

DOMINUS DET TIBI PACEM

# Province of The Most Holy Name

## Franciscan Fathers

135 WEST 31ST STREET

NEW YORK 1, NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL

June 1, 1957

My dear Confreres:

This letter was begun in Jerusalem and its writing was continued on flight 211 of Middle East Airlines en route from Beirut to Rome. It will cover the trip of the American Provincials to Rome, Beirut, Jerusalem, Beirut and, finally, Rome. In a few weeks I shall try to get another letter on its way reporting on the trip to Assisi and some high lights of the Chapter.

On April 29 the American Provincials, the Provincial from Australia and the Custos of the Canadian Province gathered together at St. Raphael's Novitiate in Lafayette. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the coming Chapter as well as various ways and means of achieving more uniformity of Franciscan observance in the United States. The latter point of discussion was at the urgent request of the Most Rev. Fr. General. There were further informal talks about the geographical limits to be imposed on our Mission Band in Denver. It seems the greatest variance among the American Provinces concerned travel and vacation.

We left New York at 4 p. m. on Thursday, May 2, aboard the Italian Liner, "Saturnia," and at 4 p. m. the next day we docked in Boston. We left Boston at midnight, stopped at Ponta Delgada in the Azores, May 9, at Lisbon, May 11, at Gibraltar, May 12, at Palermo, May 14, and arrived at Naples, our destination, the following day. From Naples we took a train to Rome. After 2 days there we departed for Beirut on a Viscount of Middle East Airlines. We stopped at Athens for about 45 minutes and arrived in Beirut at approximately 9:30 p. m. The flight, with stopover, consumed about 6 hours. After 3½ days in Beirut we went to Jerusalem on a DC 3 of Middle East Airlines which took about 2 hours--a half hour more than it should have taken. But since the Israeli set-up the planes must zigzag to avoid flying over Israel. We spent 5 days in Jerusalem (Jordan); we did not enter Israel. On Monday, May 27, we left Jerusalem for Beirut, stayed overnight with Bishop Smith and then proceeded to Rome. The next day we left by bus for Quaracchi, Florence and Assisi.

Items of Interest on the Sea Trip. The Boston stop worked out well. It gave the Provincials an opportunity to see Arch Street. At Ponta Delgada, the ship anchored outside of the harbor debarking passengers and unloading freight in smaller boats. The weather was foul and the debarkation hazardous. We docked at Lisbon and were able to leave the ship for a few hours. The provincial house of the Portuguese Province is outside of Lisbon. The friars were holding their 3-year Congregation with Very Rev. Heliodorus Muller, O.F.M., Visitor General, presiding. Fr. Heliodorus,

