

SEMINARY ADVENTURES

THE LIFE OF A FOURTH-YEAR THEOLOGIAN AT THE
PONTIFICAL NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE

BY DEACON PATRICK AGUSTIN



Diaconate Ordination Class of 2019

Living in Hope...

Welcome to this issue of *Seminary Adventures*. The world certainly finds itself in a difficult and uncertain period with the coronavirus pandemic. Many of us have had to adjust our lives drastically – not being able to attend Mass, working from home, teaching the kids, cancelling events, etc. Perhaps someone reading this newsletter is suffering from the virus or knows someone who is. Whatever situation you find yourselves in, I hope this newsletter brings even the littlest bit of hope, but most importantly, reminds you of God's goodness and faithfulness. I won't say much else here since a lot more will be said in the following pages, but I wanted leave you all with a quote from Saint Francis de Sales, with which the Rector of my seminary ended his homily for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord:

"Do not look forward in fear to the changes and chances of this life; rather, look to them with full confidence that, as they arise, God, to whom you belong, will, in His love, enable you to profit by them. He has guided you thus far in life, and He will lead you safely through all trials; and when you cannot stand it, God will bury you in His arms. Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering, or will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations."

- Saint Francis de Sales

Andiamo...

PREPARING FOR DIACONATE ORDINATION

Upon returning from the Camino de Santiago, I immediately jumped into the workshops held at the seminary. Because our university classes don't begin until early October, each class spends the month of September in various workshops. The First-Year Men are in Italian language studies; the Second-Year Men focus on preparing and delivering homilies; the Third-Year Men focus on advanced preaching and counseling; and the Fourth-Year Men (my class) focus on Family and Marriage Preparation and Liturgical Preparation. In our workshops, we learned how to administer the FOCCUS Marriage Inventory and did a few role-playing exercises of different couples we may encounter. We also learned how to celebrate the Mass and reviewed the Rite of Baptism.

In addition to the workshops, the entire community was busy with Diaconate Ordination preparations. There are a number of events leading up the ordination itself.

On September 14, the first major event for the *ordinandi* (those getting ordained) took place. At this event, my brothers and I made the Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity before the entire seminary community. In making the Profession of Faith, I am stating that I believe to be true everything that the Catholic Church teaches. When the Profession of Faith is combined with the Oath of Fidelity - whereby I place my hand and swear on the Bible to "preserve communion with the Catholic Church" in my words and deeds and faithfully teach and hand on the Catholic faith - the stakes become higher, and there is a greater seriousness.



Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity

During the week of September 22-28, my classmates and I made our annual silent retreat at *Internazionale di Spiritualità Sacro Cuore di Gesù* in Rocca di Papa, a little town just outside of Rome. This wasn't just any retreat, however. My classmates and I had to make what is known as a "canonical retreat." The Catholic Church's Canon Law requires that all those getting ordained to the diaconate or priesthood to make a retreat of at least five days (Code of Canon Law, 1039).

This retreat is scheduled the week before ordination on purpose. It gives us the opportunity,



Fourth-Year Canonical Retreat in Rocca di Papa

not to concern ourselves with any more planning, but to enter into silence with the Lord, pray with the Rite of Ordination, and prepare to take this next (huge!) step with the help of God's grace.

To be honest, it was difficult to stay focused in the retreat! It wasn't due to nerves or anxiety about the vocation. It wasn't due to worrying about my guests arriving in Rome. The difficulty came from *excitement* and *anticipation*. In my prayer, the image that came to me during retreat was of being a little kid waiting for Christmas to arrive. That's what it felt like! This huge gift was waiting for me on the other side of this retreat. I did my best to remain as present in the retreat as possible, but I do remember saying to God, "I blame You for this joy and excitement!" I'm sure He got a laugh!



Chapel at the retreat center

When the retreat ended, we headed back to the seminary to get ready for all our guests to arrive!

On Sunday, September 29, my buddy Tony and I woke up bright and early to catch a bus to Fiumicino Airport to meet some of our family members at the airport. His sister and brother-in-law came out of baggage claim first, then I saw my parents. We exchanged big hugs and introduced our family members to one another. Tony and his family went on their way, while I waited for a few more relatives to arrive. Upon seeing them, we exchanged more hugs. With all the people and baggage accounted for, we left the airport and made our way to their hotel. After a quick breakfast, I left my parents at their hotel to get some rest.



Family Mass in the Immaculate Conception Chapel to kick off Diaconate Week

After the reception, we went out as a family for a nice traditional Italian dinner and strolled to the beautiful streets of Rome.

In the middle of the week, the *ordinandi*, their families, and their guests attended the weekly Wednesday audience with Pope Francis. The *ordinandi* and their parents had special seats close to the Holy Father, and at the end of his remarks, he gave the deacons-to-be and their families a shout out! It was really neat to be so close to the Pope.



With the family in front of the Pantheon

Later that evening, our families and friends attended a vigil at Chiesa del Gesù to pray for those of us getting ordained the following day. The *ordinandi* did not attend this vigil because we had our own prayer vigil with all our brothers back at the College, just us and them and no outside guests. It was a beautiful hour before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, asking for His blessing and protection upon each of us, as we prepare to lay down our lives for His Church.



House Vigil for the ordinandi the evening before Diaconate Ordination

Finally the day arrived – Thursday, October 3! The day I had been looking forward to for months (years!) was finally here. Not surprising, I didn't get much sleep the night before, but it didn't affect me. I grabbed a light breakfast to get something in my stomach, and before taking off for Saint Peter's Basilica, I asked my spiritual director to hear my confession. Nothing like getting ordained with a clean soul!

