



In Rome with Pope Francis

As February dawned, 17 bishops from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana spent a week in Rome to meet with Pope Francis and visit officials of 13 Vatican departments.

I got in late Sunday afternoon, 2 February. Early the next morning we were off to celebrate Mass at the tomb of St. Peter. In his homily, Archbishop Sample reminded us that we were there because “Peter is here,” as Ancient Greek words scratched in rock near his bones attest. Not far from where we stood that Galilean fisherman-pope shed his blood on a cross, and soon we would be ushered into the presence of his successor. Two thousand years have passed away, but Jesus’ words naming Peter the Church’s Rock have not passed away.

Pope Francis received us graciously, and we sat down to two and a half hours of easy-flowing fraternal conversation lightened more than once by the Holy Father’s ready wit. Midway through I was struck by how completely at ease we all felt.

Much of what we discussed appeared a few days later in the exhortation the Pope issued on last October’s Amazon Synod. In addition, he spoke to us quite openly about the upcoming report on ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, and he reiterated quite forcefully his long-stated views on the campaign for transgenderism. When our time was up, we left the room encouraged and uplifted.

From Tuesday through Friday we were kept busy visiting Vatican offices—the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the Protection of Minors, and for Catholic Education, to name a few. For the most part this was time well spent in engaging discussion and frank exchange of ideas.

We bishops are called “successors of the Apostles,” and so we are. It was fitting, therefore, that we celebrated our last Mass in Rome at St. Paul’s Outside the Walls. Beneath its high altar lies the tomb of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. So *ad limina* week began and ended with us standing together at the altar next to the bones of Peter and the bones of Paul. The straps of their sandals we are not worthy to loose, but the Lord has chosen us, as He chose them, to be “stewards of the mysteries of God.” We can only trust that He will give us, as He gave them, grace to be faithful to our calling, grace to be faithful to the end.