

Fr. Robert's Great Adventure

Dear friends,

Since I am just over the halfway mark of my sabbatical, I thought I would drop you a little note to tell you how things are going.

I began in Assisi, Italy, the birthplace of St. Francis. Assisi is a little medieval town set into the side of the mountain. When you walk in Assisi it seems that you are always walking up hill. Assisi is inspiring for Franciscans. It is as if the very stones of the town have absorbed the spirit of St. Francis. I lived in Assisi several times and became friends with the friars who take care of the Basilica of St. Francis. It was wonderful seeing some of them, though they seem to have aged a lot slower than me. The first part of my sabbatical was moving and brought back many fond memories.



When I got to Rome (where I studied theology), it was also a little like coming home. My Italian was horrible after 30 years, but the friars were very patient and understanding. In Rome I settled into a quiet restful pattern. For the first couple of weeks I found myself sleeping 9 hours straight. In the morning I always spent some time in a church, usually San Saba, praying and reading. In the afternoons I spent walking around Rome. In the evening I relaxed reading spy novels. One of my greatest joys was seeing my very first pastor or pastoral supervisor, Don Vincenzo. He is close to 80 now, but was in great spirits. When I arrived in his new parish we reminisced for hours. When I got on the bus to leave, we said goodbye and we were both crying. I learned so much from him about being a priest. Somehow he was able to be patient and funny and challenging and kind all wrapped up in a little Italian man. I was so happy I was able to track him down and catch up with him. In Rome I stayed at our house of studies for graduate students. There were friars from all over the world working towards Doctoral Degrees. They were great to be with. One of the benefits of being a friar is wherever you go you are most welcome. Of course, it was a thrill for me to see Pope Francis. He is so simple and direct and seems to draw his energy from the vast crowds which fill the piazza whenever he appears. We all have a lot to learn from him.

After Rome I was supposed to go to London and stay with the friars, but because there was no room in the inn, (lucky for me) they sent me to Dublin for a couple of days. The airfare is really inexpensive here. Dublin is a medium size city with lots of sites to see. I went to St. Patrick Cathedral in Dublin and it took me awhile to figure out that it is no longer a Catholic Church. I listened to an hour lecture on the Arrest of Christ by Caravaggio, which is in the main art gallery of Dublin. I'm not an artsy kind of person, but it was fascinating. The rest of my time in Dublin was just spent walking from place to place and taking in the sites. The friars were great to be with. There are always visitors coming and going in that friary and they are very hospitable.

As you can see from the picture, my first pair of shoes gave out in Dublin. An Irish shoemaker told me to forget about fixing them, "Those shoes are made in China and are good for nuthin. You should buy Irish shoes". I was embarrassed to go in the store with them on and buy a new pair. One of the best

things about the sabbatical so far is that I have had time to walk all over. Some days I walk for hours. I would never have time to enjoy so much walking in the States. My new Dublin shoes ("Irish Shoes") are holding up fine.

Finally, the last couple of weeks I have been in London, once again staying with the friars. London is a vast city with an incredible blend of both modern and ancient cities. When you walk the streets, sometimes you hear more French, German and Italian than English. I've become friends with some street people in a local park and they continually lament that I don't speak English, but American, and they can't understand me. Our friary in London is located in the heart of London and you can walk to almost everywhere. The other day I took the subway or "Tube" as they call it here, to Kensington Gardens and walked home. When I checked my pedometer, I had walked 15 miles. It was a beautiful walk through park after park. All of them had beautiful formal gardens. Here in London my morning prayer place is St. George Catholic Cathedral. It is a beautiful Gothic Cathedral which was rebuilt after the war after being destroyed by an incendiary bomb. I find it so peaceful in St. George Church away from hustle and bustle of the touristy churches toward the center of London.

When I leave London, I will fly back to the U.S., pick up my car and journey to Buffalo where I will spend some time with my family and attend the Friars' Chapter in May. On the way, I plan to stop to see my new great niece who was born when I was in Rome. They named her Sophia after my Mom. I can't wait to meet her.

After Buffalo, I will drive down south to stay with some friars in Port St. Lucie, Florida. On the way down, I will make lots of stops to see former students from Catholic U who have invited me to see their new families. They have been making babies like crazy! I can't wait to catch up with them and meet their new families. I will be back in Kensington toward the middle of June, all rested and ready to go. I am so very grateful for this time away and for the good work of the friars who are filling in for me.

I want you to know that I think and pray for our parish every day. I always remember you and your families in my prayers and Masses. On Tuesdays, I always pray for the young people of our parish, those in our school and religious Education Program, those we see and those we don't see. On Wednesdays, I always remember the sick and elderly of our Church. I assure you that even though we may be separated by many miles, we are very close in prayer. Well that's it! I hope I haven't bored you too much. I'll see you in 7 weeks

God Bless you all and may God bless our beautiful Parish.

Amen