My brothers and I made our way to Saint Peter's Basilica, and in the process. I ran into some friends from LA and some relatives. As my brothers and I were passing everyone, there was a growing excitement from the crowd that erupted in cheers. In just a few short hours, the Church would be welcoming 31 new deacons.

Once inside the sacristy of the Basilica, we were quickly whisked away from the rest of the priests that were in there so that we could gather ourselves and get vested in our albs in silence. As we waited for the liturgy to begin, many of us turned to prayer.

I remember those last few moments before the bell tolled and the procession began. I was praying the Rosary, asking Our Blessed Mother to intercede for me and my brothers, to stand beside us in that sanctuary as she stood faithfully by Our Lord on the cross, and to see in each of us her Son. Suddenly the bell tolled, and the procession began towards the Altar of the Chair.

After that, the whole ordination was a bit of a whirlwind (though I think it was about two-and-a-half hours long). I processed in and saw all my family and friends in the congregation, grateful for their presence there and for their prayers that have helped get me to the altar. Once I was in my seat, I saw all the priests filing in, some I didn't know personally, but a number I did: from the Archdiocese of Washington, from the seminary, and even some from my summer assignment in Padua. I think the procession ended up being about 15 minutes long!

The liturgy continued as is familiar to any Catholic, but everything was slightly elevated: the music, the vestments, and even in that the Gospel was entirely chanted. Every detail of that liturgy was accounted for, and everything was done in a way that gave God the praise that He deserves.



From top to bottom: Our families and friends gathered at the Altar of the Chair in Saint Peter's Basilica; my brothers and I getting a "pep talk" from Fr. Hurley, SJ; the ordaining prelate Bishop Robert Deeley of the Diocese of Portland in Maine, along with two of my classmates (who were ordained in their respective dioceses last summer)



After the Liturgy of the Word, we moved to the Rite of Ordination, which begins with the Presentation of the Candidates. All of us getting ordained were called forth, and after we all acknowledged our presence with a loud “present,” our Rector presented us to the Church and asked the bishop to ordain us. After inquiring of our worthiness for ordination, the Bishop accepted the request and the congregation assented with their applause.

At this point, we made a number of promises, which included the promises of celibacy, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, and obedience to our ordinary (our local bishop). To be frank, these weren’t hard to make as we had been conforming our lives up until that point to be able to make these promises. Thus it was an easy, “I do.”



Following the promises, all the *ordinandi* laid prostrate on the floor of the sanctuary, while the cantor led the congregation in the Litany of Supplication, asking for the intercession of all the saints and angels in heaven to pray for my brothers and me. As I’m laid there with my face to the floor and the Litany began, “Lord, have mercy,” my eyes began to well up with tears because being called to serve God as His deacon – and ultimately priest – is nothing short of an *act of mercy*. To call me or any human being – sinners that we are – to such a beautiful vocation is a complete and gratuitous gift from God.

From here, the bishop laid his hands on each of our heads. The gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred upon us by the laying on of hands and the Prayer of



Ordination. Those getting ordained receive the strength of the Holy Spirit through the gesture of the laying on of hands. After this and the Prayer of Ordination, we were officially deacons!

I remember looking across the sanctuary at my brothers and seeing the biggest (and goofiest) smiles. We were deacons! I only had a split second to let it sink in before we were getting vested in the stole and dalmatic, vestments which signify the office of the deacon. A beautiful tradition is having a priest or brother deacon help you to vest. I asked my good friend and newly ordained priest of the Archdiocese of Washington Fr. Joe Cwik to vest me.

From top to bottom: Making the promise of obedience; Litany of Supplication; laying on of hands



When he came up to begin vesting me, I thought he was just going to place the stole and dalmatic on me. Instead, before placing any vestment on me, he prayed the specific prayers that priests and deacons pray as they put on each piece. As he was preparing to place the stole on me, he prayed, *"Restore unto me, O Lord, the stole of immortality, which lost in the transgression of my first parents; and though I am unworthy to approach your Sacred Mysteries, may I still merit eternal joy."* Before placing the stole on me, however, he gave me the stole to kiss, a gesture of love and respect for the office that we have just been ordained to and a symbol of the minister being yoked to Christ.

I still remember looking down and seeing the stole draped across my chest and my eyes again welling up with tears. *Whoa, I'm really a deacon!* What had just happened interiorly in the laying on of hands and the Prayer of Ordination was now visible on the outside. God is good! Fr. Joe then placed the dalmatic on me and prayed the beautiful prayer, *"Clothe me, O Lord, with the garment of salvation and the vestment of gladness; and surround me always with the dalmatic of righteousness."* Vesting was complete.



Each of us then approached the bishop and knelt before him. He placed the Book of the Gospels in my hands and said, *"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach."* As a deacon, I'm now able to proclaim the Gospel at Mass and to preach homilies.

Following this portion of the Rite, the bishop and all other ordained deacons present then go to each of the newly ordained deacons to exchange the "Sign of Peace," which is symbolic of welcoming them as a fellow worker in their shared ministry.



At this point of the liturgy, we proceeded to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. But the beautiful thing is that there is a "swap." The two deacons who

From top to bottom: Vesting of the deacons; the bishop giving me the Book of the Gospels; the "Sign of Peace" from the bishop and deacons

processed in with the bishop at the beginning of the liturgy switch places with two of the newly ordained deacons. I was given the great gift of being one of those deacons.

Even to this day it is surreal to think about: the first time I ever got to deacon was at my own ordination in Saint Peter's Basilica. Wow. I was the Deacon of the Altar, and I had the responsibility of incensing the clergy and the people, but most importantly, to hold the chalice with the Precious Blood of Jesus.

At the end of the ordination I got to chant, "Go forth the Mass is ended," which was also really cool to get to do in Saint Peter's!

