

ROME OCTOBER 2018

Peggy and Trevor (Gillan), parishioners, and myself their cousin (Fr Hugh) had never been on holiday together before. We have had weekend visits and occasional family gatherings but this was our first 'marathon' together. It turned out to be a very enjoyable week doing just what we wanted to do. There were no guides, no organised visits, no fees paid up-front for this, that or the other. We did it our way! We walked 51 miles in six days – all those Roman streets, hundreds of steps and hills.

We arrived on Tuesday, 9th October, Peggy & Trevor coming from London and myself from Manchester. Whilst waiting for their flight to arrive, I was fortunate enough to be able to celebrate Mass in the airport chapel ... and I had one penitent for Reconciliation whilst I was in the chapel! There was a lady waiting for Confession but her flight was called so she had to take off pretty smartly. On our way from the airport to Clivo di Cinna, where we would be staying, we had a tremendous downpour of heavy rain with thunder & lightening. The lady taxi driver said this storm had not been forecast ... Welcome to la dolce vita a Roma!

The next morning we headed off to the Wednesday audience with Pope Francis. We got a lift from one of the priests in the house at 7.30am and got down to St Peter's in good time but things were already "warming up" with Roman traffic; cars, motor-bikes, moped users and pedestrians, they all contributed to the early morning excitement and very many were making their way to St Peter's. We had tickets for the audience and got through security reasonably quickly. We ended up having good seats and Trevor was able to get one very good photograph of Pope Francis. There was a lovely atmosphere in St Peter's Square during the audience and we ended up speaking to complete strangers gathered there with us.

On Thursday we took the regional train from Termini Station to Castel Gandolfo changing trains at Ciampino. There were a few drops of rain and we had to make a judgement call: do we go or do we postpone the trip? We stayed with our plan A and went for the train. It turned to be a wise judgement call because the day, though a little chilly, turned out to be very enjoyable. There is a steep climb from the station towards the town centre and the Papal Villa there. That climb was taxing but we made it all the way up to the top and made our way to the Villa. It was a lovely visit and all three of us enjoyed this vast history trip through the centuries as so many of the Popes are remembered. We went at our own pace and had the use of headphones in English to help us.

Friday was a quiet day. We stayed local, visited the local parish church of St Pius X, popped in to the nearby supermarket and did a little shopping to buy something for our hosts whose hospitality we were enjoying. A single malt plus a bottle of grappa never go amiss in Italy! In the late afternoon we visited St Peter's Basilica: the security was still tight but the crowd was less than in the morning and we had a good visit there as people were beginning to make preparations for the Sunday morning.

Saturday was a trip to Ostia. When we got on the train we saw that there are in fact three stops for Ostia: Ostia Antica, Ostia Centrale and Ostia Nord. We weren't sure which Ostia stop to get off at so we stayed on the train until Ostia Nord. It was a good move because we were able to walk towards the beach through the town centre taking in at least one huge church on the way along with a visit

to a pharmacy because of Peggy's insect bites! It was a scorching hot day and we eventually landed on a nice place for a leisurely lunch before heading back to the station and a quiet evening.

Sunday, 14th October, was a special day. It was the day on which Pope Francis would proclaim seven new saints in the life of the Church. Another beautiful morning and we made our way to St Peter's by foot to join thousands and thousands of other pilgrims gathering for the canonisation Mass. Amongst the new saints would be Oscar Romero and Pope Paul VI. Again we had tickets but in fact the tickets didn't help us too much. With so many pilgrims and so many roads closed, it was just a wonderfully chaotic Roman morning! Keep pushing forward slowly-slowly is my strategy and we eventually got in to the Square. The preparations for the Mass included some screen replaying of earlier Papal audiences and the Rosary was recited. We had decided on our strategy to make an early exit because there would be a huge rush to leave at the end of the celebration. It was a memorable morning and uplifting to hear a tumultuous applause echoing all around St Peter's Square and the Via Conciliazione as Pope Francis proclaimed the new saints.

Monday was our last full day and didn't know what we would be doing when we set off but on this day we completed our "walks" and, at the end of the day, we discovered we had walked 51 miles during our six full day visit to Rome. On this our last day, visited the main Rome Synagogue. We walked there, eventually found it having asked for directions, and we were fortunately enough to be able to get in. Again, another fascinating visit recalling the long history of a Jewish presence in Rome which goes back thousands of years. We were able to visit the museum which recalled this history plus the tragic events of World War II and the deportation of some of the Jewish community to the concentration camps. These captures are recalled in small plaques embedded in the nearby pavement which give the names and dates for those arrested and the camp to which they were taken. Our visit finished by going up the steps towards the Synagogue itself where people still gather for prayer and the Scriptures. Well worth a visit ... except one little word of caution. The loos could be improved on!

So, Tuesday, 16th October ... all over. Back home! But we thoroughly enjoyed this week together.