

January 16, 2024.

Dear Parishioners,

Saluti da Roma! (Greetings from Rome!)

It has been a week since I started my sabbatical here in Rome, and what an incredible week it has been!

There are 11 priests on this sabbatical program, not including the Rector of the program (Fr. Edward Linton, OSB): 8 from the United States; 1 from Australia; 1 from New Zealand; and one Canadian (Me! 😊). It has proven to be a wonderful group!

In this past week, we have had some incredible experiences!

We:

- 1) celebrated Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica, just a short distance away from the tomb of St. Peter
- 2) attended a General Audience with Pope Francis in the Pope Paul VI Hall
- 3) had a presentation on pastoral communications (i.e., how to work with the media/journalists as a priest)
- 4) toured a cathedral in Agnani, Italy, where four of the church's Holy Father's came from
- 5) toured the church of St. Pope Clement I (called San Clemente Church); this was mind-blowing for the present church (built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century) is constructed on top of a church built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century; and that church is constructed on top of a Roman temple to the Roman gods (built in the first century!). We walked on stone stairs at the level where the Roman temple was excavated that were erected in 99 AD!!! This is close to the year that the Apostle John died, and approximately only 66 years after the death of Christ! The history here in Rome, therefore, is simply amazing!
- 6) had some incredible meals, wines, coffees, and desserts; and
- 7) experienced prayer as a community with Morning and Evening Prayer, Adoration, and Mass.

In the next few weeks, we will:

- 1) tour the church of Santa Maria Maggiore
- 2) have some sessions on Ignatian spiritual discernment
- 3) have some sessions on Lectio Divina
- 4) make a visitation to the Dicastery for Clergy at the Vatican
- 5) have a tour (with tour guide) of St. Peter's Basilica
- 6) have a session on preaching
- 7) make a trip to Genazzano, Italy, to see the icon of Our Lady of Good Counsel (the patroness of the Catholic Women's League)
- 8) continue to have some incredible meals, wines, coffees, and desserts; and, of course,
- 9) experience prayer as a community with Morning and Evening Prayer, Adoration, and Mass.

I am so grateful to be able to experience this sabbatical! It is really proving to be much more than I had anticipated it to be! The comradery with the priests that are here from literally around the world, our shared time of prayer, meals, discussions, education, formation, and renewal is an incredible gift!

On that note of thanks, I want to express my deep gratitude to Fr. Matthew, Martha, and Sr. Michaela for overseeing parish matters and all of you who make IC Parish the incredible community that it is! I miss you all and wish you well!

And, as promised, I pray for all of you during prayer/Mass in the chapel at Casa O'Toole (our residence for the sabbatical program), and at each church that we go to! And I will continue to remember you all in prayer each day of my sabbatical here! Please pray for me, too.

I will send another letter by the early part of February.

In the meantime, God bless you all! Let's keep each other in prayer.

Peace+

Fr. John

P.S. I have included some pictures below.



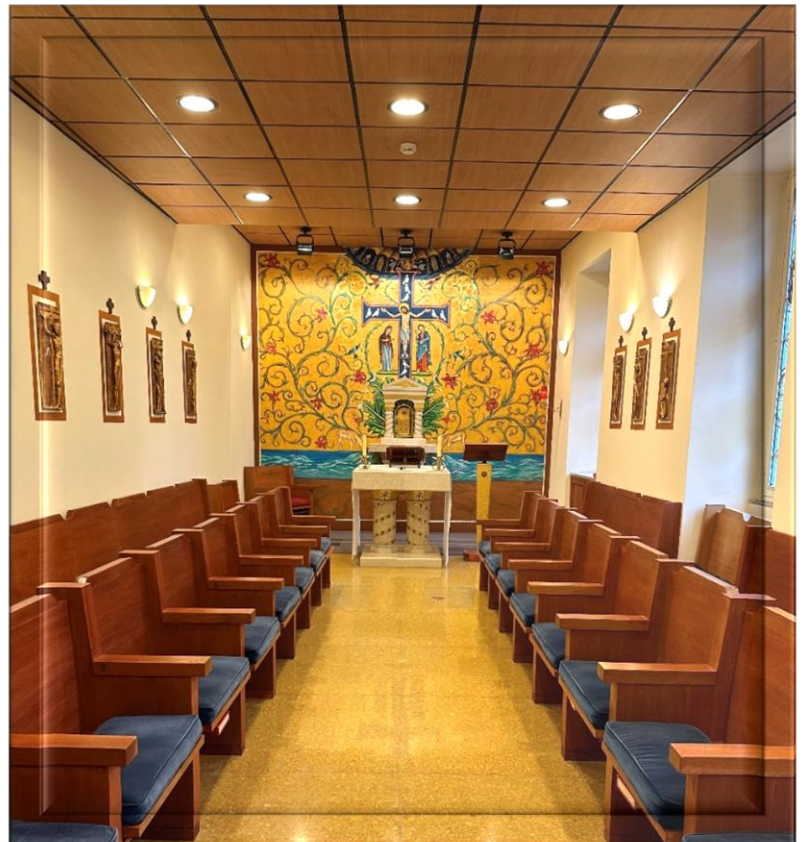
The balcony off my room at the priests' residence.  
You can see the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in the background.  
We are about a ten-minute walk from St. Peter's Square.



