

NEWS FROM FR. JAMES-PETER TRARES, OP

This weekend concludes the Christmas Season, transitioning us into Ordinary Time once again. For many, we're also getting back to "normal," or at least the "new normal" of the continually extraordinary time we're living in. With the transition to the new year, I'd like to share a little update on my adventures since I was last in Ohio this past summer.

Over the summer, I concluded my first priestly ministry at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota and finally managed to get clearance to travel to Rome in September. After a two-week quarantine in my new room, I arose from the tomb and began to settle in. In October, I began classes at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas, more commonly known as the "Angelicum." It is a university run by the Dominican Order, and I live with around sixty other Dominican priests—students and teachers—in a convent attached to the school. I'm working on a licentiate in sacred theology, which is an official church degree that prepares and authorizes me to teach theology at Catholic universities and seminaries. It is a two-year program, after which I plan on continuing for another two years to obtain a doctorate, which will involve greater specialization, research, and writing, to prepare me to contribute to the professional scholarly field of theology.

The focus of my studies is spiritual theology, which is the area of theology dealing with the practices and experiences of daily Christian life. In other words, we look at the lives and teachings of great Christians throughout history to see what Christian life looks like "on the ground" in all its diversity and to understand what helps support growth in our relationships with God and in virtue. We talk a lot about prayer—how to do it, what it's like, common questions and struggles in praying, etc. One thing I really enjoy about studying spirituality is that it's nearly always personally applicable... I feel like I'm always on a spiritual retreat, even when I'm working hard. In any case, by the time I finish my studies, I'll know a lot about holiness, and with God's help I might put some of what I've learned into practice!



Vatican Christmas tree being set up

Another important part of this time is the experience of Rome. It's an amazing city with so much history to explore. It's surreal for me simply to pass by the Colosseum on my way to the barber shop or to take an afternoon walk to the Vatican for Confession. Because of the pandemic, access to some popular places is limited, but a benefit is that the lack of tourists makes the streets a lot calmer and more pleasant for walking. Living in Rome is also a very international experience. I live and study with people from all around the world. Despite the challenges of navigating different cultures and trying to communicate in multiple languages (yes, Italian is coming along slowly!), it's been very enriching to learn about the Church in

different places and to make connections that will serve my future ministry well.

I'm so grateful for the conveniences of modern communication that allow me to stay connected even overseas, much as it has for all who have been more confined these days. My plan is to return to the U.S. this summer, and hopefully with the dangers and restrictions of the pandemic lightened, I look forward to seeing you all then. Until then, let's continue to pray for each other, that God will bless us with an extraordinary year.

Fr. James-Peter Trares, OP



Fr. James-Peter in front of priory-school with conventual church where daily university Masses and such happen; friars pray in back half (aka choir) behind altar of church