

SEMINARY ADVENTURES

The Life of a Second-Year Theologian at the Pontifical North American College

By Patrick Agustin

A Busy Couple of Months...

Ciao amici! Welcome to this new edition of *Seminary Adventures*. I realize it has been a while since you all last heard from me via this newsletter (about 7 months), but trust that I have been keeping busy with a lot of wonderful things! When I last wrote you all, I had completed Italian language studies in Genoa and was just beginning my summer parish assignment at San Bartolomeo Apostolo – Tencarola in the Diocese of Padua. As you'll see in the next couple of pages, a lot has happened since then – returning to Rome to welcome the new batch of American seminarians; month-long workshops on the priesthood, celibacy, and preaching; new theology courses; the holidays,

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Welcoming DC seminarians Nicholas and Tom to Rome, and welcoming back Fr. Park

etc. And that's just the tip of the iceberg! God continues to be generous while on this journey to the priesthood, and I look forward to sharing some of those graces with you. *Andiamo...*

Summer Parish Assignment at San Bartolomeo Apostolo in Tencarola

On July 8, 2017, I arrived at San Bartolomeo Apostolo in Tencarola for the next part of my summer plans. Tencarola is a little village in the Diocese of Padua, Italy, and I was going to spend five weeks there for a parish assignment – learning from the priests there, helping out with different events for the parish, and getting immersed in Italian language and culture. I had just finished two-weeks of language study in Genoa, so I was looking forward to putting what I learned to use.

When I arrived at the parish, I was welcomed by don Daniele, the associate pastor, and Pierclaudio, a seminarian of the diocese (don Raffaele, the pastor, was finishing up a retreat). After dropping off my stuff in my room, I sat down with don Daniele, Pier, and my friend Simone and his wife Federica, who were parishioners of San Bartolomeo; the two of them picked me up at the train station.

I shared a little bit about myself in Italian – where I'm from, what I did prior to seminary, how I ended up in Rome, and why I asked to stay at the parish. Don Daniele then started to speak to me in Italian, though I could only make out a few words here and there. I definitely tried to act as if I understood him!

He started explaining what I would be doing at the parish. He mentioned I would be helping out a kids camp in Brescia the following week, joining the pastor for home visits to the sick and elderly, and going on a pilgrimage with some teens. Everything sounded as I had expected.

Then don Daniele started saying the words "Gerusalemme" and "Terra Santa". I didn't really understand what he was saying; I thought he was talking about some program at the parish called "Jerusalem" and that I'd be helping out with that. All of a sudden, Simone turns to me and asks, "Do you understand what he just said?!" I said, "Haha, no I don't." Simone explained in plain English: "A group of Scouts from the parish are taking a trip to the Holy Land in August. A spot freed up, and he's going to ask if you can come because he could use your help, and it would be a good witness to the group." I was in disbelief! I had never been to the Holy Land before, nor did it ever cross my mind that I could be possibly going within a few weeks' time!



Il Santo - Basilica of St. Anthony of Padua



Inside San Bartolomeo Apostolo in Tencarola

After shaking off the shock, don Daniele asked me if I could introduce myself at the Masses that weekend, beginning with the Mass that evening. I attended Mass with Simone and Federica, and at the end, I introduced myself to the congregation (and also apologized to them for my poor Italian!). Afterward, Simone, Federica, and I headed went for a nice dinner with his parents, eating cuisine common to the Veneto region, including *baccala* (codfish) and *cinghiale* (boar).

The first day at the parish ended with Night Prayer with don Daniele and Pier and of course, some limoncello. I went to bed that night incredibly grateful for that wonderful first day and looked forward to whatever other surprises God had in store for me over those next few weeks.

A few days later, I met don Raffaele when he returned from his retreat. In those first few days at the parish, I joined him on some home visits to the sick and elderly around the neighborhood. We

spent a couple of hours that week visiting parishioners, praying with them, and if possible, bringing them Holy Communion. It was really special for me to be welcomed into these peoples' homes. I was a stranger to them, but they were incredibly kind and excited to share some of their stories with me.

The following week, I went to Brescia with don Daniele to help out at a *camposcuola* for some 75 kids from the area. There were lots of activities for the kids – sports, games, arts & crafts, acting, singing, etc. It was quite busy! On one of the days, we walked to an old abandoned fort where I got to share my vocation story. The kids seemed to really like the part where I mentioned I worked in Hollywood and did the financial forecast for some of their favorite movies like *I Puffi* (*The Smurfs*) and *Piovono Polpette* (*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*). On the last night of the camp, the kids dressed

up for a little party where they performed skits, songs, and dances for one another. One of my favorite moments throughout the week though was when we prayed before a meal. One of the prayers went like this (to the beat of Queen's *We Will Rock You*): "Oh Signore, Ti ringraziamo, per il pane quotidiano. Alle-, Alleluia!" (x2), which means, "Oh Lord, we thank You for the daily bread." The kids would get so into pounding the beat on the table that sometimes their food went all over the place!