As we processed out, it was nothing but a sea of smiles from the congregation. Before heading back to the sanctuary for some photos, my brothers and I exchanged hugs in joy and thanksgiving for what God had just done in us.



Holding the chalice with the Precious Blood for the first time as a deacon at the concluding doxology of the Liturgy of the Eucharist



The three new deacons of the Archdiocese of Washington



With my family after ordination



My relatives from the USA who came to support me at ordination



With two of my good friends from northern Italy, Simone and Vittorio

After a few photos, we all headed back to the seminary for a reception with all of our guests, held in the *Cortile degli Aranci*. For me it was the first time when all my guests were together: my family, my aunts, uncles, and cousins, my friends from LA, my friends from DC, my friends from all over Italy, my friends from seminary, and everyone in between. It was special to just take a step back and see this beautiful icon composed of people that the Lord had brought into my life and supported me on this journey.

Later that evening, the newly ordained deacons for DC hosted a private reception for our guests at *Ristorante Scarpone* (or “boot” in Italian). It was a joyful celebration filled with delicious Italian food and wine.

The following day, on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, I had my Mass of Thanksgiving at San Bartolomeo all’Isola. From my previous newsletters, you’ll know that Saint Bartholomew has been a saint close to my heart. It’s not so much that I discovered him, but that he befriended me (saints tend to do that). My first parish assignment as a seminarian was at Saint Bartholomew’s in Bethesda, MD. During Holy Week in Seville, Spain, of my first year in Europe, my friends and I stumbled into San Bartolome y San Esteban and spent the Triduum there. And during my summer abroad in Padua, I spent five weeks in the village of Tencarola whose patron saint is San Bartolomeo. Not coincidence, but Providence! So I thought it would be fitting to have my Mass of Thanksgiving at this beautiful basilica. The Mass was celebrated by my good friend, Fr. Derek Ho, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, who I often “blame” for being in the seminary today. It was at his diaconate ordination in November 2013 that I heard the “call.”

The Mass was beautiful. The basilica was full of family and friends, and I was blessed to have a number of concelebrating priests present. I even had a little choir provide the music. I proclaimed the Gospel and preached my first homily publicly (even weaving in my niece Evie into it!). I prepared the altar and the gifts. I again held the chalice with our Lord’s Blood. Though I was still getting used to doing all the “deacon” stuff, I nonetheless felt right at home. There was a tremendous sense of peace that this is where God is calling me to be. And that peace remains to this day.

Afterwards, we headed to *Ristorante Kuriya* for a luncheon.



Blessed to have the support and love of friends from my parish in LA, Saint Monica’s



Grateful for the example and friendship of each of these priests



Wonderful friends from Tencarola (Diocese of Padua), where I did my summer assignment a few years ago



The procession at Diaconate Ordination

With that, all the Diaconate Week festivities came to a close. To say I was exhausted after that would be an understatement. But no words could express the tremendous joy and peace I felt after all of that, and the gratitude I had to God for such a blessed week.

For EWTN's coverage of the 2019 Diaconate Ordination,

copy and paste this link (check for spaces):

<https://www.facebook.com/PontificalNorthAmericanCollege/videos/421707571813611/>

For A LOT more photos from the ordination,
copy and paste this link:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/PUUjQcBBYxkNVMWF7>



Thanks for coming to Rome, Jaclyn and Mark



With Fr. Gary and the Merkle Family (former parishioners of Saint Columba and now at NSA Naples)



With my former Sony co-worker Anahit and her cousin Hasmik



With don Pierclaudio and don Daniele (priest friends from Tencarola)

FALL 2019 SEMESTER – BEGINNING THE LICENTIATE PROGRAM

As soon as Ordination Week came to a close, we immediately jumped into our university courses. At the conclusion of the Spring 2019 semester, I completed my bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology (STB) *Magna Cum Laude*. With the start of the Fall 2019 semester, I was beginning a two-year license program (also known as second cycle) with a focus on Dogmatic Theology. Obtaining the license would allow me to teach theology in a college, seminary, or university. This semester brought me two courses in Italian. Below is a summary of my course load (per the Angelicum's Handbook of Studies):