The view off my balcony at night with St. Peter's Basilica in the background.

I can hear the bells of St. Peter's Basilica whenever they are rung!

The chapel at our residence.





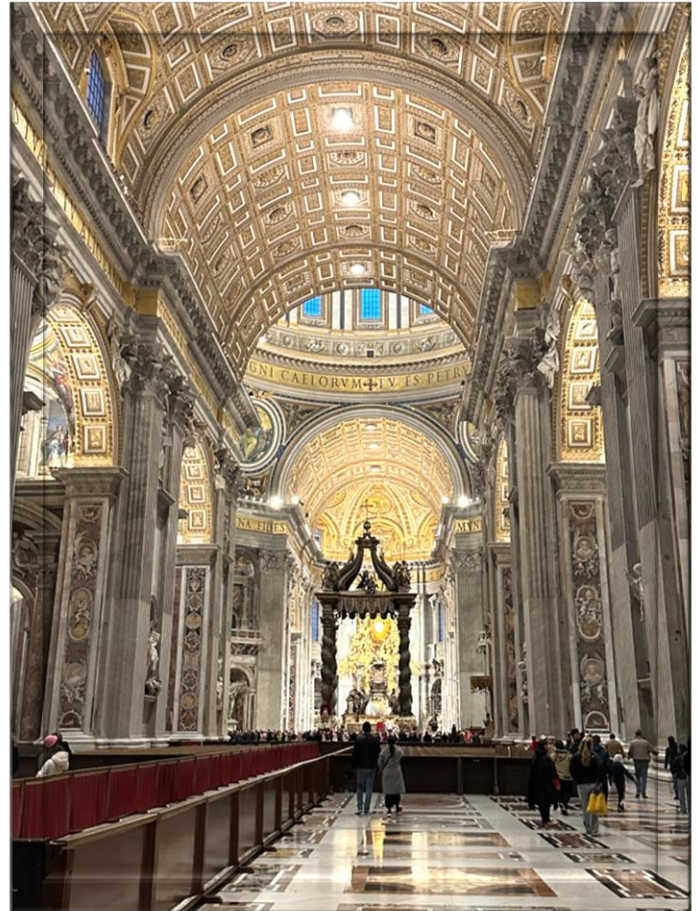
The socializing room at our residence.



The dining room at our residence.



St. Peter's Basilica and St. Peter's Square at night.



Inside St. Peter's Basilica.



The tomb of St. Pope John Paul II located inside St. Peter's Basilica.

The outside of St. Peter's Basilica during the day.



Part of our priests' group waiting to enter a side door of St. Peter's Basilica to pray Mass in the crypt where St. Peter's body is buried.



The tomb of St. Peter.

Attending the General Audience with Pope Francis. We were sitting about six rows from the front of the stage where Pope Francis was seated.





Inside San Clemente Church (named for Pope St. Clement I). This level of the church was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, above a 4<sup>th</sup> century church. And the 4<sup>th</sup> century church was built on top of a Roman temple.



A sarcophagus found in the excavation of the Roman temple that sits below San Clemente Church.





And, of course, you come to Rome for gelato!



😊 And for delicious food, like this salad and lasagna!