The week after the camp was spent back in Tencarola, helping out at Masses by lecturing, serving, or cantoring, visiting more parishioners, and exploring more of Padua and some of the surrounding towns. I visited places like Vicenza, Verona (yes, there is a place there dedicated to Juliet of *Romeo & Juliet*), and a Benedictine Monastery in Praglia. It was neat to see more of the Veneto region.

During my fourth week, it actually happened. *I went to the Holy Land.* I joined 20 Scouts from Padua. Having never been a Scout myself, by traveling with them I received a glimpse of who they are and what they do. I got to see aspects of their faith, their service, and their dedication to each other and to the organization. We spent a number of days volunteering at Hogar Ninos Dios, an orphanage for children with disabilities in Bethlehem. We visited a number of Scout troops in the area. We swam in the Dead Sea. We walked through the desert. We visited a number of museums. We prayed at the Wailing Wall.

The highlight for me though was retracing the steps of Jesus in Jerusalem. We visited places that I had only read about in the Bible. We visited Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed to His Father that Holy Thursday night. We walked the Via Crucis, the Way of the Cross, which tradition holds to be the path that Jesus took on the way to His Crucifixion. The Via Crucis has 14 stations to commemorate the different events that occurred as Jesus made His way to Calvary. At each station, each of the Scouts gave beautiful reflections and prayers. With each station, we were approaching the place where Jesus died and was buried, now known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Once we were finally there and entered the church, I got goosebumps. I was going to see the spot in which stood the cross that Jesus was nailed to. I was going to see His empty tomb.



With the Scouts in the Holy Land



Walking through the desert



In Gethsemane, kneeling before the spot Jesus wept blood on the night before His Crucifixion



Below this altar stood the Cross of Christ



The tomb of Christ



(Above) At the orphanage in Bethlehem; (Below) Becoming an honorary member of the clan

I can't describe what it was like to touch the ground where the cross stood or what it felt like to be inside the tiny space that held Christ's Body. It was an incredible experience, and it also brought into perspective the vocation God is calling me to. As amazing as it was to visit these places, God reminded me that I encounter Him in an even more real way at Mass, because it is there I receive Him, His Real Presence, in the Eucharist. And God-willing I make it to priesthood, I would be bringing Him to His people.

After a blessed week in the Holy Land, we returned to Italy via Milan. Don Daniele and I exchanged our goodbyes with the Scouts at the airport because we were heading straight to Siena for another camp. I was sad to leave them, but before leaving, we had a beautiful ceremony in which they made me an honorary member of their clan.

After spending the night in the Milan train station, don Daniele and I eventually made it to Siena in the morning. We were greeted by almost 30 teens and 10 volunteers. Though tired, I was excited to join the group. We were going to walk part of the Via Francigena, which connects northern Europe to Rome. The portion we would be walking with the teens went from Siena to San Gimignano.



First stop on the Via Francigena: Monteriggioni



Getting ready for dinner



Passing by a vineyard on the Via Francigena

After greeting everyone, one of them asked me, "Patrick, the first stop is Monteriggioni. Are you ready to walk 20 km?" 20 km?! Dead.

Just kidding... In all honesty, God gave me a second wind as soon as I saw the group. They were full of energy and ready to go. When we were finally on our way, we found ourselves walking through fields, crossing over creeks, and passing by vineyards. *Only in Italy would a pilgrimage route take you through a vineyard.*

During our walk, I had the opportunity to talk to the teens. Some had never met an American before, so many wanted to practice speaking English. Others wanted to hear how I ended up with them on the pilgrimage, while others had sincere questions about the Catholic Church's teachings on different social issues and wanted to understand them.

The world is a much different place now than when I was 15 or 16 years old. Teens these days are incredibly smart and intuitive, asking some tough life questions I didn't start asking until well into my 20's. What I learned from these teens is that, while they may be from another culture, their questions about their purpose in life and the meaning of faith, their hopes for their future and humanity, their desire for happiness, etc. aren't all that different from Americans their age. Whether or not I addressed all their questions, what I hoped to do was to help them to think of things in light of God and to leave them with a sense of hope.



