

Ciao Fratelli e Sorelle in Christo!

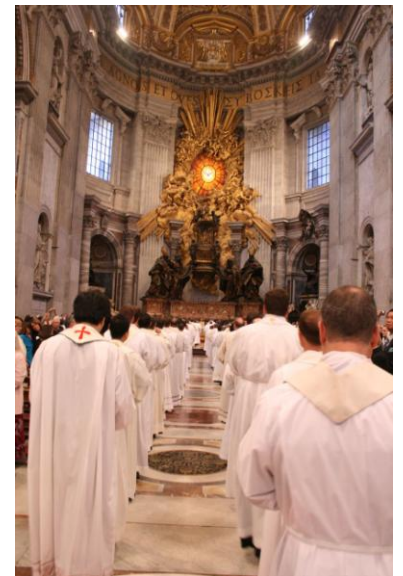
*Ad Majorem Gloriam Dei*<sup>1</sup>. Time has really begun to go by quickly out here. I cannot believe that I have already been in Italy for more than 5 months and 20 days and 5hrs<sup>2</sup>. That is definitely an approximate amount of time because I do not have time to figure out exactly, exactly how long it has been. Things truly have been wonderful but there is no place like home. Right now anywhere in America or a commonwealth would be a welcome sight. But that is not to say that I have had any bad experiences. You are all just too good that you can make even a seminarian paradise feel lacking. But rather than spending my time in a pangeyric<sup>3</sup> of praise to you all, how about I tell you a little of what has been going on these past few months.



When we returned from our language studies they put us through another set of daily classes at the college. Sadly during this time just like during my time in Verbania my instructor's mother acquired some illness during the course of the class. This one forced her to resign her post after two weeks, which was very difficult for us as we had become very attached to her for her excitement over teaching and her Catholic faith. Her replacement for the remaining 2 weeks had a completely different style but had an invigorating desire to teach us all the same with a jovial spirit to lighten our spirits.

Immediately following the final week of Italian classes, we went on our annual silent class retreat to Greccio, where St Francis set up the first *crech* or nativity<sup>4</sup>, and later experienced the great pomp and excitement that is Diaconate Ordination Week. Between the many choir practices, banquets, holy hours, and preparations for the beginning of the semester, I was finally able to brave the Roman streets and acquire a much needed hair cut. This ended up being a disaster as the barber 'knew best' and switched my part to the other side, which was hideous enough to attract the attention of the Vice Rector, whom asked for a quick reversion to normalcy<sup>5</sup>. The ordinations were truly wondrous to behold! 30 men ordained to the transitional diaconate in St Peter's Basilica, btw our parish church, with all the reverence and precision for which the NAC's liturgies are known. *Sursum corda!* The heart is truly lifted on high to the Lord!

The next major event was the beginning of classes. This followed immediately upon the heels of the ordinations. The Archbishop assigned to me the honor of attending the *Pontificia Università San Tomaso d'Acquino Angelicum*, aka the Ange, 'the happy place', 'the promised land flowing with *milk and honey*,' etc. The men usually refer to these positive titles of the university b/c it is all in English; Quindi, it is easier to understand our professors. Me piace :)! The excitement of learning in Italian does interest me but, as in all things, obedience; "*Christ has spoken through Peter*" though the bishop and I am not complaining. As the furthest first cycle university from the NAC, this requires a 30 min walk along the noisy *Corso* everyday, which I do in ~23 while praying the rosary b/c I like to make it exercise<sup>6</sup>. They also grant some exemptions for some previous course work so this has enabled me to occasionally visit St Peter's in the morning before going to class instead of having to do the normal 4hrs Mon-Fri. The course load is 29hrs for this semester, but things are on the Bologna system so it is manageable. The European system provides that my whole grade comes down to a 10 min oral examination at the end of the semester so right now after 12 weeks of class I still have 100%. That is except for Biblical Greek. This has been a bear on my back, the thorn in my side, the black hole into which so much of my study time is devoured and for little result – the reason I have been unable to write until now. The professor's method excludes a text book. He actually discourages finding one b/c it will only confuse us since we are going on an alternate course which he has told us no text mirrors. Till now I have not done well on our daily pop quizzes<sup>7</sup> (that's only 1x/wk for 45 min while still moving faster than I did in my Latin courses which were more than 3x that long in the class). But this is all for the glory of God and has taught me that I can't "*Ace*" everything and other things are more important – but still we press on *ad majorem gloriam Dei!*