- **Nothing is impossible with God:** Christian faith teaches that God is Almighty and that “nothing is impossible with God” (Lk 1:37); nevertheless, human reason discerns some limitations of what is possible in this world. How do we handle God's Almightyness, different kinds of impossibilities, and the empowerment of whoever believes? This seminar investigates the Christian doctrine of God by retracing Aquinas' uses of Lk 1:37: “Nothing is impossible with God”, and other connected passages. It reveals how omnipotence touches upon central topics of Christian faith. Aquinas might be compared with contemporary theologians of almighty and/or omnipotence, such as M. Vial and K. Sonderegger.
- **The Christian Contribution to Art:** This course offers a series of fully illustrated lectures on the Christian contribution in architecture, sculpture and painting from the early Renaissance to modern times. Artistic movements, schools and individual artists and works of art will be studied in their historical context, with special emphasis on their religious importance.
- **Trinitarian Dogmatics and Monotheistic Rationality:** This lecture course will consider basic challenges in the elaboration of Trinitarian doctrine of God in a modern context. Themes include: the transcendentals, rational arguments for monotheism, historical coherence of Trinitarian revelation, the divine attributes, analogies for the immanent Trinity, and the theological notion of Trinitarian missions.
- **I nomi divini secondo san Tommaso (The Divine Names according to Saint Thomas):** In q. 13 of the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* - De divinis nominibus - Saint Thomas examines the value and scope of our language when applied to the mystery of God. We will study in a systematic way the different articles of this question in the light of their sources (Dionysius, Saint Augustine, Maimonides...) stopping above all on the theme of the analogy of divine names. Between an a-metaphysical and anthropomorphic discourse that presents a human God, too much human, so human that it could be a mere projection of our subjectivity, and a speech of the false transcendence that makes God arbitrary and threatening, Saint Thomas traces, by means of analogy, the way to a fair and balanced philosophical and theological discourse on God.
- **Amore, giustizia e onnipotenza di Dio secondo san Tommaso (Love, justice, and omnipotence of God according to Saint Thomas):** This course consists of a systematic presentation of q. 20-21 (De divinis moribus: love, mercy, and justice in God) and q. 25 (divine omnipotence) of the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* in the light of traditional sources (Sacred Scripture and Fathers of the Church) and medieval problems, but also taking into account the evolution of the problems and critically confronting the new interpretations of these perfections in Jesus Christ in contemporary theology (God's suffering, God's weakness...).
- **The Lived Theology of Catherine of Siena:** Apart from a general introduction to the life and teachings of this remarkable lay woman, the course will pay particular attention to: 1. Catherine as a preacher of God's Mercy; 2. The ecclesial depth of Catherine's spiritual vision; 3. Catherine and freedom.
- **Christian Anthropology:** The Apostle Paul says in his Letter to the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me.” (Ga 2:19) The gift of the grace of Christ, heals, transforms and perfects human nature. This course will study the human person created in the image of God, redeemed in Christ, and sanctified by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Special attention will be given to the relationship between human nature and the new life of grace in Christ.
- **Hispanic Pastoral Ministry:** This course serves as a specific study of Hispanic Pastoral Ministry in the Church in the United States. The course considers selected, practical questions related to the ministry and pastoral care of the Christian faithful of the Hispanic community in the United States. Specifically, the course considers selected historical, cultural, linguistic, legal (civil and canonical) and devotional aspects associated with ministry to the Hispanic community. The study of these realities in the seminary will assist future priests to provide, with solicitude and spiritual fruitfulness, to the pastoral needs of the growing Hispanic community in the United States.

FOURTH-YEAR FORMATION: RECONCILIATION AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Every Thursday night, each of the theology classes breaks up for workshops related to our priestly formation. Among other topics, the primary focus for my class this year are the sacraments, particularly the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. In general, we would have a presentation related to the sacrament to review some of the theology behind it and some practical things to keep in mind. Subsequent Thursday formation conferences were devoted to the practical application of those sacraments. So, we broke up into groups of four to do some role-playing and met with a priest moderator who conducted the *practicum*.

In our Reconciliation *practica*, the priest moderators were given different characters to play, though the deacons weren't aware of what those were! The scenarios definitely mimicked what a real Confession would be like. We had to know the rite itself, assign an appropriate penance, and have the Prayer of Absolution memorized. To be honest, it's quite nerve-wracking yet very humbling, in that priests and future priests are entrusted with hearing some of the heaviest burdens people carry, and at the same time, being an instrument of God's mercy.

In our Anointing *practica*, we followed a similar pattern as the Penance ones. We had to know the rite and have the prayers for the anointing and the Apostolic Pardon memorized.

What I am grateful for is the Church's presence through the sacraments at every stage of a person's life. My prayer for all of us is to have a greater love for the grace made available to us through the sacraments and to have greater recourse to them. The Church, Who is Our Mother, always provides.

NSA NAPLES APOSTOLATE

I am blessed to be able to return to the NSA (Naval Support Activity) Naples apostolate for a second year, serving the Catholic military and their families. This year, I am the *capo*, responsible for leading the team of seven other seminarians and being the liaison between the seminary and the base. The apostolate is probably one of the closest experiences a deacon or seminarian can have of an American parish while living abroad. We serve at the Masses, prepare Days of Recollection, teach CCD, are hosted by families in their homes for meals, and host Theology on Tap (Q&A on Catholic stuff at a bar on base). Having been a part of the apostolate last year, you begin to develop bonds with the people you are serving. What's beautiful is that as we move forward in priestly formation, this community moves along with us. They knew me as "Seminarian Patrick," and now they know me as "Deacon Patrick," as God-willing very soon, it will be "Father Patrick." I now get to preach homilies to them, and I'm able to better tailor my preaching to their needs since we've established a relationship.

One of the highlights every year for me is the annual Confirmation Retreat, which was held the weekend of October 18-20. The retreat was held at a hill-top hermitage run by the Bridgettine Sisters about thirty minutes away from the base. The deacons, seminarians, and two Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist planned the weekend. We had eight teens on the retreat, and we had a blast! They were so energetic and gave themselves to all the activities, talks, and times for prayer. Please pray for them, that they may recognize the gifts of the Holy Spirit they received at their Confirmation and be courageous witnesses of the Gospel.



NAC men and the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist with the Confirmation students at NSA Naples at their Confirmation Retreat

LIFE AS A DEACON

Since ordination in October, I have been able to exercise my ministry as a deacon inside and outside of the seminary. In addition to “deacon-ing” at Mass, I have had the opportunity to lead the seminary community in Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer and also serve as the deacon for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. If you’re assigned as the “deacon of the day,” one of the responsibilities is to bring Holy Communion to our sick brothers who may not have been able to make it to Mass that day.

I was also blessed to deacon at a number of other Masses for our seminary community, but out in the city. I was the Deacon of the Altar at the Mass on the occasion of the Episcopal Consecration (bishop ordination) of Bishop Austin Vetter for the Diocese of Helena in Montana. Bishop Vetter was the Director of Spiritual Formation at the NAC during my first two years in Rome. I was the Deacon of the Word at the Ash Wednesday Liturgy at Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill. The Mass at Santa Sabina kicked off the station church tradition that is held annually in the city. You can check out EWTN’s broadcast of the Ash Wednesday Mass here:

<https://www.facebook.com/PontificalNorthAmericanCollege/videos/2339361993020457/>

Outside of our seminary community, I have been able to deacon at a number of convents, including for the Carmelite Sisters, at the Domus Guadalupe (convent for American religious sisters of different orders living in Rome), and for the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist.