Blessed to have walked a part of the Via Francigena with this group

I had to leave the teens before the end of the camp as I wanted to return to Tencarola to say goodbye to the parishioners at the Masses. Before leaving, I sang a little bit with teens, and they gave me a shirt signed with their names on it. I left that camp grateful to God for the time spent with them and for the joy they brought me in those few days.

Back at the parish, I said my farewells and thank you's at the Masses. I told the congregation I would miss them, asked for their prayers, and promised my prayers for all of them, too. My last night in Tencarola was spent with the priests of the parish, Pier, Simone, Federica, and his family for a pizza dinner at Simone's parents' home. I shared the graces from the five weeks and thanked them for being like a second family to me.

The next morning, don Raffaele and Pier accompanied me to the train station. They waited with me until the train headed to Rome arrived. We exchanged hugs and said, "Alla prossima!", which means, "See you next time!" I got on the train and grabbed my seat and said a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the gift of this experience, the people that I encountered, the happy and holy priests I lived with, and the joy in confirming this vocation for me.



Farewell dinner with Simone's family

Back to Rome for New Man Orientation

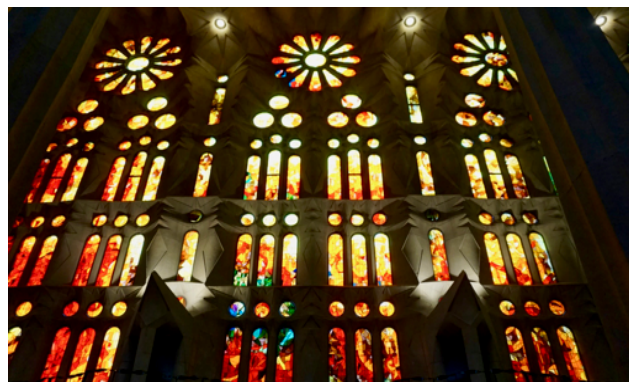
After a whirlwind five weeks in (and out of) Tencarola, I returned to Rome on August 14 to assist with the New Man Orientation. A group of the now Second-Year Men returned to the seminary a bit earlier than the rest of our classmates in order to welcome the fresh batch of 47 seminarians from the U.S. who would be calling the NAC their new home. In this group were four men who I knew from my time at Saint John Paul II Seminary, so it was exciting to see them again after a year and help them get acclimated to their new environment.

I was the Liturgy "Capo" or "head," so it was my responsibility to work with our Director of Liturgical Formation to ensure that all the liturgies for orientation went off without a hitch. I had to assign all the liturgical responsibilities (e.g., lector, acolytes aka altar servers, cantors, etc.), plan the "Clap-In" (the first official welcome of the New Men to the college) and Blessing of the Our Lady of Humility images (Patroness of our college; each New Man receives one to keep in his room), and coordinating off-site liturgies in Assisi and at our other campus, the Casa Santa Maria.

I remember being in these men's shoes just a year before – missing home, feeling a bit overwhelmed with the many new faces at a new seminary, living in a foreign country, learning a new language, etc. It was definitely a lot to take in, but I remember how welcomed I felt by the men on the orientation team. They did everything possible to make sure our transition was as smooth as it could be, and I wanted to do the same for these new brothers of mine. It was neat being on this side of orientation because while I now have the hang of things at the seminary and Rome, I got to live the "brand-newness" of moving to Italy through them all over again. Please pray for these men as they continue to adjust to their life in Rome.



Blessing of the Images of Our Lady of Humility



A few images from La Sagrada Familia from a weekend trip I took to Barcelona – a must see!

September: Workshops on the Priesthood and Preaching

While a few of us were busy orienting the New Men, the rest of my classmates began to trickle back into the seminary from their own summer assignments. Some taught English in China; some volunteered in the Holy Land; others worked with the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India; a few did language study for Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, or German; and most others did parish assignments all over Europe, including Sweden, England, Germany, and Italy. It was great to come together after being away from one another for three months and sharing our experiences.

We didn't have too much downtime, however, before our workshops began. During September, the men in second, third, and fourth year theology participate in workshops on the priesthood. For my class, we dove headfirst into various aspects of the priesthood, including priestly identities, celibacy, and preaching. These workshops allowed us to look at the one Priesthood of Jesus Christ as a prism and appreciate its beauty from many different angles. Some of the workshops included the Theology of the Priesthood, Spiritual Fatherhood, Priest as Chaste Spouse, Priest as Friend of the Bridegroom, and the Charism of the Diocesan Priesthood.