Provincial of the Sao Paulo Province, is the nephew of Fr. Edward Blecke. We made a tour of the city and found it clean and beautiful. City traffic is light, perhaps due to the smallness of the Portuguese cars. At Gibraltar there was a repetition of the Ponta Delgada activity except that the weather was much better and the facilities for transferring passengers much more adequate. Of interest at Gibraltar, besides the scenery around the Rock, was the method of selling goods from small boats to the ship's passengers. The small craft pull alongside the ship and make contact by throwing a line with weight attached over the side of the ship. The deck stewards make the line fast, attach a basket to it and business begins. The passengers are shown materials and they make a choice. The wares are sent up in a basket which in turn is lowered with the money for payment. Business was slow in starting but after a couple of hours when the ship was ready to weigh anchor it increased. We stopped at Palermo across the dock from the Flagship of the Sixth Fleet, the "Salem." From this point there were many evidences of the Sixth Fleet, including a couple of carriers, etc. Fr. Sebastian Day and I decided to do Palermo on foot. We walked for about a half hour after which we boarded a horse-drawn coach; much like those at Columbus Circle, for the rest of the trip. There was an embarrassing moment. One of the places to see is on top of a long steep hill. While en route, the horse had trouble. Our faces were red. There we were riding while the poor horse was having so much difficulty, so we walked most of the hill. Palermo is almost free of any heavy traffic; like Lisbon, the cars are small. At Naples the most astounding fact was the speed with which Fr. Vincent Fochtman got us off the boat, through customs and in a bus on our way to Pompei. It was a little less than an hour from the time the ship tied up at the pier until we were on our way. This must be a record. We were cleared quicker than the transient passengers. We were to find that this would be standard procedure for the trip. It was so at Beirut, at Jerusalem and again at Rome. The friars all along the line had the necessary contacts and prestige to get things done. Out of Naples we did a very quick tour of Pompei. The first stop was at the Cathedral. I hustled around it just as fast as I could without giving the idea that I was being chased. When I returned to the entrance, the group had gone. Then, I saw Fr. Mel Brady looking for me. It seemed that we had a lot to do in a very few minutes. We did a tour of the ruins of ancient Pompeii in half an hour. We walked fast to a place of prominence, took a quick look in four directions and went back to the bus. In Naples we visited the church of St. Clare with some degree of thoroughness. At one time it was a famous monastery of Poor Clares but having been bombed out, it has been rebuilt and is now a national monument in charge of the friars. We left for Rome. After a few days I went out with our friars studying at St. Anthony's: Frs. Hilary, Cassian, Demetrius and Augustine. Together we visited St. Peter's and St. Mary Major. At St. Peter's we saw the body of Pope Innocent XI, recently beatified, which had been moved from its original tomb to a place beneath an altar. His head and hands are covered with a silver mask. The body is in a good state of preservation. We were present in the square at 12:15 when the Holy Father came to the window of his apartment and blessed the people. We had a few pictures taken and then went to the Colony (American restaurant) for lunch, after which we went to St. Mary Major. There we saw what all Rome was talking about--a floral display arranged for the Holy Father's fortieth anniversary as a Bishop. The Assumption of our Lady was pictured at the top, below it, our Lady of Fatima, and toward the bottom the Holy Father. It was really something to see. After this I took my weary legs home for a nap. In conversation with the Fathers studying at St. Anthony's the subject of the cold winters came up again. Immediately, I thought

of sleeping bags as a solution. However, a much better answer is beginning to perk in the minds of the American Provincials. You might well pray for this special intention.

On Friday, May 17, we left Rome and flew to Beirut. After an evening of conversation with His Excellency Bishop Smith, and Fr. John Lambert Rowan, we retired to prepare for the events of the morrow. On Saturday we made 7 official visits, observing all the oriental protocol. Beginning with the Papal Nuncio, we visited with all the top ecclesiastics or their representatives and a few lay leaders. Two items of interest stand out in these calls. The procedure is the same, i. e., each one is introduced, sits and speaks when spoken to. After a few minutes a servant comes with a demitasse of very sweet and very strong coffee, the visitor consumes it, then a cigarette is offered and smoked, then the visitor leaves. Smoking the cigarette is important. Beirut is the focal point of the Middle East and the distribution point for United States funds. The set-up lends itself to the spread of Protestantism, and on this the Protestants capitalize. The financial help finds its way almost exclusively to Protestant projects, according to almost every ecclesiastic we listened to. On Sunday, we attended a First Communion. The children were dressed in a sort of religious habit. At the Offertory they come up to the Communion rail and take a host from a tray and put it into the ciborium which the celebrant (Bishop Smith) held.

While in Lebanon His Excellency arranged for us to see the points of interest in the area. They included: the Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon and a monastery nearby, high in the hills of Beirut; the excavations at Byblos, Tripoli; the Cedars of Lebanon; the excavations at Baalbek; and, finally, the city of Damascus. These will be given coverage in a piece which Fr. John Lambert will send to the "Annals." Two things stand out for me. The trip to the Cedars is a very steep winding climb something like the ascent in Bolivia. The exceptions being that the oriental roads are wider and the scenery, rugged; in Bolivia the views are tropical. At Damascus we saw the sites connected with the conversion of St. Paul, including the place where he was lowered from the wall in a basket. At Baalbek the results of many years of excavation and study have enabled those concerned to reproduce in part, three Roman Temples which took 100,000 men 250 years to build. The original task and the reproduction are tremendous.

