring my homework to do this, but all will be forgiven with a minimum of tongue lashing from *miei insignanti*. My major problems in picking up the language are my insistence on using the Spanish and Italianized-Latin to supplement my very diminutive vocabulary and my failure to use the proper articles of the proper gender for each noun. The former mistakes befuddle my teachers and the latter just make my face a turn a nice reddish hue for the first 4hrs of my day *doppo colazione*<sup>10</sup> – good for practicing humility. By the way, 4hrs a day of private lessons is great, but I am *stancissimo doppo pranzo e miei classi*<sup>11</sup>. I relish each conversation period. I am using my Italian to speak about things that really matter: the times of conversion in my life; why I desire to share in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ; a defense of the church's teaching on cohabitation (*convivenza*); *Papa Giovanni Paulo Secundo's* Theology of the Body and Personalistic Norm; Dante's Divine Comedy (BTW all of these are at her request); the errors of modern and contemporary philosophy and the few bright spots therein just to name some of the highlights covered over the past 2 weeks. I am not so secretly praying for her reversion to the faith of her baptism so if you want to join me in this prayer for Eliza<sup>12</sup> that would be awesome. She has a golden innocence about her and an openness to the Truth – “which is a person – Christ Jesus” PP BXVI. All in God's timing.

Well, I have so much more to say and such little space and time in which to say it; next time I will tell you about my growing devotion to St Gianna Beretta Molla, my new BFF, but you can research her life if you want a sneak peek. I am greatly appreciative to all of you who sacrifice so much to allow me to study here in the Eternal City. Your prayers, the closeness to the saints, and the sacraments sustain me by the grace of God. Know that I lift you up daily and especially those who have sent me formal requests. If you have anymore, send them on over and I will add them to the list. We are busy, but prayer is priority. We spend more than half as much time praying as we do sleeping so there is always room more intentions. The holy Cure of Ars, St John Marie Vianney, tells us, “Prayer never leaves us without sweetness. It is honey that flows into the soul and makes all things sweet. When we pray properly, sorrows disappear like snow before the sun.” Know you are in my heart and travel with me wherever I go. See you in the Eucharist.

*Con il mio più sincero amore e affetto fraterno*<sup>13</sup>,

Christopher Bernabe

*On the feast of St Lawrence, Deacon & Martyr, 2010*

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<sup>6</sup> The slave of the previously mentioned St Clement who took the name Clement in order to honor his virtuous master after his martyrdom when he became Pope St Clement, the 3<sup>rd</sup> successor to the Chair of St Peter and martyr.

<sup>7</sup> I am not sure on the 1<sup>st</sup> two dates, but I am sure of 3<sup>rd</sup>. I didn't take notes and it has been a long time since the trip. Mea culpa ☹

<sup>8</sup> It is also noteworthy that its location was higher than a person at that time was tall and required a ladder to reach so as to signify the fact that what was contained within is not to be grasped by human hands. The priest had to journey up higher, toward the realm of God, in order to reach presence of God, which was ever before him (EMANUEL) in the Blessed Sacrament. Che riccissimo!

<sup>9</sup> regional trains and all day bus passes is about all it takes – never more than 15€ in day as of yet

<sup>10</sup> *After breakfast*. Since our major meals (*pranzo e cena*) seem to last between 2 & 3hrs (!! not thrilled about this) (slower service & a large group), the relation to meals is the best way to judge the passage of time; it is also another reason I am not able to do as much work after class as I would like, but the table conversations are worthwhile as we recount the blunders of the day and plan those of the next.

<sup>11</sup> *Very tired after lunch and my classes*

<sup>12</sup> Eliza laments the fact that there are no saint's by her name (Elizabeth's apparently don't count) so I tell her that she must then become the first so I retort in Italian, “Young people do not be afraid to become to Saints of the new Millennium – JPII” and she only blushes. With the help of God and a generous response to the grace He richly lavishes upon her, she's as good as back ☺

<sup>13</sup> *With my most sincere love and fraternal affection*