A week of the workshops was devoted to preaching. This was our first taste in learning how to prepare and deliver homilies. Over the course of a few workshops, we received some practical training and delivered two practice homilies in front of a priest moderator and a few of our classmates. Afterwards, we gave each other feedback.

The assignment for our first practice homily was for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, and I focused on the Gospel for the day (Mark 8: 27-35). Specifically, I preached on verse 34 which says, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." The moderator for my group was Fr. Sullivan, OP. If you don't know what "OP" stands for, it stands for "Ordo Praedicatorum," which is Latin for "Order of Preachers." The person who was going to critique my first homily belongs to the Order of Preachers! He's a pro. He possesses the charism for preaching, and he's going to critique me? No pressure, right?

I delivered my homily, which I had written out before me in 16-point font. I gave it as much energy as I could, using hand gestures, making eye contact, and projecting my voice. After I finished, I thought to myself, "Whew, glad that's done. I think I did ok!"

I awaited the feedback. One seminarian said, "You look comfortable up there. You had good, natural hand gestures, but you tend to move around behind the ambo." *Yep, you're right – I do tend to move around.* Another said, "It flowed well, but it sounded like a report." *Ouch, but okay.* When asked by our moderator what he thought was the one main idea of my homily, the seminarian said, "Actually, I don't know." *Dagger.*

I learned a lot just in giving that one practice homily – what worked and what didn't. Learning how to prepare and deliver a good homily is a lot about trial and error. Thankfully a majority of our formation this year is dedicated to homiletics (we will give 14 practice homilies by the end of the year).

It's humbling to preach God's Word and not easy! In preaching, there is some degree of vulnerability there because I'm sharing the fruit of my prayer with the readings. As the preacher, I'm relaying a message to the congregation that I trust in faith that God wants me to share with them. In sharing that message, God uses all that He's given me – my personality, my life experiences, my knowledge, my voice, etc. There's a bit of me that's put out there when I'm behind the pulpit.

I have definitely seen my preaching style change since that first homily. I have become more confident and relaxed in preaching, and I have done a few with notes scribbled on a notecard. It has been an eye-opening experience preparing and delivering homilies, and I look forward to continuing to hone this skill. Delivering homilies definitely makes me more sympathetic to priests!

Fall 2017 Semester

For this first semester of my second year at the Angelicum, the classes have been heavily focused on dogma, which I have really enjoyed. Take a read below to see the courses I took this Fall.

Christology: The course offers a comprehensive and systematic treatment of the issues related to the person and mission of Jesus. Specific themes: The Mission of the Son in relation to the history of Israel; the development of soteriology in patristic and medieval thought; the controversies and conciliar definitions, and contemporary issues.

Ecclesiology: After a brief history of ecclesiology, the course explores the images used in Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium to express the nature of the Church (People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit, etc.) ; The four properties or "notes" of the Church in the Creed (One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic); Several theological models for a systematic definition (mystery - sacrament, mystical person, communion ...). We shall then examine the states of the Church in the history of salvation (*Ecclesia ab Abel*); The hierarchical constitution of the Church of Christ, ministries and states of life, according to the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church *Lumen Gentium*.

Theology of Grace: After examining the biblical and patristic evidence as well as the main lines of the teaching of the Church's Magisterium in answer to heterodox opinions, the course will study theologically the meaning and place of grace - God's life in us: the authentic life of the human spirit - in the life of Christians and its implications in light of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas and other more recent and contemporary theological reflection.

Faith, Hope, and Charity: The theological virtues through which a contact with God is established and developed are studied according to their presentation in the *Summa of Theology* of Aquinas.

Spiritual Theology: The invitation to spiritual communion with God as presented in the First Letter of St. John. Study of selected texts from the Christian spiritual tradition (e.g., Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans, St. Augustine, *Confessions*) with special emphasis on the following themes: God's saving mercy, prayer, the ascetical life, growth in holiness and contemporary spirituality.

U.S. Church History Seminar: This class, an ordination requirement for candidates for the priesthood in U.S. dioceses, intends to serve as an introduction to the rich history of the Catholic Church in the United States of America. Beginning with a general introduction to the field of U.S. Roman Catholic Church history, it will proceed to offer an overview of the status of the Church in the U.S.A., demographically, in 2017. From this point, beginning with the Spanish and French missionaries, the class will explore Church history in the U.S.A. until the immediate post-Vatican II period.

Mariology: This course will consider the person and role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation. Special attention will be given to the doctrines of her Immaculate Conception and Assumption. Consideration will also be given to understanding Marian devotion in Christian life and spirituality.

