

Province of The Most Holy Name
Franciscan Fathers

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OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL

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My dear Confrere:

This letter is the record of a trip in which I was too early.

When the then Fr. Eustace Smith informed me he was Bishop-elect of Beirut, he requested that I accompany him to Beirut for the formal installation. I assured him I would. After his consecration, plans were made setting the installation date for some time during the week of April 29. I had planned to fly to Rome on April 25, to meet our Bishop Smith there and then to accompany him to Beirut on or about May 3. It became necessary to change plans but it still seemed possible the installation would be held late in the week of April 29 or early in the week of May 6. My return transportation was so arranged that I would leave Beirut the afternoon of Wednesday, May 9, on Pan-American for New York.

After seeing off Bishop Smith and Fr. John Lambert Rowan on the S.S. United States, Wednesday, April 25, I left New York for Rome the evening of the same day. Flying from Idlewild, I stopped off briefly at Shannon and then Paris where I had a short visit with Fr. Aloysius Siracuse. At Rome I was met at the airport by Very Rev. Vincent Fochtman, General Definitior for the English speaking friars, and Frs. Hilary Scott and Alcuin Coyle, Holy Name Province students at St. Anthony's. Frs. Cassian Corcoran and Augustine McDevitt, two others of the Province at the Antonianum were on an outing with the choir.

Italian customs were friendly and after a speedy clearance we drove to the General Curia, stopping at St. Anthony's to drop off Hilary and Alcuin. I was welcomed at the Curia by the Most Rev. Minister General. At recreation, following dinner which begins at 8 p.m., Fr. General gave me an appointment for Saturday morning. At noon Friday I went to lunch with the American friars studying at St. Anthony's and Fr. Mel Brady, a secretary at the Curia from the Cincinnati Province. That evening we walked around St. Peter's. Fr. Cassian Corcoran proved an apt guide.

Friday evening before dinner I visited Cardinal Pizzardo with Fr. Vincent Fochtman to arrange an audience with the Holy Father. This audience was set for Sunday, April 29.

On Sunday morning Fr. Vincent and I left the Curia for the Vatican at 10:15. The audience was scheduled for 11:30, but a short sight-seeing tour of the Vatican had been arranged. The first place we visited was the Chapel of St. Matilda. Here the Holy Father offers Mass on Christmas Day. Here also each week in Lent the preacher for Rome gives a sermon to the Papal Family. Included in the Papal Family are the Generals of the Religious Orders. Off both Gospel and Epistle sides of this chapel--where you would expect sacristies--are two rooms housing many relics of the Saints and Blessed. These relics range from the charred skull of St. Lawrence to a relic of the most recently beatified. Unfortunately, the collection does

not include relics of all the Saints and Blessed. At the beginning of the Twentieth century the custom of presenting the Holy Father with a relic of each was begun. In these rooms the relics were displayed in various reliquaries ranging from the simple cardboard box to the very ornate type.

We passed through the Ducal and Regal Chapels to the Sistine Chapel, and through the Sistine Chapel to the rooms beyond. In one of these rooms the newly elected Pope is clothed for the first time in the Papal robes. Our final stop was in the Papal Treasury where the sacred vessels and vestments used for all pontifical ceremonies are stored. Outstanding among the articles seen here are: a) a chalice made from a pair of jeweled spurs given the Pope by a Sultan of Turkey, b) the sword used in conferring the various Papal honors, c) the hammer with which the Cardinal Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church touches the head of a dead Pope, d) a set of vestments made by a Parisian Poor Clare on which Franciscan Saints are portrayed wearing Capuchin habits.

At 11:15 a.m. we went to the waiting room for our audience. While there we met Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith; an American Admiral and his aide; and a family from Montevideo. At 12:15 we lined up around the room forming a rectangle, then separated into smaller groups. His Holiness arrived at 12:30. A Monsignor preceded the Pope giving him information as regards the country of each group. I was the last in line. Fr. Vincent informed His Holiness of the Bolivian project. The Holy Father said, "They need priests badly in Bolivia, Father." He attached an indulgence of 1,000 days to the crucifix on my rosary, to be gained each time it is kissed. We knelt for His Holiness' blessing, posed for a picture, and the audience was over. Although this type of audience is more intimate and affords one the opportunity to kiss the Holy Father's ring, my experience is that the bigger thrill comes from being present with the great crowd at the general audience or in St. Peter's Square at noon when the Pope gives his blessing. His Holiness has been giving this noonday blessing daily for some months now.

On Monday, April 30, I accompanied Fr. Apollinaris Van Leeuwen, general Prefect of Studies, to Grottaferrata where the Order maintains an Institute of Higher Studies. About 30 or 35 of the House's 100 rooms are occupied by the staff and students of the two schools established at Grottaferrata; the school for Preachers (The Apostolic School) and the school for Cleric Masters (School of Pedagogy). The Apostolic School serves the Italian Provinces only and from all accounts serves them well. The School of Pedagogy prepares men for or would like to prepare men for the whole Order. The basic idea of a training school for Cleric Masters is certainly good. I am not, however, in a position to judge the accomplishments of this particular school.

On Tuesday, May 1, Fr. Vincent and I joined the crowd at St. Peter's Square to await the arrival of a helicopter from Milan bearing a statue of Christ. We gave up after an hour and a half--a half hour too soon.