<sup>1</sup> Latin: To the Greater Glory of God (with the additional intent of "for the salvation of souls" as well)

<sup>2</sup> This is from the beginning of the letter now it has been about 6mo, 4da, and 12hrs since arrival. It often takes a while to find the time to write.

<sup>3</sup> They've learned me good out here with their fancy words and jargone [sic] ;)

<sup>4</sup> Per Divine Providence, I read the complete works of St Therese of Lisieux and completed her Story of a Soul (manuscripts A, B, & C), which was my retreat, by the anniversary of her death, Sept 29, ~ 7pm. "*To Love, to be Loved, to return that Love might be loved,*" was my lasting grace.

<sup>5</sup> Because he changed it from left to right, the brothers commented he tried to change me to the "far right" b/c of his politically fascist tendencies.

<sup>6</sup> I am never late, but it cannot be said that I am often early either. I like to cut it close and maximize my time b/c we don't have too much of it. The vigorous trek also helps to fight the poundage from the plentiful pasta partaken upon our perplexingly prolific plates. It's good stuff.

<sup>7</sup> UPDATE: I just received my first passing grade on one of these exams. I have been assured that only the final counts, but I want to do well always.

We have made many trips this year and, being constantly surrounded by the saints, have many opportunities for stops along our walks to and from classes. I have begun to be known, like my brother and capo, Simon Carian, for researching the saints on the calendar and searching for their churches in Rome so that we can visit them on their feast days. It really makes our Catholic faith come alive to be able to pop into any number of holy sites on a daily basis. We still have to study quite a bit, but if we plan it right, we can make our time and bus/metro/train tickets really count. Venerable and soon-to-be Blessed Pope John Paul II told the seminarians that while we are here we are to “learn Rome” and ‘let Rome be our teacher.’ Though I weekly see the Holy Father weekly at the Angelus Address and as often as possible at the occasional solemn vespers or big Masses<sup>8</sup> despite the long lines and can pass through St Peter’s square a few times every week and the tens of beautiful churches where the relics of the great heroes of the Church interred for public veneration of the wonderful works of God through their works given as our examples of faith truly lived just off the *Corso* on the way to class every day, I never cease to look up in wonderment at this beautiful experience. Some of the men may tease about it, but I don’t understand how anyone could take it for granted to be surrounded by such beauty pointing to the ultimate reality despite the intensely secular surroundings of the city of Rome itself. It is truly a wonderful blessing of God to be able to experience this ever-present reality made crystal-clear by this ancient city teeming with memorial stones around every corner.



On the Palatine Hill overlooking the Coliseum in Rome



St Jacinta standing before her parish church in Fatima

One notable place that I have had the grace to be able to visit is Fatima, Portugal this past November. This was a trip on which I was invited as a Santa Fe trip with Simon and 2 other 2<sup>nd</sup> year men. I had never been to a major Marian shrine like this before nor did I know much about the Marian apparition that occurred back in 1917 so I had to do a lot of research to really understand what I would be experiencing. The other brothers were quicker than I to raid the library so I retrieved the only book left on the shelf on Fatima, but the great grace was that each of us read a different account of the events and were able to share the research with each other as we recalled it on the plane or throughout our travels. We had many Providential meetings with people facilitated by the dawning of our clerical attire, which made us conspicuous targets for Catholic comments. One of these meetings was with an old, gruff man, who loved the Church and priests because the Salesian brothers of St John Bosco took him off the streets as a child and gave him a proper education, which he used to learn to understand (9), speak (7), and write (5) languages. He invited us into his café and treated us to a cappuccino so that he could repay some of his debt of gratitude to God. He recalled the deep faith of the Portuguese people that ‘planted the cross on 4 continents,’ while he demonstrated the faith of the people by calling out random passersby who held multiple rosaries, relics, and holy images in their pockets as they passed by on a Friday night incessantly telling us he was a “man of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment<sup>9</sup>.” He was a very enjoyable patron.

