

# Streets of Rome filled with more than rubble



*St. Francis of Assisi statue in Assisi, Italy*

**By Paul McMullen**

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Father Rob - aka Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot - paused under a San Damiano Cross in a chapel at St. Clare Basilica, less than a mile from where the original inspired St. Francis of Assisi eight-plus centuries ago.

"How beautiful it is to celebrate Mass here," Father Rob said, "where God spoke to St. Francis and said 'Go, rebuild my church.' Each of us has been called by name, to build up some aspect of the church."

He added that it was "our call today" to share the spirit of that mission, especially with "those who are a challenge to you."

It was the afternoon of April 22. Father Rob and 28 others had been on the road more than 24 hours, through Dulles International Airport and an overnight crossing of the Atlantic and a harried connection in Frankfurt, Germany, more travail in Rome and a two-hour bus ride north to Assisi.

All needed a meal, a nap and a shower, but Father Rob's homily reinforced the call he had issued the first Friday in April, when some who had signed on for two nights in Assisi and five in Rome had gathered at the Catholic Review for introductions and a briefing.

"You are not going on a vacation," he told us. "You are going on a pilgrimage." Many were savvy travelers, having traveled with the Review or the Archdiocese of Baltimore to locales as diverse as Poland and Haiti. Most had been to Rome - but never to witness church history, as one pope, Benedict, witnessed another, Francis, canonize two predecessors, St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II, April 27.

This was not a week at a villa in Tuscany, two-hour lunches followed by the Mediterranean custom of an afternoon siesta, but a series of deadlines and checkpoints, with potential for trial and tribulation.

Going around the table April 4 in Baltimore, this one announced her dietary restrictions, that one that there was a pacemaker in her heart.

Then a funny thing happened on the way to St. Peter's Square. People with very real

concerns of their own forgot about themselves and the money and time they had invested, locked arms and made fellow pilgrims their priority. In rapid order, people modeled Bernadette Macdonald, who looked out for Florence Des Roches, whose motorized scooter wasn't made for cobblestones. Deacon George Sisson, who assists Father Rob at Holy Family Catholic Community in Middletown, left his wife, Dinah, back at the hotel the morning of the canonizations to shepherd others just close enough to see Pope Francis. Several women steadied themselves with canes, including Linda Webster, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Taneytown. From Assisi to airports, she could have used the shoulder of her husband, Larry, to lean on, but told him to never mind about her, and see to the needs of others. The pilgrimage played out like a film review cliché - We laughed, we cried, we sang Happy Birthday - but more importantly, we let down our guard, bared our souls and endeavored to be instruments of peace. That would not have happened without the ritual of daily Mass that made it a most meaningful Easter Week, in chapels at historic basilicas, cathedrals and seminaries. "It is the same Eucharist we celebrate at home every day at Holy Family," Father Rob said. "To see that universality of the church, in as great as those places are, it does bring us back to the essential relationship we have with God."

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