Studying at an international university has allowed me to befriend priests and religious from different orders from all around the world. I deaconed at the diaconate ordination of my friend, Br. Ben, of the Marist Fathers. More recently, I deaconed at an Italian parish run by the Order of Saint Paul the Hermit in Prima Porta, a little village just outside of the Rome city center. It was the first time I’ve ever had to chant the Gospel in Italian!



Mass of Thanksgiving for Bishop Vetter at Sant'Agostino



The Angelicum students at Br. Ben, SM's Diaconate Ordination



At Santi Urbano e Lorenzo on the occasion of the dedication of their church



Ash Wednesday Mass at Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill



Lenten station church liturgy at San Pietro in Vincoli

DC FRATERNITY WEEKEND IN MILAN



The priests, deacons, and seminarians of the Archdiocese of Washington

It is a tradition for the DC priests, deacons, and seminarians to go on a fraternity weekend together. During the long holiday weekend of October 31 – November 3, we hopped on the fast train and headed up to Milan. There we got to enjoy the beautiful city of Milan and the surrounding areas. On Friday, November 1, which is All Saints' Day, we had Mass at a local parish. Afterward, we took the regional train and headed up to Lago di Como, where we spent the day hiking in the surrounding mountains that overlooked the beautiful lake. At the end of the day, we took the ferry back to the train station and headed back to Milan. There we enjoyed some good ol' American food that you can't get back in Rome – Five Guys!

The following day was All Souls' Day. We took another train to Pavia, where we visited the tomb of Saint Augustine of Hippo. His relics rest at San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro. Fr. Joe Cwik celebrated Mass, and I was the deacon and preached the homily. It was a great gift to be able to deacon at the tomb of this great saint, a saint whom I've studied for years in philosophy and theology, whose *Confessions* I read, and whose name I sort of share. Bonus: Another saint's relics rest in the tomb of this church – that of Boethius – whose *Consolation of Philosophy* I studied in one of my philosophy courses the Catholic University of America.



Five Guys in Milan... sometimes you just crave American food



Mass at San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro



At the tomb of Saint Ambrose

After spending a few hours exploring the town of Pavia, we hopped on the train in the direction of Milan, but first stopping at the stunning Carthusian monastery of la Certosa di Pavia. Its beautiful grounds and even more beautiful church gave us a good place to pray for some time. We got back on the train headed for Milan, where we paid a visit to the Basilica of Saint Ambrose, whose relics rest there, along with Saints Gervasius and Protasus. There were two particular graces from this visit. The first was being able to pray the second reading of the Office of Readings (one of the prayers required by clerics and some religious to pray) for All Souls' Day before the tomb of Saint Ambrose, who is the author of that writing. The opening of that writing is really striking. Ambrose says, "We see that death is gain, life is loss. Paul says: *For me life is Christ, and death a gain*. What does 'Christ' mean but to die in the body, and receive the breath of life? Let us then die with Christ, to live with Christ. We should have a daily familiarity with death, a daily desire for death." Thus, we ought to think about death daily, not as something to be feared but as the threshold to eternal life.

The second grace: as we were praying before Ambrose's tomb, someone came in to unlock the gate that enclosed it. A number of altar servers and priests came into the tiny area. One of the priests began to get vested in his liturgical vestments and then proceeded to put on the miter. It was the Bishop of Milan. It was beautiful to see one bishop of Milan, Ambrose, and his present successor.



Up and close in the Duomo



Place where Saint Augustine was baptized

On our last day in Milan, we spent a majority of the day at the Duomo (or cathedral). We ascended the beautiful structure and got to see all the intricate statues and marblework atop the church. The kind of artistry and detail behind such a beautiful cathedral is absolutely mindboggling. What was most inspiring to me is that this church (and many, many churches in Europe) was a reflection of the people's faith, wanting to build a beautiful church fit for the King of the Universe. We descended into the main church to see the eerily beautiful statue of Saint Bartholomew carrying his own skin, reflecting his martyrdom by being skinned alive. We ended our visit by paying a visit to the crypt to see where Saint Augustine was baptized by Saint Ambrose.

We capped off the weekend of fraternity with Mass back at the seminary, celebrated by our Vice Rector for Student Life (and priest of the Archdiocese of Washington) Fr. Park. He reminded us that we have these fraternity weekends so that we can bring that fraternity back to Washington. I am grateful for this fraternity and for the fraternity that awaits me among the priests of the Archdiocese of Washington.

AD LIMINA VISITS

Every five years or so, all bishops are required to come to Rome to make a visit *ad limina apostolorum*, literally “a visit to the threshold of the Apostles.” During the months of November 2019 – February 2020, the U.S. bishops came to Rome by region. During their visit, the bishops celebrate Mass at the major basilicas of Rome, visit various Vatican offices, and meet with the Holy Father.

Following Thanksgiving, the bishops of Region IV arrived in Rome. Region IV includes Washington, DC, Baltimore, Arlington, Richmond, Wheeling-Charleston (WV), and Wilmington (DE). When the bishops of our respective regions visit, the priests, deacons, and seminarians are given permission to join them at various events when possible. For example, we are often asked to deacon, serve, lector, or cantor during the Masses they celebrate.