Although we only had 2 days in Fatima, we were able to see everything in the immediate area related to the apparitions. We went to the houses of the seers, and while walking the town, we stumbled upon two of the nieces of St Jacinta whom ran a tourist store out of their converted garage. We walked the distance to parish church, which was at the center of much of the story of Fatima, & prayed before the original statue of Our Lady of the Rosary to which the Venerable Lucia noted great devotion prior to the apparitions. We also visited the various places where the angel<sup>10</sup> visited the young shepherds and the site of the one Marian apparition outside the *cova*, which occurred after the children were kept from their appointment with Our Lady due to the imprisonment of the government<sup>11</sup>. One of the beauties of this place is that it is a site of Portuguese devotion. Rarely was there a

<sup>8</sup> Including Beatifications and Canonizations of which I have attended one of each: *Chiara ‘Luce’* and the 6 most recently canonized last year.

<sup>9</sup> I thought he was referring to the ban on idolatry, which is a good endeavor in itself, but he meant ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ We wanted to remind him that 1<sup>st</sup> commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is the “greatest,” but such an argument would have been counterproductive in our situation and not in line with the levity of our conversation. But the man clearly had a good heart and a desire to render to God what he could according to his vocation and understanding of our Holy Faith.

<sup>10</sup> Revealed as the Guardian angel of Portugal. From this we can back up the pious devotion to that each nation has its own God-given protector.

<sup>11</sup> This site made me particularly proud b/c every station along the well constructed paths, which are extensive, were donated by patrons from the US. Additionally, a friendly area dog decided he wanted to follow us along the path until we safely reached Our Lady’s post.

sign outside of area of the main apparition not written in Portuguese and even the least devout of the locals<sup>12</sup> we met said they come down at least every month. The most important part of our time was that spent in communal prayer, silent reflection, and celebrating the Sacred Mysteries. Our purpose, as in all our travels, was to go and pray – to be with our Lord and Our Lady and ask them to convert our hearts and those of the ones we love.

The NAC has been quite a wonderful place to soften the blow of living in a foreign country far away from our diocese and our beloved. The official language is English and all activities are carried out as much as possible in American fashion when to otherwise would be less expedient. They do adopt the Italian family-style pranzo meal and have cena at 7pm (on the early side for Italians *ma va bene*) but outside of that every things else is Americanized. We watch almost exclusively American films, have an in-house commissary for some American products, and celebrate all major American and Church holidays with full pomp<sup>13</sup>. The exercise facilities permit us to prepare for the annual Spaghetti Bowl, where the new men take on the rest of the house in a gridiron football match on Thanksgiving weekend<sup>14</sup>, and the Clericus Cup, where the North American Martyrs put up a good showing against the other Roman seminaries every year in **real football**<sup>15</sup>, as well as many other in-house events throughout the year to keep ourselves physically strong and deepen community bonds.