This is probably as good a place as any to bring into focus some bits of information concerning the workings of the Custody of the Holy Land with which I had not been familiar up until now. The Holy See has determined its government as follows: the Custos must be an Italian; the Vicar must be a Frenchman; the Procurator must be a Spaniard. The rest of the Council is comprised of discreet men from various language groups. All of these are appointed by the General. The Italians, French and Spaniards have two votes each on the Council. Another point of interest is that when the Custos leaves the Holy Land he appoints another Italian to take his place. The entire set-up stems from the fact that these nations have made many and sizable donations to the Holy Places.

Another interesting fact is that, of the 400 friars working in the Custody, about 200 belong to the Custody and the other 200 belong to the Provinces. This is in accord with the Constitutions which provide that the normal way for the average friar to work in the Holy Places is to volunteer for the work and to retain membership in his own Province. One more item of information that became quite clear to me was that the members of the Custody and those working in the Custody are much more than custodians of the Holy Places, they are missionaries.

Late in the afternoon of May 22 we left Beirut for Jerusalem. The next morning, with Fr. Patrick Coyle as guide, we began our tour of the Holy Places. Father took us around the perimeter of the area and from a few elevations he was able to point out the places of interest and their relation to one another. I had envisioned them as being much farther apart. Fr. Patrick also explained that since we were not going to Israel, the places we would visit would have more to do with the Saviour's Passion than with His day by day public life. The pilgrimage began at the home of Lazarus in Bethany. From there we walked to Gethsemani. It was explained that we were walking over the approximate route used by our Lord on His not too frequent visits to the temple city. It was pointed out also that there is no mention made in the New Testament of the Saviour having stayed in Jerusalem during His manhood. For this reason it is thought that on the occasion of His visits He stayed either in a cave in the Garden of Gethsemani or at the home of Lazarus. In this general area one sees Bethany with the house and tomb of Lazarus, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemani, the location of the Brook Cedron and the place where Christ wept over Jerusalem. We crossed the Valley of Judgment and went into the city. There at our own monastery of the Flagellation we found ourselves in the area of the Passion. The courtyard, the place of the trial, scourging and crowning of thorns must all have been on this acre of ground. Beginning here and a little further up the hill is the sanctuary of the Holy Sepulchre. Outside of the city we visited Bethlehem, Jericho, the Jordan River (at the approximate place of the Baptism), the Dead Sea, Jacob's well, Emmaus, the Pool of Siloe and other places of interest.

I offered Holy Mass at the following shrines: at the Crib in Bethlehem, in the Garden of Gethsemani, at the shrine commemorating the Crowning of Thorns, at the altar on Calvary, and at the Holy Sepulchre. My intention at these Masses included all of my confreres in the Province and their immediate families.

As regards the sacred shrines, I think it is of interest to know that we share most of them with others. The big three in this sharing are the Latin Catholics (O.F.M.), the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Orthodox. This entails many disadvantages but nothing can be done about it. Another point is that we must pay a stipend each day to the Moslems for the privilege of showing pilgrims through the Holy Sepulchre.

On Friday, May 25, we made the Stations of the Cross. This public pilgrimage through the streets of Jerusalem is protected by a police escort. It is done each Friday at approximately 3 o'clock. The day we made the Stations there was a group of about 100, approximately half of which were friars. There is one Station in the custody of another rite and on Friday they open a gate so that the Station can be seen from the street. It is noticeable that the fifth Station is at the foot of an incline.

This just about winds it up. I certainly wish to express my gratitude to Bishop Smith, Frs. John Lambert Rowan, Eugene Hoade, Patrick Coyle, and to Brother Raphael Quinn for their courtesies and the arrangements made.

Sincerely and fraternally,

*Richard E. Whelan, O.F.M.*

Minister Provincial