

Jubilee Year 2025

Pilgrimage to Rome

Dear Parishioners,

Saturday, February 22nd

The Church celebrates the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter. I felt very honored to walk through St. Peter's Square this morning. Normally, I have thought about this Feast because it's on the calendar and is the Mass to be celebrated on this date. So, seeing this Basilica and the vast number of pilgrims walking to it on this Feast Day is very moving.



This week, the Church is celebrating Deacons around the world as a part of the Jubilee Year. I have seen hundreds of Deacons on pilgrimage when I have visited the major basilicas this week. There are a couple of Deacon groups in my hotel from several countries.

Today, when I entered the Square, I saw that the lines were long, extending from the security stations up to the top steps of the Basilica, approximately over a quarter mile! I noticed that many people were wearing white. The closer I got to the main security area, I realized that they were Permanent Deacons in their Albs going into the Basilica. Then as I walked away from St. Peter's, I saw several pilgrim groups walking towards it, with many Deacons in the group. The groups were from Germany, France, California and Cabo Verde (West Africa).

Today I walked the Pontifical North American College (Seminary) to visit Fr. Mike Romano of the Camden Diocese. Fr. Romano is the Director of Admissions for the Seminary. Fr. Romano took me to St. Paul, Outside the Walls Basilica. It is about 4 miles outside the main part of Rome. This is where St. Paul is buried and it is one of the 4 Major Basilicas of Rome. I had the opportunity to bring the Pilgrim Cross through the Holy Doors in this Basilica! Fr. Romano said that not every pilgrim for the Jubilee is able to do this.

Being next to the place of St. Paul's burial place was an overwhelming experience for me. I had not expected to come here, and I felt honored to be in the place where St. Paul is buried. During my entire priesthood, I have read St. Paul's letters and preached on them. Now, here I am praying in this place!!

I am thankful to Fr. Romano for taking me here, because of the distance from the hotel, I hadn't planned on going there. Fr. Romano also drove to another section of Rome, where St. Paul was killed. There were 3 chapels in the area. Each one was smaller, compared to the large Basilicas, and were not as crowded, but it was good to just sit in the quiet stillness of these places and pray.

Fr. Romano then took me to a popular restaurant for lunch. This is where many local families come for meals and celebrations. This was another unexpected great experience. During this past week, there have been tourists/pilgrims from around the world in every place I had a meal. It was nice to experience a "normal Roman family" meal.

It's around 4 pm now, so I might walk around a new section of Rome for a few hours.
I am planning on attending Mass at the Seminary tomorrow morning.

Peace

Fr. Ed

Friday Feb. 21st

St. Peter's Holy Door

I went to St. Peter's Square by 8:25 am before the many pilgrim groups started to arrive. There were already lines at the security points but not as long as the past few days. I met 3 people from Des Moines, Iowa in the line. I told them about the Pilgrim Cross and asked if one of them could hold it at the Holy Door for a picture. I showed them the Cross and they were impressed by the many people that have prayed at it. They asked if they could pray on it as well.

When we got to the Holy Door, one of them held the Cross as I took pictures. They insisted that I take a picture holding the Cross. There were only a few people behind us as we took the picture and were willing to wait. This wouldn't have happened with the large groups behind us.

I left the people from Iowa and the Basilica around 10 am. I walked away from the Basilica so I could take a photo of the Cross with St. Peter's behind it.

It was difficult holding the Cross and taking a photo. There was a family of 5 from England next to me. I asked if someone could hold the Cross high in the air and I would take the photo. They asked me where I bought this beautiful Cross. Of course I told them the background of it. One of the children asked if anyone from England had ever prayed on the Cross. I told them no one had. Their face brightened and said, "And we're the first!".

I told them that I was from NJ near Philadelphia. The children asked if I knew how to do "they spelled out Eagles cheer." I told them that I did. Of course they told me to do it "right now". Their parents seemed embarrassed. I replied only if you help. So, in the middle of St. Peter's Square we yelled out "E-A-G-L-E-S!!"

All of this happened before 10:30 am.

Peace

Fr Ed



Thursday, February 20th

This was a long day of walking for my pilgrimage to the Papal Basilicas in Rome. I am staying near Vatican City; it is a short walk to St. Peter's. But the rest of the important Basilicas are about 3 miles away.

I walked towards St. John Lateran Basilica that is near the Colosseum. It is the Cathedral of Rome, and it is older than St. Peter's.

I brought the Pilgrim Cross through the Holy Door there. The Basilica was crowded with people from all around the world. There were also Art students sitting around the Basilica, making sketches of all the statues. I lit a candle for everyone's intentions.

Then I went to St. Mary Major Basilica that is over 2.5 miles from there. St. Mary Major is very large! The crowds were long waiting in line here as well. When I took the Cross out of the bag to take a picture of it, several people asked where I bought it. Of course, I told them about the Cross and all the people who prayed on it. One woman said "We should have done this for our parish"

Then it was time to walk back on the narrow sidewalks and hills. But by the time I got near the center of Rome the sidewalks were crowded with people! As I passed by St. Peter's Square the crowds waiting in security were long and the line going into the Holy Door as well.

By the time I reached the hotel I had walked 9.4 miles!

I went to a local church for mass at 5 pm. On Friday I plan to get to St. Peter's in the morning, before the crowds get too big. This weekend was planned as the Jubilee for Deacons. There, thousands of Deacons and their families from around the world!

Peace
Fr. Ed

It is Wednesday, February 19th around 5PM

(Rome time). I arrived safely in Rome on Tuesday, February 18th around 8:30 AM and in my hotel by 10:30 AM. My hotel is few blocks away from St. Peter's Basilica.

I went to St. Peter's in the afternoon. I was surprised by the large amount of people in the Square and the long lines waiting to get into the Basilica. There are many large groups (30+ people) walking up the main street towards St. Peter's praying as they walk. I was pretty tired by the evening and was in my hotel room by 7pm

Wednesday, February 19th

Today, I had a ticket for Pope Francis' Audience in the morning. Unfortunately, due to the Holy Father being the hospital the Audience was cancelled. There are several large pilgrim groups in my hotel and everyone was disappointed, but all are praying for his recovery.

In the morning I walked about 2.5 miles south to the Trastevere section of Rome. I wanted to visit the Church of St. Cecilia in that section. The church was built in the 800's, over the area that her family's house was. A few centuries later St. Cecilia's remains were brought to the church. I had the Pilgrim Cross with me and took pictures of it near the main altar.

I came back to the St. Peter's Square around 3PM and there were around 15 large groups of pilgrims lined up the main street (over a half mile). There were small groups of people praying for Pope Francis in the Square.

I have spoken about the Cross to some of the people here in the hotel. They have all asked to see it and have taken time to pray on it. The groups are from Kansas, Michigan and Texas.

I will be going to two of the four major Basilicas of Rome tomorrow. They are. St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major. There are Holy Doors in those Basilicas as well. Please know that I have prayed for the intentions of everyone who has prayed on the Cross when I visit the different churches each day.

I will send something on Thursday evening.

Peace,
Fr. Ed







