

Dear Parishioners,

Saluti da Roma! (Greetings from Rome!)

Life here in Rome continues to go well! And it continues to be so full!

In addition to our regular schedule of Mass, prayer, and meals together as priests in the sabbatical program, these have been some of the highlights of the sabbatical program since I last wrote to you:

- 1) Our classroom sessions (with a variety of professor-presenters from different speciality areas) have focused on the following topics:
  - Priestly Identity
  - Ignatian Discernment
  - Lectio Divina
  - Listening and Preaching
  - Theology of Grief
  - Preaching at Funerals
  - Scripture sessions on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
  - A session on preaching the Gospel of John
- 2) We visited the Dicastery for Clergy: which is a group of offices located in a building just outside St. Peter's Square. There is a cardinal from South Korea by the name of Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-sik who is Prefect (or in charge) of the office, as well as his secretary, Archbishop Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Feoreira (from Chile), and other various assistants (a staff of about 30). The offices in the Dicastery for Clergy oversee all matters related to seminarians, deacons and priests (i.e., such things as seminarian formation; priestly ongoing formation programs; and other matters related to priesthood, etc).
- 3) We travelled to and took in tours of:
  - St. Peter's Basilica
  - the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore (or St. Mary Major)
  - the Benedictine Monastery in Subiaco, Italy
  - the catacomb of St. Priscilla and other martyrs
- 4) I also took a personal one-day train trip with two other priests to the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel (or in Italian: Chiesa di Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio) located in Genzano, Italy (about 40 minutes south of Rome). As spiritual advisor to the BC-Yukon Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League, I made a promise to the executive members of the council that I would make a trip to this church as it is the place where a fresco of Our Lady and Christ-Child miraculously appeared on the wall of the church; and it is this image that the CWL use as their logo.

I continue to pray in each Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and my personal prayer time here in Rome that God's gracious blessings be poured out on each of you and all whom you hold in prayer in your lives! I will be concelebrating at a Mass celebrated by Pope Francis on Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, at St. Peter's Basilica. Please be assured that I will remember all of you in prayer at that Mass as well! Please pray for me. 😊

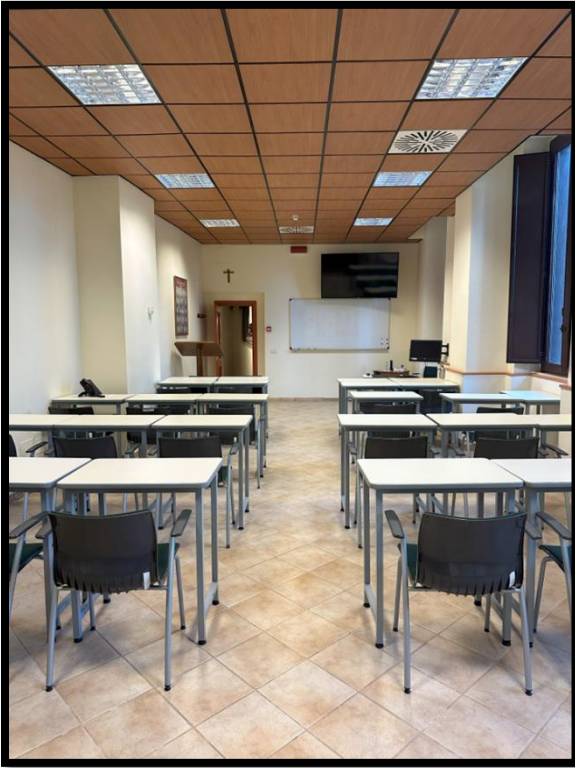
I will be in touch again with another letter sometime this month or in March.

God bless!

Fr. John

PS I have posted some photos of the above-mentioned events below.

## CLASSROOM AT OUR RESIDENCE



Our sabbatical classroom. Yes, I am actually going to classes, too, while I am on sabbatical! 😊  
Albeit, the classroom was empty when I took this picture.



### VISIT TO THE DICASTERY FOR CLERGY

Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-sik (Prefect of the Dicastery for Clergy). I was so impressed with this cardinal (and all in the dicastery office)! He was such a kind, humble, and funny individual!



Archbishop Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Feoreira (Secretary for the Dicastery for Clergy)

## TOUR OF ST. PETER'S BASILICA

A priest from Oregon, USA, who is studying in Rome gave us a tour inside St. Peter's Basilica.



Outside St. Peter's Basilica. At the top of the basilica, you can count 11 apostles, with Christ in the centre, holding the cross. There is no statue of St. Peter on the top of St. Peter's Basilica to make 12 apostles. The reasoning for this is that when the Holy Father (Pope Francis, or any of the Popes) speaks to the People of God from the loggia (the centre open balcony on the front of St. Peter's Basilica directly below the statue of Christ), the Pope is considered to be

speaking as St. Peter (as successor of St. Peter). Therefore, he becomes the visual representation of St. Peter amongst the other 11 apostles.