For more information about my university, visit angelicum.it.

Saint Francis International School – The New Class!

As you may recall from my last newsletter, I was teaching Grade 4 Religion at Saint Francis International School, an English-language private school. I returned to this apostolate this year eager to teach new students and prepare them for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and their First Communion.

This year, my class is comprised of 11 students – 9 boys and 2 girls. With this ratio, you can imagine what it's like in the classroom! Probably the most common phrase I use in the classroom is, "*Ragazzi, basta!*" (translation: "Guys, enough!"). Still, amidst their distractions and playfulness, they somehow manage to listen to me because when I try and catch them not paying attention by asking them a question, they somehow manage to answer correctly!

One grace I want to share from my classroom this year: During one class, we had just finished our lesson on the Trinity (there is 1 God but 3 Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and moved on to the Incarnation (God the Son taking on human flesh in Jesus). We had just established that though Jesus was called the Son of God, He is God in the fullest sense, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit. To begin the lesson on the Incarnation, we read the Annunciation, the story of the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary announcing that she would bear God's Son in her womb. One of my students (one of the more mischievous ones) raised his hand and asked, "*Mr. Patrick, so if Jesus is God, and Mary is the Mother of Jesus, is Mary the Mother of God?*" I was blown away by his question! I'm certain he didn't understand the profundity of his question, but little did he realize that what he summed up in a few phrases took centuries to sort out in the early Church (look up "Council of Ephesus"). Some people in the early Church were condemned for teaching opposing beliefs!

So I looked at him and said, "YES!! What you just said is EXACTLY TRUE!!" His response, "Huh?!" as if his mind was blown. As a teacher, there's nothing like seeing your student piece together material he or she has learned right before your eyes and come to conclusions about truths of the faith. This is an example of how faith and reason are not opposed to each other and even a young child can come to knowledge of the teachings of the faith.

It has been quite the journey with these kids, and I look forward to preparing them for the sacraments these next couple of months.

Pastoral Council

This year, I have the joy of serving as the Pastoral Council Representative for my class. As Pastoral Council Rep, it's my responsibility to liaison between my class and the rest of the community (i.e., the faculty, the other classes). It's my duty to bring any issues to the rest of the Pastoral Council on behalf of my class and coordinate events to build fraternity among the men of Second-Year Theology.

This past Fall, I coordinated our class Mass and dinner. Thanks to the help of my classmates, we had a delicious dinner comprised of prosciutto and cantaloupe for the appetizer; steak, potatoes, and asparagus for the main course; and a sticky toffee pudding with vanilla ice cream for dessert. One of the guys made glühwein (mulled wine) using a secret family recipe. It was a successful event!

Next semester, I will be coordinating a class fraternity weekend to Spoleto and our Spring class Mass and dinner.



Setting up for the class dinner

Reflections from Rome: Feast of St. John Paul II



Mass with Fr. Giertych, OP, at the Polish Chapel at St. Peter's

On October 21, the alumni of Saint John Paul II Seminary now studying at the North American College in Rome gathered together to commemorate and celebrate the life of a great saint and the patron of our diocesan seminary, whose feast day was on October 22.

We began our day of celebration with Mass at Saint Peter's Basilica at the Polish Chapel of Our Lady of Częstochowa. Not surprisingly, the Chapel of St. Sebastian, where the tomb of our beloved patron rests, was booked all day, so we were unable to have Mass there. In a providential way, however, it was as if Saint John Paul II was pointing us towards and leading us to Our Blessed Mother instead, just as he did during his pontificate. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Wojciech Giertych, OP, a papal theologian and professor of moral theology at

the Angelicum, the university where many of us receive our intellectual formation. Fr. Giertych was joined by Fr. Robert Kilner, one of the Archdiocese of Washington's newly ordained priests and a member of the inaugural class of JP II.

At the end of the day, we proudly donned our burgundy JP II polo shirts to pray Evening Prayer together and shared in a delicious dinner prepared by some of our more "culinarily-inclined" alumni. The dinner included some traditional Polish dishes, such as *golumpki*, a stuffed cabbage roll in tomato sauce, as well as Polish sausages. Over the meal, we reminisced about some of our favorite memories from our time at JP II, including the way we would sing "happy birthday" at dinner (perhaps "scream" would be the more appropriate term) and unfortunate encounters with ghost peppers. It was an unforgettable evening, and we look forward to continuing this tradition in the years to come.