Maybe I can catch you all up on the goings on of Christmas another time as I don't want to delay the finalization of this correspondence any longer than it is as I am already now quite delayed. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, in my last letter, I ran out room and made a promise to share an experience with you that I had a new special woman in my life by the name of Gianna Beretta Molla, or Santa Gianna for those who know her more personally. She was a young Italian woman who led a holy life pursuant of the face of Christ Jesus, her true love, by living out the holy vocation marriage to the full. She wanted to lead a life of Holy Chastity as a Bride of Christ Jesus, himself, in total continence during her youth but was never given the grace to enter the convent much to her consternation. Through much spiritual direction and prayer, she discerned her vocation was to the married state and sought an avocation in the medical field as a medical doctor. She remained faithful and active in her Catholic faith and community, married a strong Catholic man and proceeded to fulfill what she claimed as her most sacred duty: to bring as many children as God permitted her into this world and see to their ultimate wellbeing in eternal happiness with God forever. All she did was conspicuously marked by her faith in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist through the holy sacrifice of the Mass and the presence of Jesus in others.



*“Jesus says: ‘Whoever visits the sick is helping me’ – a priestly mission! As the priest can touch Jesus so we doctors touch Jesus in the body of our sick: poor, old, or children. Jesus makes himself seen in our midst. Many doctors offer themselves for him. When you have finished your earthly profession, if you have done well, you will enjoy divine life ‘because I was sick and you healed me.’” – Santa Gianna Beretta Molla*



Her crowning achievement<sup>16</sup> like all saints is in how they leave this world and are swept up into the beatific vision. After 3 painful pregnancies, a large growth was discovered in her womb during her fourth. Being a doctor herself and knowing the grave risks full well, she continued to affirm to her physicians and to her husband, Pietro, “If you have to decide between me and the baby, don't hesitate; choose – and I demand it – the baby. Save him!” She had earlier written, “Every vocation is a vocation to material, spiritual, and moral motherhood and to prepare one's self to be a giver of life. If during the struggles to carry out our vocation, we should have to die, that would be the most beautiful day of our life.” Thus, all her earlier work was only a training in virtue to be prepared for any type of sacrifice. Fulfilling her role as a physician and mother even to the day of giving birth on Good Friday of 1962, she brought a new life into the world and the following Friday entered into her own Good Friday trials where she entered into glory on April 28<sup>th</sup><sup>17</sup> She was canonized in 2004 as the last saint of the final canonization of Servant of God, Pope John Paul II. This is an even more touching story as the typing of these words occurs on the week in which we remember the horror of abortion and the +52 million innocents whose lives this

<sup>12</sup> This includes a young Muslim cab driver in Lisbon said there is a ‘special presence that draws him there and gives him interior peace.’ Go OL!

<sup>13</sup> This always includes great entertainment from the talented brothers. Noteworthy so far is the traditional reading of “T’was the Night before Christmas” by the rector with a slideshow depicting the scenes of the story at the loving expense of some of the men. All things with joy

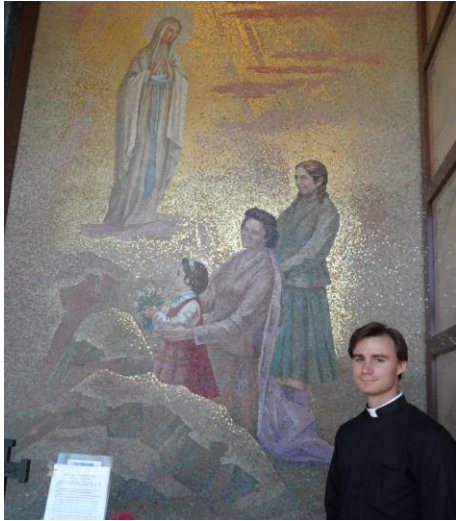
<sup>14</sup> Usually we get crushed but this year we... well we still got crushed but if you take out the first quarter we did beat them. Slow starts are a killer. But the way we competed, without any complaints and hard-nosed play won us a lot of respect in-house.

<sup>15</sup> We are always just shy of the title, but Santa Fe is back again and things are looking strong as the new men and old men begin to gel early on.

<sup>16</sup> Without this instance, she would have still been considered a saint though it makes the rest of her life ring more truly of the Gospel

<sup>17</sup> Most taken from experience with devotees in Mesero and *Gianna Beretta Molla: Journey of Holiness*, 1994

scourge has ended in the US alone and not to mention the numerous mothers, fathers, and families left behind in the wake of this great tragedy. Let us now pause and say a prayer in the silence of our hearts right now for them all and for our healing...



