

# Fr. Robert's Great Adventure - Part Two

Hello everyone,

As my sabbatical comes to an end, I just thought I would share a couple of thoughts I've gleaned over these last few months. My time in Assisi and Rome was like a walk down "memory lane." Being in Assisi was like walking in the footsteps of St. Francis. Being in Rome, the heart of the Church, reminded me where I came from and how I'm called to share my life. The sight of Pope Francis doing everything he could to share his life with so many people in the crowds day in and day out was both moving and challenging. They were beautiful days to be sure.

London was really the great adventure of my trip. I'd never been there before and there were tons of things to see and do. Our friary was right in the middle of the city. It was easy to walk to so many places such as Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral, Kensington Gardens etc. In London I got to be friends with a group of poor people who would have a beer or 10 every afternoon in a park right near the friary. One day, when I was praying the Rosary there, they adopted me and called me "American Bob." Being a part of that little group was an experience I'll never forget. As they sat on the grass, they talked about their lives and their families and their struggles. They fought about who was going to buy the next round. They laughed, and once I was very moved as they mourned the loss of a member of their group. God reminded me in that park that the poor or the drunks we see on our streets are people just like us. After my time with the "drunks in Waterloo," as they called themselves, I hope I will be less afraid and more inclined to reach out to the poor who sit in our parks with the beer cans shrouded with a paper bag.

When I returned to the States, I was able to reconnect with many people dear to me - my family, the friars at our Chapter, several friends and graduates from Catholic University - all of these encounters reaffirmed my conviction that friendships are too precious a gift to let drift away. I only wish I had had the time to visit with more of the people with whom I have been able to share my life. Maintaining relationships is really a challenge for a friar. When you get transferred every 8 years, it's so hard to keep in touch with the people you've gotten close to. As I journeyed from place to place, I realized that keeping in contact is something at which I have to do a better job. In this vein, I was lucky enough to stay with Fr. Martin in Shamokin, PA. Several times he asked me to give his regards to everyone in Kensington. He is doing a fine job at Mother Cabrini Church and is very happy.

The sabbatical gave me some good quiet time - time to think and time to pray. Parish life is busy. St. Paul Church is a very big place. Some of the friars affectionately call it "the factory." There is always a meeting to go to, a sick person to visit and anoint, a husband and wife who are fighting, a Mom and Dad who are exasperated with their kids or kids who are exasperated with their parents. Usually in the morning I worry about the administration of the parish, in the afternoon, a visit to the school or the sick. In the evening, I meet with people who are home from work and need to talk or prepare for their marriage. Speaking of being busy, even though I checked my email now and then while on sabbatical, I just opened my email inbox and found that I have 1311 emails to sort through. Many of them are very old. It is going to take me awhile to go through them. If you sent me an

important email and did not get an answer, please resend it because it's probably buried in the avalanche.

Now that I am home, I hope that I will be able to do a better job of carving out a little quiet time in my daily routine. One of our parishioners forwarded me an email they received questioning my sabbatical. To be honest, I kind of wish that they hadn't. The email they received read something like this. "Why should he get a sabbatical? Who of us could ever get 4 months off?" I guess it is a fair question, even though the tone was a little iffy. Before I went away I asked myself same question. I didn't really understand why I needed a sabbatical and why my Provincial was so insistent on me taking one. I've come to see these last few months as a kind of rest stop on a very long highway. Being realistic, I know that there is no way I am going to retire at, 60, 65, 70, or if I'll even be able to retire at 75 or 80 if my health holds out. With the diminishing number of priests, who really knows if I'll ever retire. Many of us are resigned to the fact that we will simply work until we drop. The fact that I found myself sleeping so many hours, when I didn't have to set the alarm clock, was a sign I was indeed tired and needed a rest. Now that I've taken this time, even I think it was a good idea, and I am most grateful to everyone who made it possible, especially the friars of our parish who chipped in and did my share so that I could be away.

I'm very happy to be home, to sleep in my own bed and get back into my routine. It will be great to put away the suit cases and not have to worry that I left something behind in some friary or Motel. They tell me the KGS building will be coming down next week. I can't wait to see the difference that will make for our parish and our neighborhood.

See you in Church everyone. I can't wait.

Fr. Robert