I know one highlight for all of the seminarians is the opportunity to visit with the Holy Father. We were whisked by bus to the Apostolic Palace, where we scaled a number of steps and walked down a beautiful long corridor. Upon reaching the end of the corridor, we awaited instructions from one of the attendants. He called each bishop by name, and as Archbishop Gregory’s name was called, that was the DC seminarians’ cue to fall close behind. Once all the bishops and their contingents were assembled, we walked through a number of different colored rooms. We even passed through the room where Pope Francis gives his weekly address just before praying the *Angelus* on Sundays.

After a bit of waiting, each bishop was introduced to the Holy Father followed by his group. We each had the opportunity to shake Pope Francis’ hand and say something quick. When I approached him, I said, *Grazie Santo Padre per tutto che hai fatto per la Chiesa* (which translates to “Thank you, Holy Father, for all that you have done for the Church”). He smiled and gave me a Rosary that he blessed. It all happened very quickly, but it was no doubt a moment I will never forget.



Meeting Pope Francis during Region IV's ad limina visit

CHRISTMAS BREAK

For Christmas, I returned to Ramstein-Miesenbach, Germany, to visit my cousin Realyne and her family. I hadn't been back since my first Christmas in Europe in 2016.

While I was there, I was able to deacon at some of the Advent and Christmas Masses at the American Air Force Base at Ramstein. I have a special place in my heart for the Catholic military and their families, given my ministry with the Navy community at Naples. It was great to connect with the military there and to thank them for their service. Many of them were familiar with the NAC, and they were grateful to have a deacon at their liturgies.

Also while in Germany, I got to bless my cousin's new home as well their two cars on Christmas Day. That was a first for me!

On December 26th, I departed Germany and headed to Madrid, Spain, to meet up with a few brother seminarians.

The trip to Madrid was a pilgrimage of sorts. While there was time to explore the city, we first went to Avila to visit the Carmelite Monastery situated just outside the city walls. Saint Teresa of Avila helped to found this monastery in the 16th century, and we got to visit where she lived, had her confessions heard, and even prayed in the chapel where she went into religious ecstasy. It was incredible! After exploring Avila itself and retracing Saint Teresa's footsteps, we headed to Segovia to visit one of her close friends, Saint John of the Cross. We had the opportunity to pray at his tomb for a bit. It was surreal to be able to visit these holy sites and to pray with the saints whose works I've read over the years.

After the others had split from Madrid, I spent an extra day or so to explore a bit more of the city. I was able to visit the Cathedral de Santa María la Real de la Almudena with its ornate crypt, as well as number of other beautiful churches. I also visited the Museo Reina Sofia. My favorite, however, was the Museo del Prado, where I was spent a good six hours taking in all the beautiful works of art. This place has definitely become one of my favorite museums with all its beautiful paintings. Actually, my holy card for priesthood ordination will feature an image from this museum. Stay tuned for the next newsletter to see what it is!

After a great Christmas break, it was time to head back to Rome to finish the Fall semester and prepare for final exams!



Christmas in Germany



Convent founded by Saint Teresa of Avila



*Tomb of Saint John of the Cross
in Segovia, Spain*



Madrid with some classmates

AFTER EXAMS

After Christmas break, we had about three more weeks of lectures before final exams. It was a long stretch to the finish, so by the end of the semester, I was ready for classes to be over with!

After exams, I was on break again before the start of the second semester. I was able to take care of a few priesthood ordination things, as well as do a bit more traveling.

A number of guys from the seminary recommended visiting Innsbruck, Austria, so my friend Chris and I hopped on a fast train from Rome to Bolzano, then took a regional train to Innsbruck. It was a beautiful train ride through the Alps.

I wish I was a skier, but I really enjoyed Innsbruck, nonetheless. We took the funicular train all the way up a snow-capped mountain. Once we exited the train, it opened up to an incredible panorama. It literally felt like we were on top of the world. I remember just sitting on a ledge and taking in all the beauty and thinking to myself, "Only God could have designed creation to be this beautiful."

After enjoying everything Innsbruck had to offer, we headed back to Rome via train, grateful for this post-exam trip.



Innsbruck, Austria



With my Jesus Caritas Group at the cathedral in Bayeaux, France

Before break was officially over, however, my *Jesus Caritas* fraternity group took a trip to northern France, from February 8-13. Ever since we formed our fraternity group during our first year in Rome, our devotion to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux began to grow, so we had been talking since then to make a visit to her. Two years later, we were finally able to do it.

We made a visit to the Carmelite Monastery where she lived and where her relics remain. To be honest, I was awestruck when I approached her tomb to pray. I was in the middle of re-reading her autobiography *Story of a Soul*, so it was like making a visit to a friend because you knew life story and got a sense of the kind of person she



Tomb of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux

was. After spending some time in prayer before her tomb, we were able to attend Mass at the monastery. Afterwards, we also made a visit to the Lisieux Cathedral and saw where she and her family went to Mass and where one of her sisters prayed about her own vocation. Afterwards, we visited the Basilica in Lisieux named after this wonderful saint, which also contains the relics of her parents, Saints Louis and Zélie.

The following day, we took a two-hour drive to Omaha Beach, where the Allied Forces entered France on D-Day during World War II. There is a great museum that pays tribute to all those who served in the war, as well as a beautiful cemetery honoring those fallen soldiers who valiantly gave up their lives. As I was going through the museum, I was struck by the faith of many of these men, who often carried Rosaries or Saint Michael the Archangel medals with them into battle. Afterwards, we drove to Bayeaux to visit one of the most beautiful Gothic churches I have ever seen.

The next day, we went to the Alençon to visit the birthplace of Saint Thérèse. We took a tour of the childhood home she lived in before her family moved to Lisieux and prayed in the chapel situated next to the room where she was born and her mother died. We also visited the cathedral in Alençon where her parents got married and where Thérèse was baptized.