Looking up at the loggia (open balcony) at the front of St. Peter's Basilica. This is where the Holy Father gives his yearly "urbi et orbi" (meaning "to the city of Rome, and to the world") address and apostolic blessing as successor of St. Peter.

St. Pope John XXIII. His body lies in state in St. Peter's Basilica.



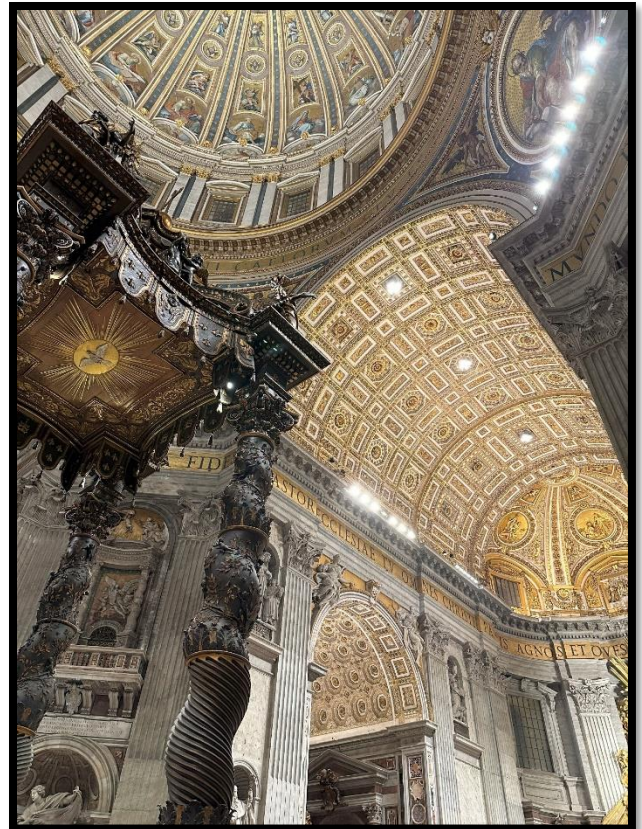
Not far from St. John XXIII, is the tomb of St. Pope John Paul II.

Pope Benedict XVI's body is entombed in the crypt below St. Peter's Basilica in the place where St. Pope John Paul II had been entombed. When Pope Benedict XVI died, they moved the body of St. Pope John Paul II upstairs to this location in St. Peter's Basilica.



The main altar of St. Peter's Basilica. The tomb of St. Peter is located in the crypt which is directly below this altar. Only the Holy Father (as successor of St. Peter) can celebrate Mass at this main altar. However, Cardinals may do so with the permission of the Holy Father. Because Pope Francis is not very mobile at this time (and having difficulty climbing the stairs to the main altar), you may have seen in the news various Cardinals celebrating Mass at the main altar with Pope Francis being the main presider, but not standing at the altar itself.

The ceiling above the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica.



The sacristy where the cardinals, bishops, priests, and deacons vest prior to celebrating Mass at St. Peter's Basilica.



## TOUR OF THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE



Outside view of Santa Maria Maggiore Church.

Inside the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore. It is given this title, “Maggiore” (meaning, “major”), because it is the largest church in Rome that is dedicated to, and named for, Mary.



Inside this reliquary is wood from the manger of the Christ-Child which was brought to Rome from Jerusalem.

## TOUR OF THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY AT SUBIACO, ITALY

The cave in Subiaco, Italy, where St. Benedict lived during his early years of monastic life. The statue in the cave is to represent St. Benedict living and praying in the cave.



St. Benedict went on to establish twelve monasteries, including this one at Subiaco, Italy, which is constructed into the cliffside.

## TOUR OF THE CATACOMB OF ST. PRISCILLA



One picture inside the catacomb where St. Priscilla, and many other martyrs of the Church (and other Christians) were buried. Priscilla, and her husband, Aquila, were a first century Christian missionary married couple who are described in the New Testament. They lived, worked, and traveled with the Apostle Paul, who described them as his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3).

This catacomb dates back to the 1st and 2nd century.

Before the Emperor Constantine signed the Edict of Milan making Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christians were considered sub-human. Therefore, they were martyred as sport in the various forums of Rome, and their bodies had to be buried in underground

catacombs outside the city walls. The word, "catacomb" comes from the Latin root word, "catatumbas" which means, "next to the quarry". The quarries of Rome were located outside the city walls, and this is where the bodies of Christians had to be buried.

It is only about a century after Emperor Constantine makes the Christian religion the religion of the Roman Empire that above-ground cemeteries begin to be established within the areas around Rome, with Christians being able to be buried in them.

Romans in the early centuries of the Church were not very tall, as you can see by the size of the burial niches in the sides of the catacomb.