We give thanks to God for the gift of this great shepherd who by his life gave witness to the Gospel and has given us seminarians an example of a holy and joyful priesthood. We also give thanks to God for the gift of Saint John Paul II Seminary, our home away from Rome.

Saint John Paul II, pray for us!

(The article above was originally submitted as a blog post for Semantics on DCPriest.org.)

Trailer Park Fraternity Weekend

Fraternity is an important part of a happy and healthy priesthood. Only other priests can really understand what it's like to be one. Because of this, seminaries typically incorporate activities to build fraternity into priestly formation.

During the weekend of October 27-29, the seminarians of my corridor, nicknamed "Trailer Park," spent a weekend in Sansepolcro, a town in Tuscany. While most halls will at most take a day trip together somewhere outside Rome, it's pretty rare for an entire corridor, comprised of 21 seminarians, to spend an entire weekend together!



The men of Trailer Park

We rented a house that had tons of space, a large kitchen, a huge dining room table to fit us all, and a big fireplace to keep the entire house warm. There was even a place next door that served as our chapel where we had Mass and community prayer. We spent the weekend hanging out, playing games, making some delicious food (including some pizza using the wood-burning pizza oven), and taking in the beauty of this quaint town. Some of us also took a drive to San Marino, technically another country enclosed within Italy.

It was a great weekend where we shared a lot of laughs and created a bunch of memories for our hall.



Thanksgiving Banquet with the DC guys and our guests

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving remains one of my favorite traditions here at the NAC. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely miss spending Thanksgiving with my family back in the States, but the NAC does a great job in making this a special time for us.

The events were similar to last year, so I'll just do a quick recap here: Thanksgiving Day started off with the annual Turkey Trot, a 5K around the Vatican ("the only 5K to go around a sovereign nation"). We had a celebratory beer with all the runners from my hall before a nice American breakfast cooked up by some members of Trailer Park. After some rest, we attended Mass celebrated by

Cardinal James Harvey, an alumnus of the NAC. In attendance were Callista Gingrich, the U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, and her husband, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich.

Afterwards, we headed to the refectory for the Thanksgiving Banquet. It was a wonderful feast with all the trimmings – turkey, gravy, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, pumpkin ravioli, and of course, pumpkin pie!

On Saturday, we had our annual "New Man/Old Man Show" in our auditorium. The New Men did a great job pulling together a memorable show – funny skits, hilarious short videos, and a few musical numbers, parodying Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and Coolio's 1995 hit, *Gangsta's Paradise*.

No longer a "New Man," I joined the Old Man Show for a few acts. I teamed up with two seminarians for a musical number called *If I Had a Million Dollars*, in reference to what we would do if we had that kind of money to make improvements around the seminary. I also filmed a video with my fellow Asian brethren in the house, joking about how we're moving up in the ranks since our new Vice-Rector, Fr. Adam Park (who happens to hail from the Archdiocese of Washington), is Korean. That video got a lot of laughs!

On Sunday, the Old Men took on the New Men in the annual Spaghetti Bowl. Though the New Men fought hard and narrowed their double-digit deficit, the Old Men came out on top. It was a great weekend!



A few images from around Naples



Christmas

Though I had to be away from home, God provided abundant ways for me to have a blessed and memorable Christmas.

At the Angelicum, I joined a group of Filipino priests, religious, and seminarians to sing a few Christmas songs from our culture at our university Christmas gathering. We sang a medley that started with "Do You Hear What I Hear?" then went into "Emmanuel" and "Ang Pasko Ay Sumapit." It was a blessing to meet other Filipinos here at university, hearing/speaking Tagalog again, and eating homemade Filipino food.



With some Filipino priests, seminarians, and religious from the Angelicum

At the seminary, we prepared for Christmas by decorating our corridors in hopes of winning the annual hall decorating contest. Last year, my hall won "Most Improved," so this year, we were gunning for the win. We decided to be more cultural this year with a theme of "Mexican Christmas." We decorated the hall with papel picado (colored tissue paper cut with designs in them) as well as a number of handmade piñatas. When the judges came to our hall on the night of the seminary Christmas Party, we offered them Mexican hot chocolate and dulce de leche cake. To top it all off, a group of us did an a cappella rendition of Straight No Chaser's "12 Days of Christmas" medley, which you can see here: <https://www.facebook.com/denisnakk/videos/10157008462984251/>



When the time to announce the winner came, we waited with baited breath. "3rd place goes to 4th Convent" (that was a shocker... everyone thought they would win the whole thing). Do we have a chance?! 2nd place goes to... (please don't say 2nd Hospital)... 4th Hospital. Oh wow, could we have won?! "1st place goes to... 2nd Hospital!" We won 1st prize! I practically yelled in the refectory, threw my fists up in the air, and gave my hallmates a high-five. There was no real prize except bragging rights, which was enough for us.