The mosaic in the tomb of Santa Gianna

My experience with Santa Gianna began with a pilgrimage during my 2<sup>nd</sup> week of being in Italy, on Italian studies. I had no idea who this saint was until 2 days before with minimal research, where she was, or how to get there, but that didn't stop me from taking the 2hr train ride alone one day. By the sheer grace of God and kind aid from local who's words I could not comprehend, I arrived at the town of Mesero where she did her work and at her basilica, a beautiful 13<sup>th</sup> century church, and began to explore and pray. As I took my last photo of the interior and old man entered, and seeing me in clerical attire, excitedly investigated further and rushed out to acquire the keys to her tomb so that I could see her (a pretty rare treat). I had little idea what the plan was b/c of my poor command of the language but I could feel God and Santa Gianna building a fire in my heart with each successive step. I cannot describe what it was like to be in her tomb when the man let me alone to pray for awhile in a letter like this, but it was very transformative and I prayed for you my family **with** Santa Gianna the patroness of Physicians, Mothers, and the Family. He later toured me around her office still preserved as it was when she left it and provided historical notes of which I was able to understand 90% by a grace of God. I spent the whole

day in prayer in and around her shrine, attended her vespers, and Mass in the Ambrosian rite later that evening still unsure how or when I would be able to return back to my lodging. A small 2 sec prayer to the Holy Spirit during my thanksgiving after Mass and who would tap me on the shoulder after the Amen but the old man, asking if I needed a ride to the train station. He had scrounged up 2 willing drivers who were oh so generous with their time and even took me to tour the basilica where she was baptized and married, to a town half an hr away when there were no ticket offices open, helped me to get the best train back, and even walked me to my train. There were still more opportunities for the grace of God to work in me and through me after the train left the station but that's enough for now. God is SOO GOOD!! I really had to tell you how you have provided such a wonderful opportunity for me to experience the power of Jesus Christ so I couldn't keep this to myself. The book of Tobit, on which I just completed a term paper, in 12:7 says, "A king's secret it is prudent to keep, but the works of God are to be declared and made known. Praise them with due honor<sup>18</sup>." Glory to God on High!



Angelus in Castelgandolfo after singing "Ad Multos Annos." I'm against the wall 4<sup>th</sup> one from the front.

I am so thankful for all the great graces and benefits that I have been privy to since coming to Rome to study for the Archdiocese. His mercies never fail and extend to the thousandth generation! I take great consolation from the fact that I know that as I go about my duties in Rome, that you all are back home doing good things and supporting our local church. I think back often to you all and the wonderful times I had serving you as your youth minister. There are so many grace filled moments with you that move me to great joy upon each remembrance. It was amidst you all through prayer in the Chapel of Divine Mercy before the Blessed Sacrament and holy conversation that I was enabled to hear the call of vocation. It was your hunger and zeal for the things of God that helped me answer Christ. I have benefited far more from what you have taught me than anything I could have taught you. Let us continue to keep one another in prayer. If you have any requests please send them on over. I shall put them on the list I keep in my breviary for my daily intercessions.

May the peace of Jesus Christ rule in your hearts and minds, and may you dwell in the presence of the Lord for years to come!  
*Etiam Deum Serviam*<sup>19</sup>+

Christopher Bernabe

On the Solemnity of *The Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 2011*  
the Feast of *St André Bessette of Montreal, (newly canonized)*  
& On the Feast of *San Ildefonso of Toledo, España*

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, this is required under Jewish law (Deuteronomic for the scholars), so we have been doing this for a long time – thanks be to God!

<sup>19</sup> Latin: *Indeed, I shall serve God*; a traditional practice to recite "serviam" as an undoing of the "non serviam" of Satan which caused him to fall