On our last day in France, we drove to Mont Saint-Michel, an island on the northwest coast of the country. Tradition holds that Saint Michael the Archangel appeared to Saint Aubert and asked him to build a church on this rock. We took a tour of the monastery that is still there to this day, and we attended daily Mass with the religious community there. It's a pretty spectacular sight to see!

These few days in France were a blessed time with these men. Not only were we able to visit all these places, but it was a great time to just hang out and pray together. We all took turns cooking dinner every night (I made Filipino adobo for the guys, and they loved it!), and after dinner, played some cards (I played "Hearts" for the first time... fun game!).

After a nice break, I was ready to begin the second semester!

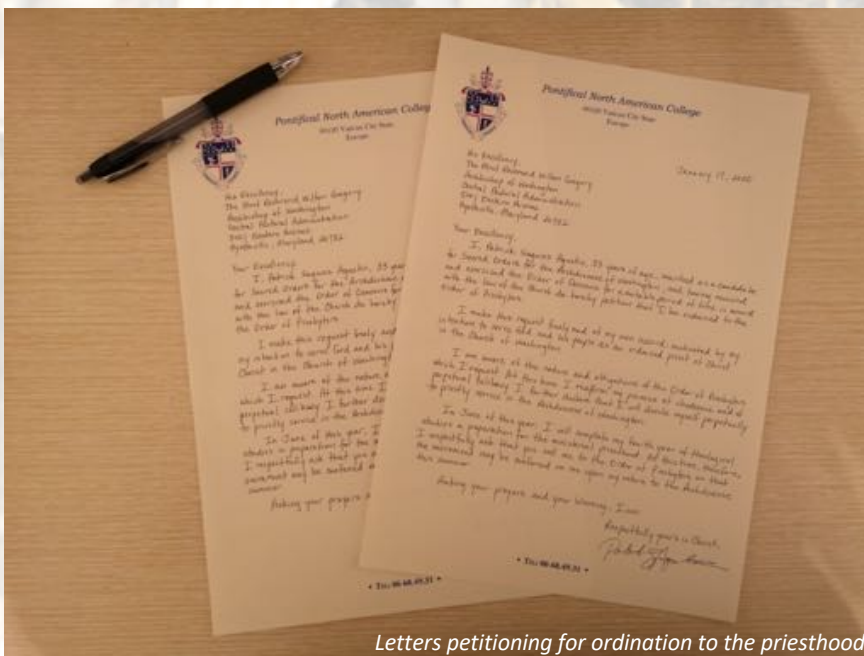


Mont Saint-Michel

PETITIONING FOR ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

After a successful faculty evaluation, I was ready to petition my Archbishop for ordination to the priesthood. Similar to my petition for ordination to the diaconate, I had to submit two handwritten letters asking my Archbishop to ordain me as a priest. In the letter, I state that I have served as a deacon for a suitable period of time and am making this request freely in order to serve God and His people. I also reaffirm the promises of celibacy and obedience I made at diaconate ordination.

It is with great joy to share that, while I was composing this newsletter, I have received my official call to orders! Thanks be to God! Pending any unforeseen circumstances, I will be ordained with my brothers from the Archdiocese of Washington on June 20th at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in DC!



Letters petitioning for ordination to the priesthood



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

I write this newsletter as I wrap up my fourteen-day quarantine in my parents' basement. It has been a surreal couple of weeks to say the least. When Italy announced that universities would be closed until March 15th, I thought the coronavirus situation would pass, and we'd be back to normal operations. When the entire country went on lockdown on March 9th, it was clear that things were escalating quickly.

With the announcement of the lockdown, the North American College allowed us to go home upon receiving permission from our bishop. With schools and universities being closed through April 3rd (actually through April 19th due to the Easter break) and the uncertainty of the next few weeks and months, I had a call with my Director of Seminarians at 11pm and suggested to him that it would be best if we came home, in case the situation worsens and the window to leave gets narrower or fewer flights would be available. If we stayed, we risked getting stuck outside of the U.S. and putting our ordination date in jeopardy. He agreed. So, he tasked me with waking up all the DC guys (it was after midnight at this point) to let them know that the Archbishop has given us the option to return home.

Six out of the ten DC men opted to head home; all the ones getting ordained this summer were in that group. So after some late-night flight searching, most of the DC guys left on the first flight out on March 10th, while I opted to take a day to pack calmly and say my goodbyes. I was preparing myself not to come back to Rome until the fall, so I had to make sure I had everything I needed for the summer.

Because the announcement came so late on March 9, many of the guys at the seminary didn't see the notice until they woke up the following day. By then, some guys had already departed the seminary or were frantically trying to pack up to get ready to leave within a few hours.

It was a heavy and chaotic day to say the least. I was unexpectedly saying "goodbye" to some of my own classmates who would not be returning to Rome after their own ordinations. Given the uncertainty when or if we will return before the semester ends, some of my classmates had to pack up their entire rooms in a few hours. We have some beautiful traditions at the end of the year to give the departing men a proper send-off, but on that day there sadly was no time for that. I was packed in a few hours, and I spent the rest of that day saying "bye" to the guys who remained.

Reflecting on that day, it was definitely more bitter than sweet. I was happy to return home, but at the same time, sad to say "bye" to these guys. Big or small, I was grateful for the impact each of them made on my life. Talking to one of my classmates, he said, "This is an exercise of detachment." What he said didn't sit well with me because I realized it's not about detachment from people, as if I was unaffected by them. What I realized in these abrupt goodbyes was that in these years of formation, God has blessed me and increased my capacity to love these guys fraternally, as He will increase my capacity to love the people I will serve in the future. That's the grace present in the bitterness.

