

My Dear St Bridget Family,

Greetings and best wishes from Quito, Ecuador. I write this on Sunday (5/28/23) evening as we wind up the celebration the Solemnity of Pentecost. I arrived here last week, after one week in Santiago, Chile. All this is part of the second half of my sabbatical which is focused on learning the Spanish language.

It has been a while since I last provided an update. Let me therefore begin by giving a quick recap from the last update just before the installation of our new Bishop. Upon return to Rome from the installation ceremonies, I had two more weeks in the eternal city, Rome. During the last week, which was also Holy Week, I was joined by my mother and two sisters (*Sr Salome who has visited St Bridget and my younger sister Mary Goretti*). Needless to say, I had the rare opportunity to celebrate the Holy Week liturgies at St Peters Basilica (*Holy Thursday, Good Friday & Easter Vigil*) with the Holy Father. It is rare, because Holy Week is a period that every priest is at his parish!

It was a special gift to be with my mother and two sisters in Rome. I had the opportunity to be a tour guide for them. Thanks to Bishop Mario and the Papal Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Pierre whom I interacted with during the Installation events, I was able to secure special tickets for us attend the papal Audience and my family got to shake hands with the Holy Father! It was a very special experience and gift especially for my mother who this year celebrates her 80th birthday. We celebrated Mass at one of chapels at St Peters Basilica.

In addition to the various holy sites in Rome, we made two trips out of Rome. The first was to the seaside city of Netuno to the shrine of St Maria Goretti (*for whom my sister was named*). It was therefore a very special trip for my sister. On our way there we had a brief stopover at the Church in Rome that is dedicated to the Martyrs of Uganda.

It was a profound experience to visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Grace & St Maria Goretti and especially to be in the presence of the body of this great young witness of the virtue of purity. As you may know her story, St Maria Goretti was born to a poor but very devout family and having lost her father at a tender age she helped her mother fend for the family. On the 5th of July 1902, barely thirteen

years of age, she was sexually assaulted by a neighbor Alessandro who had always made advances at her. She fought him and screamed, "**No! It is a sin! God does not want it!**" At her words, Alessandro began to choke her, and she said she would rather die than submit. Upon hearing these words, Alessandro pulled out a knife and stabbed her over eleven times and then fled. She was later rushed to hospital where she succumbed to the stabbing wounds the following day. But before she breathed her last, she forgave Alessandro who ended up being arrested and she prayed for his conversion. Indeed, during his 30 years in prison, Alessandro had a conversion and repented of his sin. Upon his release, he went and sought forgiveness from Maria's mother who readily granted it. Maria Goretti was beatified by Pope Pius XII in a ceremony at Saint Peter's Basilica on April 27, 1947. Three years later, on June 24, 1950, Maria was declared a saint by the same Pope and Alessandro was present at St. Peter's Square to celebrate her canonization. Talk about the power of prayer and forgiveness! He later became a Lay Brother of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, where he lived in a monastery and worked as its receptionist and gardener until his death.

The second trip we made was to Assisi. Naturally, this was because Sr Salome is a Franciscan, and in addition my mother has for a long time had a devotion to St Francis. We had an opportunity to celebrate Mass at one of the chapels in the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, located in the valley of Assisi. This is where St Francis lived, eventually died and ultimately established the Franciscan Order. We also went up the hill and visited the other holy sites most notably, the Basilica of St Francis (*where he is buried*), the basilica of St Claire (*where she is buried*) and the Church of Santa Maria Majorie where the body of Blessed Carlo Acutis rests.

We then travelled to Uganda together and I got to spend two weeks there with the rest of the family. Needless to say, it was a very short time. The highlight of my visit and time there was the privilege I had to celebrate Mass and preside at the baptism of my little niece Maria Benedicta. She is the first family member I have baptized! I also got to meet and dine with Father Stash and Fr Darius both of whom send their regards and look forward to visiting St Bridget soon. On my way back, I had a three-day stopover in Ivory Coast (West Africa) where I attended an Intercession Conference. In this conference, I was introduced to the concept of Prophetic Intercession. This in my understanding is intercession based on the mind and desire of God. Many times, we intercede based on our own minds and

desires. I had a brief stop over at St Bridget where I got to meet/see some of you and to meet Bishop Mario before proceeding to Latin America.

My Latin American experience has thus far been both very interesting and challenging. Interesting because it is literally venturing into a whole new world. For example, though most of the countries speak Spanish, I did not know that there was a big difference between Central and South America. Very challenging because they speak very little (if any) English. It is a real immersion experience. It is tough and sometimes frustrating to hear people talk and you don't understand what they are saying! As I indicated at the beginning, the first week was spent in Santiago, Chile. The focus was getting grounded with numbers and the "Present Tense". The next four weeks here in Quito will be building on that. The highlight of my stay in Santiago, Chile was a visit to the Sanctuary of Immaculate Conception on San Cristobal Mountain. The mountain is in the center of the city and top of it, overlooking the city is a huge white statue of the Blessed Mother (*Immaculate Conception*). The statue is 22 meters (72 feet) of height and weighs 36,600 kilos (40tons). It was while up there that I realized how massive the city is and more importantly, the important place that the Blessed Mother has in the world and in our lives.

Finally, as you know Deacon Davis is scheduled to be ordained a priest of Jesus Christ on the 24th of June at his home town of Kabale, Uganda. Bishop Mario has asked me to represent the diocese at the ordination. I will therefore be returning briefly on my way to Uganda to attend the ordination.

Let us keep each other in prayer.

fr simon peter