Red Room Rejects just after finishing our Christmas set in the Student Lounge

After the party, we all headed to the Student Lounge where our band, The Red Room Rejects, did a Christmas set. We did a number of covers, including the Jackson 5's "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town," Elvis Presley's "Merry Christmas, Baby" and Relient K's version of "12 Days of Christmas." It's always a blast jamming out with these guys and sharing our God-given gifts with the rest of the house.

As soon as classes ended, I once again hopped on a train for Padua to return to my home away from Rome, Tencarola. Don Raffaele was gracious to take me in again, and I was looking forward to seeing the priests, Simone, Federica, and all my friends from the summer.



With don Daniele on my first night back in Tencarola

When I arrived at the train station, I was picked up by Paola, who works at the parish. We got in the car and headed straight for parish. As we pulled into Tencarola, the biggest smile came on my face. It felt so good to be back to a place that felt like home. We pulled up to the rectory, and I was greeted by don Raffaele and don Daniele. We had lunch together and did a little bit of catching up. Don Raffaele asked me if I wanted to join him later in the afternoon for some home visits around the neighborhood, and I replied with a quick "sì!" He mentioned we'd be visiting a few of the people I met over the summer, so I was looking forward to it.

After lunch, don Daniele and I took a little stroll through the neighborhood and caught up one-on-one. It was great to reminisce about the summer and share what we both had been up to since then. After our walk, don Raffaele and I went on a few home visits. It was great seeing more familiar faces. The folks we visited remembered me from the summer and asked me how I was doing in Rome. I was touched that they still remembered me. In the evening, I joined don Daniele for a Penance Service for some teens at a nearby parish. All this happened on my first day back in Tencarola, and I felt so blessed to be there and jump right back into things.

The next few days were spent catching up with people. On my second night back, I met up with the Scouts for a potluck dinner and gift exchange at San Domenico, a nearby parish. We spent a week together in the Holy Land, so I was excited to see them and hear how they were doing. At the same time, just upstairs from where we were, the volunteers from the kids camp I helped at last summer were setting up for a separate activity for the same group of kids. I surprised them and popped my head in to say hello and shared what I had been up to. I'm continually blown away these young people's dedication to this ministry.

The next day, I met Cristiano, the new seminarian assigned to San Bartolomeo in Tencarola. Pier



Reunion with the volunteers from the summer kids camposcuola

wrapped up his time with the parish and had a new assignment volunteering at a local hospital. I helped Cristiano with the prayer intentions for the Christmas Masses and then we headed over to the local shopping center to hear the chorus from the parish sing a few Christmas tunes. They sang beautifully and even threw in some English tunes in their set just

for me. Afterwards, don Raffaele, Cristiano, and I joined the chorus for dinner at La Vecchia Bottega, one of my favorite restaurants in the neighborhood owned by one of the parishioners.



The beautiful Nativity scene in the church



Reunion with some of the camp volunteers from the summer

On Christmas Eve, the church was packed for the 10pm Mass. Don Raffaele asked me to sing the Responsorial Psalm (in Italian) for that Mass, and I was happy to do so. It was a beautiful liturgy with all the altar servers processing in and bringing a statue of the Infant Jesus that was placed in front of the altar. After Mass, I had a mini-reunion with some friends from the summer, and we caught up over mulled wine, hot chocolate, and pandoro (an Italian cake) in the parish hall.



Christmas pranzone getting ready to begin!

On Christmas Day, I was asked to sing the Psalm at one of the morning Masses. Afterward, Simone, his brother Andrea, and I headed to Federica's parents' house where we were spending Christmas Day with their families. Simone warned me to come with an appetite. Now, having been much heavier before, I knew I could eat, but friends, let me know tell you – I wasn't prepared for this Christmas feast. I haven't never eaten so much in my life. We literally ate for 7 hours. Course after course – bread, cheeses with marmalade, little pizzas, lasagna, multiple pasta dishes, lamb stuffed with pumpkin, other meat dishes, pandoro, and bottles upon bottles of wine. They told me they only do this once a year, but wow, that day I felt like I ate enough for a whole year! I had to tap out at 7pm. Nevertheless, I

felt so blessed to be experience a truly Italian Christmas with my good friend Simone, Federica, and their families. This was definitely one of the most memorable Christmases (and meals) of my life.



