

From the Pastor—August 12, 2018

My Pilgrimage I was away with 50 other pilgrims to various shrines and churches in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota this past August 1-5. Please read my day-by-day accounting of our journey:

August 1, Wednesday—We met at the church parking lot of St. Gerald's in Ralston. For those of you with family in Omaha or knowledge of Nebraska's largest city, St. Gerald's is located at 96th and Q Streets. The parish was willing to let us park our vehicles in the western end of their lot so as to have sufficient space for their own highly-used parking space. My sister, Mary, and I were about the last ones to arrive for the early morning 6:45 a.m. bus departure. Matt Willkom from Spirit Catholic Radio was serving breakfast muffins, and the tour company representative, Naomi, was helping pilgrims pack their luggage. Soon, we were headed east in a coach driven by Dwight, our bus driver. *** Our first stop was in West Bend, Iowa, which was a delightful little community. There, the famous Grotto of the Redemption is located. It has a rich history of the priest and people in the early 20th century who constructed it from hundreds of thousands of individual stones and precious stones. And the parish church of Sts. Peter and Paul had a beauty which I enjoyed almost more than the outdoor Grotto. We had Holy Mass in the Church, and I preached and was able to help set the pilgrimage spirit as best I could for my fellow travelers. *** We ate at a cozy, small-town café in West Bend. It was great! *** We got on the road and headed to Austen, Minnesota, where we stopped by the famous Spam Museum. Many of you are familiar with Spam, and have eaten it, but you may not know of this unique museum dedicated to all things Spam. They make it a real experience, putting on each visitor a Hawaiian lei with a package of Spam attached to it! Hilarious! The history is really quite fascinating of how Hormel began the manufacturing of this SP-iced h-AM and how it is a part of the diet of people worldwide. They even promote their contention that Spam helped the U.S. and its Allies win World War II. *** We arrived in La Crosse, Wisconsin, around 7:00 p.m., ate supper at a buffet restaurant, and checked into our hotel.

August 2, Thursday—We began the day by a quick stop at the Cathedral church of La Crosse, dedicated to St. Joseph the Worker. The Diocese of La Crosse is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its founding this year. By contrast, our Diocese of Lincoln is 131 years old. While at the Cathedral, I was able to phone in live to the Spirit Morning Show and speak to on-air personalities Bruce and Jen about our pilgrimage...that was fun! Then, we headed to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. When now Cardinal Raymond Burke was the bishop of La Crosse, he had a vision to build this beautiful shrine. It is a masterpiece of architecture and of beauty dedicated to Our Lady. We were able to have Holy Mass in the shrine church, where I concelebrated with a holy Franciscan priest who serves as a caretaker of the shrine. The bus parking is about a half-mile below the main shrine area. The shrine personnel provide golf cart rides for those unable to trek up the side of the mountain to the top. *** My sister had had a headache and was suffering from nausea since the evening beforehand. As this day

progressed, her symptoms became only worse despite various over-the-counter medications. When we got on the bus and started traveling to our next destination (about a three-hour ride), I could see that my sister was miserable. We arrived at the Shrine of the Holy Hill a little after 5:00 p.m. This shrine is about 30 miles northwest of suburban Milwaukee. By that time, Mary and I had determined that she needed to seek medical care. Matt Willkom from the radio station, and his wife Elizabeth, happened upon a friend of theirs named Carrie, who was making a private pilgrimage of her own to Holy Hill. Carrie took Mary and me in her car to an Urgent Care center in the closest town to the shrine. While we were admitted and Mary was treated, the rest of our group ate supper at a Culver's located adjacent to the Urgent Care. By the time our bus was ready to leave, the medical staff determined that Mary needed intravenous treatment of medications at the local emergency room. We determined that the bus needed to go to our next stop and that Mary and I would catch up later. *** By about 10:30 p.m., the treatment was finally subsiding my sister's symptoms. We went and checked in to a motel in Hartford, Wisconsin; meanwhile, the bus and our group had gone on to Green Bay. It was an interruption in the pilgrimage that could have happened to any one of us. Mary, obviously, was distraught to be separated from the group, but her health simply needed to take precedence. It all turned out ok, as you read on. I can't emphasize enough the kindness and compassion of the medical staff who served us. Here we were, like foreigners in a strange land, and they took care of us. Many "God-moments" abounded throughout the several hours that Mary was under medical care.

August 3, Friday—Mary and I awoke to a new day, without nausea and headache!!! We determined that our best option was to rent a car from the local company. However, on such short notice, the car could not arrive at our hotel until 2:00 p.m. The check-out time of the hotel was 11:00 a.m. You see the problem. We were stranded. Graciously, the hotel staff was compassionate and allowed us to wait for our rental vehicle in an unused conference room. It was comfy in this room, with a couch and several soft chairs. Mary and I both took a nap! We were grateful that a small restaurant was next door to the hotel, where we grabbed a bite to eat. The rental car arrived at a little after 2:00. We rented a Nissan Frontier pick-up. I don't drive pick-ups much since my farm days, so this was a nice vehicle to be given us. Mary and I started up the "East Coast" of Wisconsin, alongside Lake Michigan, headed toward Green Bay and our group. Through all of our separation from the group, we were keeping in touch on our cell phones (thank God for this technology). We went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, arriving around 4:30 p.m. Our group had been there around noon and had left already. *** This little Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help is located near Champion, Wisconsin (which is a teeny-tiny town) and also a town called New Franken. The shrine is out in the country, about 20 miles from the City of Green Bay. In 1859, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a young woman named Adele Brise. This apparition was approved by the Bishop of Green Bay within the past decade. His approval states that a Catholic and anyone of good will