Early the following day, a group of us on the same flight had Mass at 5am, celebrated by one of the fifth-year priests. We had to order two taxi vans to get six of us and all our luggage to Fiumicino (it was like a game of Tetris with both baggage and bodies in those vans). Even though we allotted ourselves three-and-a-half hours to get to our gate, it was just enough time for us to grab a cappuccino and cornetto before they started boarding. With that, I was on route back home to DC, with a quick layover in Newark, NJ.

Upon arriving at Reagan National Airport, I grabbed my luggage, hopped into my rental, and drove home. I didn't want my parents to come pick me up and risk getting infected with the virus should I have been carrying it unknowingly. I pulled into my neighborhood just in time to see them pull away to head to Mass. I gave them a wave, parked the car, and entered the house through the back door to officially begin my fourteen-day quarantine.

I thought quarantine would be difficult, but it has actually been a blessed time. The key was having a schedule, which for me was comprised of prayer, school (online classes), study, reading, Netflix, exercise (treadmill or walking around the neighborhood), and catching up with people. I'm really humbled by all of you who showed your concern and reached out to me via email, text, video chat (until I got back to the US, I had never heard of Zoom), or phone during my time in quarantine. It was great to catch up with people I haven't spoken to in a very long time. I never once felt lonely, that's for sure!

Prayer was very fruitful during this time. Because I couldn't attend daily Mass, I "celebrated" my own Mass in my room. I needed the practice anyway! When you're in quarantine, you have to get creative with your time and space, so I prayed my holy hour in my room, but I logged on to YouTube and pulled up a livestream of Adoration and put it on my TV so I could at least have an image of Jesus in the monstrance to help focus my prayer.

Just a few reflections from my prayer while in quarantine...

Being in quarantine or on lockdown are small inconveniences that can allow us to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering in greater ways, both physically and spiritually. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux said, "Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, or even at their difficulty, as at the love with which we do them." As I was walking through my neighborhood, I was grateful to have the ability to get out of the house for a few minutes. But the Lord showed me even that time can be sanctified by offering each step and each breath for every person who can't leave their house or who have the virus and can't breathe. My daily Mass practices were opportunities to offer my spiritual Communion for those who desire to attend Mass and to receive the Eucharist but cannot. Do the smallest things with love.

In one of my conversations with my brother, he said, "This whole situation is like a 'reset.'" It's true; there is no aspect of our lives that has been untouched by this pandemic. We're all experiencing a type of reset, but what will we do next? Will we fill up our lives with the same things as before? This trial shows us that there are things in this life that are out of our control. We aren't invincible, nor will we be on this earth forever. But there is Someone Who is absolutely in control...

God, in His Divine Providence, has allowed for this to happen during the season of Lent, and this gives each of us, by the help of His grace, to trust in Him more, to have hope, and to have faith that He will draw some greater good. We don't know how long we will be in this metaphorical "desert," and for the time being, this penitential period seems like it will last beyond Easter, but we know with full confidence that on the other side is the Resurrection. That's guaranteed, because God is faithful.

Please continue to pray for those who have died as a result of this virus, those stricken with it, their family members who suffer along with them, our medical professionals, government leaders, and Church leaders. Please pray for a cure, and pray that all may turn to the Divine Physician Who desires to bring us healing.

PRAYER INTENTIONS

- For all those affected by the coronavirus pandemic; for a cure, for the deceased, sick, their families, medical personnel, government, and Church officials; those who hunger for the Eucharist but can't receive
- For those who will be ordained this summer from DC and the NAC
- For my sister Ninia and sister-in-law Beverly, who are both expecting babies in a few months
- For all our military service men and women
- For the intentions of the Holy Father Pope Francis

MORE PHOTOS



With the LA gang following dinner at Ristochicco



Left: Turkey Trot 5K on Thanksgiving Day with the men from my corridor

For EWTN's coverage of our annual Thanksgiving "Spaghetti Bowl," copy and paste this link (check for spaces): <https://www.facebook.com/EWTNVatican/videos/2850078791671536/>



At the Immaculate Conception Banquet



My Jesus Caritas group waiting to meet the Pope



With Cristiano, a seminarian friend from Padua



Scotland trip with Fr. Joe



Presentation by Bishop Robert Barron during his region's ad limina visit

CLOSING WORDS



DC priests and seminarians waiting to meet the Holy Father

For our Annual Archdiocesan Appeal, I was asked to give a brief quote that would be included in the literature that would be sent out to the Catholic faithful of Washington. After some prayer, I sent in the following:

*"During difficult times such as these, I have prayed if there is a 'better' or an 'ideal' time to be a priest. God has shown me that He is calling me to be His priest during **this particular moment in history**, and **there is no better time to be a priest than now**. This gives me great joy and hope for the future of the Church and a stronger desire to be a holy priest, with the help of God's grace."*

I wrote this last December with a different context in mind, but it still holds true for me today in our present situation with the coronavirus pandemic. God is calling me to this vocation at this particular moment in history, to minister to His people in this generation. I am inspired by the stories of priests who have found creative ways to reach their flock through "drive-in Adoration," "drive-thru confessions," Eucharistic processions throughout the neighborhoods and on street corners, online Masses, etc. I am in awe of the priests in Italy who died after contracting the virus after ministering to their people. I look forward to joining these heroic men on the front lines in less than three months.

Just as God is calling me and my brothers to this vocation at this particular point in history, **He has called each of you to your own vocations at this particular point in history**. You may be at home with your families, but these are precise times to live out your vocations in a heroic and intentional way as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and sons and daughters. Above all, as baptized Christians, now is a good a time as ever to live out our vocation for holiness.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for your prayers. I give thanks to God for being on this adventure with all of you.

God bless,
Deacon Patrick

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