Bishop Smith, having arrived in Rome late Monday night, stayed for the first couple of days at St. Isidore's, the Irish Franciscan College. I met him Wednesday morning and we began a tour of the Congregations which included a visit to Cardinal Tisserant at the Congregation for the Oriental Church. All told we visited some four or five Congregations plus the Secretariate of State. I was amazed and Bishop Smith was, I am sure, pleasantly surprised at the number of people of all ranks who remembered him.

On Thursday, between visits to the Congregations, Bishop Smith and I had dinner with the American friars now attending St. Anthony's (two from Assumption Province, two from Sacred Heart Province, four from Holy Name Province), Fr. Mel Brady from the Curia and Fr. John Lambert. Fr. Hilary Scott arranged the dinner and after going to a few wrong places, making many phone calls, etc., we finally gathered at the Ristorante Damiani. After lunch we visited the Franciscan Church of St. Peter in Montorio. Founded by the Spanish friars as an Apostolic College and later used by Irish friars during the persecution, St. Peter's now belongs to the Roman Province. When he returned to Rome, Fr. Pamphilio da Magliano, founder of St. Bonaventure's in Allegany, was stationed here--here he died and was buried. Michelangelo designed St. Peter's in Montorio and here Bramante made the model for the famous dome of St. Peter's Basilica which was later perfected by Michelangelo. The dome, still intact, now houses two chapels.

At this time we learned that the date of Bishop Smith's installation was now set for Wednesday morning, May 9. I attempted to change my return reservation from Beirut to New York to Thursday, May 10, but could not do so. Since I had scheduled the retreat for the Neo-Curati for Sunday, May 13, I decided to leave Beirut as planned Wednesday, May 9, at 1:30 p.m.--immediately after the installation ceremony.

On the afternoon of Saturday, May 5, Fr. John Rowan and I visited Assisi. We arrived at 6:30 p.m. and immediately contacted Fr. Charles Pujol. Because we still had an hour and a half before dark, we decided to visit the Carceri. The Carceri seems to have originated either as natural caves or as shelters dug by shepherds. The Benedictines used these caves as places for retreat. Finally the Bishop gave the location to St. Francis. The first monastery was built here by St. Bernardine of Siena and is still in use.

Sunday, I offered Mass in the original Portiuncula Chapel for all the members of the Province, their immediate families and our benefactors. Fr. John followed me, but had to offer a Missa pro sponsis. His was the first of eight or ten weddings scheduled at the Shrine that morning. People come from all over Italy to be married at the Portiuncula. After Mass we visited the Shrines of Assisi. I discovered the tomb of St. Francis is also a popular place for weddings.

We returned to Rome Sunday evening, May 6, to accompany Bishop Smith to the Church of Ara Coeli where His Excellency was celebrant at the procession of the Miraculous Bambino. This statue was carved in Jerusalem from native wood and has been highly decorated and ornamented with precious stones. Regarded as miraculous, the statue has been given official recognition by the Holy See. During a pestilence in Rome, the Bambino was carried in procession and the plague ceased.

When the General Curia was established at Ara Coeli, a crypt for deceased Ministers General was installed. Before any General died, the Curia had moved to St. Anthony's. While the present Curia was being built, Fr. Valentine Schaaf died, thus he is the only Minister General buried at Ara Coeli.

Monday, May 7, we visited the Secretariate of State where Bishop Smith had business and where I had an appointment with Archbishop Samore, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. We discussed Bolivia. Afterward, Bishop Smith and I drove to the North American College where we had lunch as the guests of Bishop Martin

O'Connor, Rector of the College and friend of Fr. Gilbert Monroe. Among other guests were Archbishop Gennaro Verolino, Nuncio to Guatemala, and Fr. Tucker, Prince Rainier's chaplain. That evening we had dinner at St. Anthony's and remained for recreation. It was here that Bishop Smith learned he had an audience with the Holy Father on the following morning at 9:15.

That morning at 11 a.m., immediately after Bishop Smith's audience with the Holy Father, Fr. John Lambert Rowan and I took off with the Bishop for Beirut on a Middle East Airlines Viscount. After a stop at Athens, we arrived at Beirut at 6:30 p.m. The people of Beirut held one reception for their new Bishop at the airport and another in the Cathedral. Both receptions were crowded. It was heartening to see and, I am sure, appreciated by Bishop Smith, as he must have wondered just how he would be received.

It was at the airport that I learned I could do no more than accompany the Bishop to his See. The installation had been scheduled by the Nuncio for Thursday afternoon and not, as we thought, for Wednesday morning.

Fr. Denis Mooney, O.F.M., of the Commissariat of the Holy Land and a member of the Pontifical Commission in Beirut, and Fr. Francis Kennedy, of the Archdiocese of Cleveland and also a member of the Pontifical Commission, did a grand job of preparing a home and making other arrangements for Bishop Smith. Fr. Kennedy told me what I most wanted to hear when he said, "The Bishop has been in Beirut for two hours and word goes around that he is the man for the job."

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The following have been assigned to the Mission in Bolivia: Fathers Thomas Manning, Donald Stellpflug, Boniface Hanley, Pius F. Abrahams, Gordon Schneider, Dermot McMahon, Norman Moynihan, Venant Lalonde; and Brothers Peter Regalatus Butler, Mark Forry and Hilary Lalor. The Fathers will begin the study of Spanish in New York early in June.

Sincerely and fraternally,

Jelous Whelan, ofm.

Minister Provincial