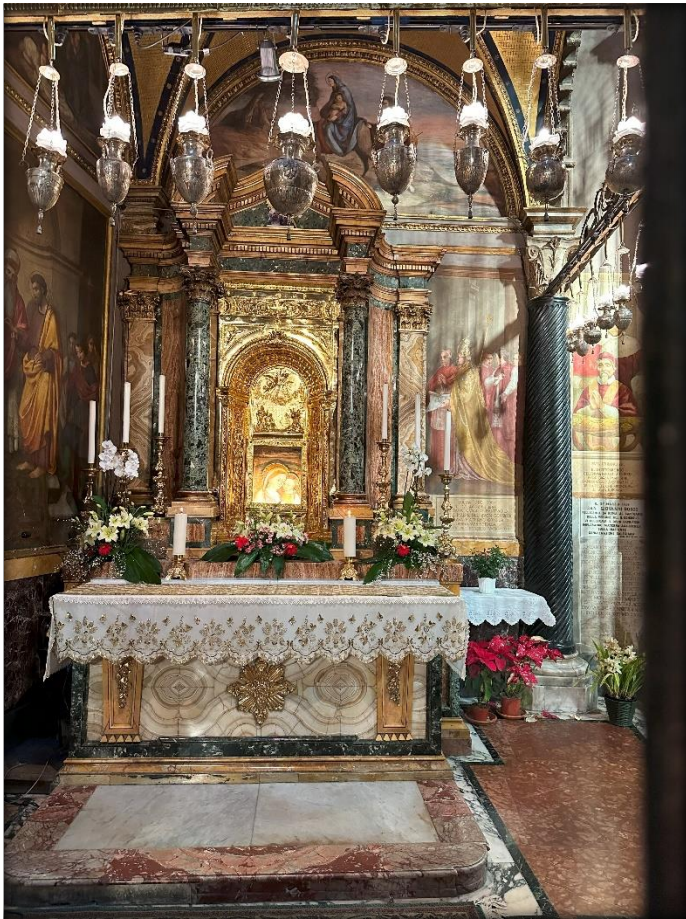
## TRIP TO THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL



Fr. Patrick Breeze, SM (from New Zealand) and I standing outside of the church.

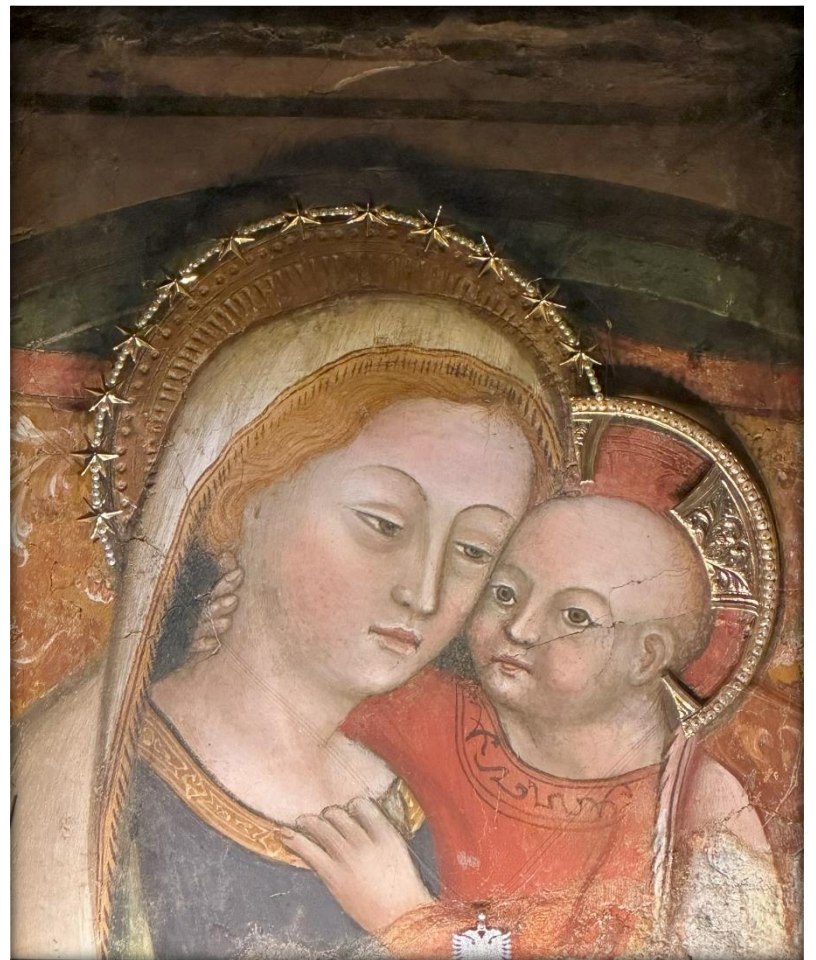
Fr. Edward Linton, OSB (from Kentucky, USA, and the Director of the Sabbatical Program) and I standing outside of the church.





The side chapel inside the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Genzano, Italy, with the fresco of Our Lady of Good Counsel and Christ-Child in the background.

The fresco up close.





Inside the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel  
(the side chapel with the fresco of Our Lady of Good Counsel and Christ-Child  
is in the gated area to the left).