may put their trust that something truly supernatural happened here, that truly the Mother of God made an appearance. The bishop only gave this approval after reviewing much data and investigating the truthfulness of the seer's testimony. The Virgin Mary's basic message to Adele was to catechize the children of the settlers who had come to this place. Many Europeans, as you know, including my own family and many of yours who read this, came to America from the "Old Country" in the 1800's. The Virgin Mary wanted these children to be taught the beautiful faith of the Church, and she deputed Adele to carry out this mission. It is worth your time to look up this shrine on your internet search engine, and even to consider a family vacation/pilgrimage to this place someday. *** While at the Shrine, Mary and I obtained permission from the caretaker priest to celebrate a private Mass. One other priest concelebrated with me, a traveler himself from a diocese in California; he was headed to a conference in Chicago but was spending a day of reflection at the shrine. *** The Shrine closed at 7:00 p.m., and then Mary and I took the rental truck into Green Bay, and were re-united with our bus group at our hotel around 8:30 p.m. It was joyous! Matt and Elizabeth had run into yet another friend (another God-moment) and he helped me to return the rental pick-up to the Green Bay airport.

August 4, Saturday—This day had been designated to include a stop at the field where the Green Bay Packers play (I am sure that among our parishioners there are a fair number of "Cheeseheads"☺). But the Packers had a Family Day which negated our stop, disappointing some of our group. We saw several families at our motel who were in town for this event. It was cute to see moms and dads, and their children, dressed in Packer gear and headed to the football field. It was for them not unlike what many of us experience when attending a Husker football game. *** We drove to the west across Wisconsin, headed toward where Matt from the radio station had grown up. The little parish in Boyd, Wisconsin, was where we had our daily Mass, around 1:30 p.m. The church there had recently been restored to its original architecture and beauty; they did a wonderful job. Matt's dad is a permanent deacon, and so he served at the Mass. We also among our group had a permanent deacon from Schuyler, in the Omaha Archdiocese, and he served at the altar, too. I preached at this Mass about the great saint-of-the-day, John Vianney, and incorporated a bit of my vocation story for our group to hear. Afterward, the parish of Boyd offered us a small reception in the church basement, including serving us authentic Wisconsin cheese curds! The parish has a small radio studio where they do recordings onto their local branch of Spirit Catholic Radio. The signal for the radio station is in the church steeple there. When you listen to Spirit here in Nebraska, you may sometimes hear the station identification as including "Boyd-Stanley-Cadotte". Somehow through the technology of radio, this station in west-central Wisconsin broadcasts all of the programming that we have here in Nebraska. *** The day was far from over! We next headed toward the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul, which I have never previously visited. Mary was still feeling well, and the trip by bus was enjoyable. We did hit a traffic snarl of almost complete stoppage, but we made it on time

to the Cities. There in the Cities, 19 of us decided to attend the Twins versus Kansas City Royals baseball game. I was one of the 19; Mary and most of the bus chose to check in at our hotel near the Mall of America at Bloomington, MN. The game was awesome! I have been to a number of Royals game in KC, but this was my first away game. Target Field, as you may know, is very new and is a much better ballfield than the former Metrodome was. Prior to the game, we were treated to some Minnesota Twins history as they were inducting a new member into their franchise's Hall of Fame. The new inductee is Johan Santana, a great lefty pitcher who once struck out 17 in a game versus the Texas Rangers. Many former great Twins were present for the ceremony, including Rod Carew, Kent Hrbek, Bert Blyleven, Harmon Killebrew, and Torii Hunter. It was fun to see these former Twins all assembled in one place. Once the actual ballgame started, my Royals didn't fare too well. Alex Gordon drove in the only two runs as we lost 8-2. After a 45-minute ride on a train away from the ballpark, we finally made it to our hotel rooms around 11:00 p.m.

August 5, Sunday—We awoke to go to the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, which is also the National Shrine of St. Paul for the USA. At the hotel, I had arranged to meet a grade school classmate of mine. We haven't seen each other since her family moved away from Beatrice in our freshman year of high school. I went to school with her at St. Joe's through 6th grade; we were buddies back then and through facebook have re-connected since about 2010. It was GREAT to see her while eating breakfast. She lives with her husband and two children near the Twin Cities. *** Holy Mass at the Cathedral was amazing. The priest who serves as rector of the cathedral was very gracious to me as a concelebrant. He gave a great homily; think about it—I don't usually have the opportunity to listen to homilies since I am usually giving them☺. After the Mass, the Father gave us a little history of the Cathedral, and then we had to be on our way. The Cathedral is located at the highest point of St. Paul, and it is definitely worth your time to visit if you ever travel that way. *** We drove through a decent rainstorm as we traveled through north-central Iowa. At Clear Lake, IA, our bus driver recounted the concert there of Buddy Holly and friends before their fatal plane crash. We had supper off of I-80 near Stuart, IA, and then finished the remaining miles into Omaha. *** As we neared the end of our pilgrimage, we had "open mike" on the bus where anyone could give their testimony of faith about the pilgrimage. One person said how she was really tempted to cancel out as she had so much to do at home, but that she was so glad she went. Another said she was so happy that her fifth grade daughter had been touched by God during the pilgrimage. One man said he had been fortunate to spray 1,000 acres of beans before we left Nebraska, and thanked God for helping him complete that important farmwork. *** We rolled into St. Gerald's parking lot at 9:15 p.m., said some quick good-byes, and then all departed. I dropped Mary off in Lincoln, and rolled into Aurora at 11:50 p.m. *** Thanks for all your prayers for me!!!

God Bless You!

Father Grell