Blessed to have spent Christmas with Simone and Federica's families

On the evening before I left Tencarola, I was invited to have pizza with the families of some kids I met at the summer camp. It brought me a lot of joy to see Jacopo, Alessio, Matilde, and their parents. After pizza, the boys and I simultaneously watched and played some soccer in the living room. Since it was 2 against 1, the odds were in their favor and they won. Afterwards, Jacopo gave me a cool backpack with a handwritten note with the Filipino flag on it, and Alessio and Matilde gave me a beautiful Nativity ornament made out of popsicle sticks. Easily the best Christmas gifts I got this year!

The next day, I was on a plane headed to London for the second half of Christmas break. I was meeting another seminarian Randy over there. Having never been to London before, I was looking forward to this trip. We saw *Les Misérables* in the West End, visited the main sights – Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, Big Ben, Tower of London, the museums, Westminster Cathedral, etc. – and participated in the Evensong Service at Westminster Abbey. We stayed at a Vietnamese parish while in London, so I got to experience the kindness and generosity of the parishioners and eat some delicious Vietnamese food!

Randy and I took a side trip to Dublin for a few days to take in the sites there. I visited Kilmainham Gaol (a historic jail), walked around the campus of Trinity University, and toured the Guinness Factory. Of course, we took in some live music at one of the local pubs in the Temple Bar neighborhood. I really enjoyed Ireland and look forward to exploring other parts of the country in the future.

After being away for two and a half weeks, I was ready to return to Rome and finish off the semester. It was a busy, but wonderful, Christmas break, filled with tons of graces, a lot of culture, a perhaps too much food.



So wonderful to see Simone, Lorena, Jacopo, Davide, Federica, Matilde, and Alessio while in Tencarola



Randy and I at Buckingham Palace



New Year's in London

More Photos

From the summer...



Crossed something off my Bucket List - hiking the Dolomites!



Easily the most beautiful place I have ever hiked



Night out in Padua with some of the camposcuola volunteers



With Federica and Simone on the celebration of their 1st Wedding Anniversary



Pierclaudio and I on the rooftop of his seminary... Il Santo in the back



Lorenzo and I with George at the orphanage in Bethlehem

More Photos

From the seminary...



Making German potato salad for Oktoberfest at the seminary



Serving the potato salad we made



Marian Procession on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception



Latino-Asian Night with Archbishop Patron Wong

Prayer Intentions

- For all seminarians, particularly those of the Archdiocese of Washington and the NAC
- For the repose of the soul of Carol Reid
- For my students at St. Francis International School, who are preparing for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion
- For each other's personal intentions

How to Pray for Vocations

The Mother Teresa Vocation Society (MTVS) is a prayer apostolate that asks for your commitment to pray daily for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

The MTVS was founded in 2004 through the Office of Priest Vocations of the Archdiocese of Washington following the beatification of Mother Teresa in 2003. The society is a prayer apostolate that promises a daily commitment to prayer for an increase in the response to God's call and for the perseverance of priests, deacons and those in consecrated life.

It requires a daily commitment to prayer. There are no dues or meetings.

For more info, or if you'd like to join, visit the following link:

<http://www.dcpriest.org/promote/mother-teresa-vocation-society/what-is-the-mtvs>

Closing Words



2017-2018 House Photo

Since it has taken me forever to get this issue out, I'm a good three weeks into my second semester. My classes and professors this semester are outstanding, I was instituted to the ministry of acolyte, Rome experienced its first snow fall in 6 years... a lot has happened! But, I need to save some material for the next newsletter, so stay tuned for those stories!

When we all returned from Christmas break, I overheard one of the third-year seminarians say to another, "Well bro, this is the year we get ordained!" I smiled and thought to myself, "Wow, they'll get ordained deacons this September!" Then it hit me... If they're getting ordained this year, then that means, God-willing, I'll be ordained to the diaconate next year!

Whoa. In 2017, I had been so accustomed to saying "in two years" when people would ask when ordination was. Now that we're in 2018, I can't say that anymore. It's next year.

Time is flying. I still remember landing in Rome like it was yesterday, when the idea of returning home seemed so far away. It would be 2 years before I could go back to the USA. Now, that time is almost here, and I'm so looking forward to it. My next newsletter will likely be sent from the other side of the Atlantic!

But here we are. God continues to outdo Himself in generosity. He has blessed me with incredible people along this path to the priesthood, all of you included. Thank you for continuing this journey with me, for supporting me, and especially for praying for me. Count on my prayers for you all. May God bless you all this Lent.

Alla prossima,
Patrick

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