

Living the Spirit

Excitement

There are times in our life when we cannot help but get excited. It starts very early on. I will not bore you with all the many times I could catalog when I was excited. Lately I have been thinking about how many wonderful days have been mine as I journey in life. When I do so, I cannot but think and remember all the persons that I thought I had forgotten.

As I was growing up I lived in what someone has called the Catholic ghetto. All the neighbors were somehow related to one another. Everyone watched us and saw to our good. A child felt it normal to find another's mother giving him good advice. And also finding one's own mother doing the same for his/her friends. Children really were a part of that social village (as some call the milieu today).

To tie my thoughts to the coming excitement many will have with the Pope's visit, I will detail my excitement when I was told by Bishop McShea that I was being sent to Rome. My journey there was my first time on a plane. It was not without a little bit of concern. The plane took eleven hours on its journey with stops at Lisbon, Barcelona, Nice and Rome. At each stop we came back to be fed – something that airlines do not do today.

I could not believe that I was going to be present in Rome just when the Vatican Council was about to open. I was there in the Piazza as the many bishops filed in procession into St. Peter's. A priest next to me said he could get us closer. I ended up right in front of the diplomats inside the basilica. I could see Pope John XXIII as he opened the Council with great emotion. When we could see little more, we rushed back to the Casa and stayed glued to the TV.

So many of those three years of days were quite ordinary. But the friendships of fellow priests during them was a special gift. Again and again it was people who made life very worth living. They made our extraordinary days have a special value.

As Pope Francis comes to our country I will satisfy myself with watching the events on TV. I admit to just not having the stamina to endure the possibilities of travel these days. I cannot say that I feel great excitement, but I do find myself happy about the visit of Pope Francis. It will do much good for the Church.

Sometime in my youth I heard that Catholics were a sort of second-class citizens. I had come to know that we Catholics had a Pope who ruled the Church. The picture of the Pope was in my school – it was of Pope Pius XI. In high school we were shown a film of the election of Pope Pius XII. He was the Pope of all my seminary days, and I came to know how blessed the Church was with such a good and holy Vicar of Christ. He was a brilliant theologian and an outstanding diplomat. Despite later attacks on him by enemies of the Church itself, he actually did put his life on the line to save the Jews of Rome as

best he could. He opened the Vatican to them and ordered convents and monasteries to do the same. I pray he will someday be declared a Saint.

It was my personal privilege to have met St. John Paul (briefly) about five times. The Church again seemed very blessed with such a leader. Who would want to forget his constant message: Stop being afraid! He began a new way of being a pope by enlarging what his immediate predecessor Pope Paul VI began with travels throughout the world.

Pope Francis brings his own charisms. He has tried to bring the spiritual to many aspects of scientific studies. He does have a way of attracting attention when he speaks of the many challenges facing the world today. I hope you are listening.

I have been happy to see how much press he is being given. Our local newspaper is doing a reasonably good job. Of course, the media feels it necessary to bring opposing views of any event or about any person. We must be watchful of any errors being made.

Few today recall how anti-Catholic earlier citizens of our land were. Popes were seen as antichrists. There were groundless fears that the Popes wanted to come and take over our government. [Who today would think anyone would want to do that, given its many problems?]

Perhaps it would be good for all of us to renew our understanding of just what the role of the Pope is in the Church. He is the successor of St. Peter, appointed by Jesus as the rock on which the Church is founded. His role is to confirm, that is, strengthen his brothers. The Popes have been men of many different natural histories. All of them have managed to preserve the faith of the Church.

Do not let yourself become a divisive Catholic. Find in the Church [God's People] all the many reasons why your faith is worth preserving. Allow it to grow in understanding. But I hope it will not be a cold acceptance of beliefs. We must be a people of love, the real love that is just like that of God. Find in your days the excitement of many days, but connect that to persons. Look around you and see those whose love you share and who sustain your faith. I think that is a good part of Pope Francis' message.

Meanwhile say a few prayers that all will go well for Pope Francis as he visits our land. He comes to remind us of many truths, but he also will be reaching out to people. Those who open their hearts to the Church will find a spiritual closeness. Even if they are far from the actual scene of the great events that mark a papal visit.

As you watch TV look at the faces of many they will show. I hope you will find that all the emotions and excitement those faces reveal can help you realize that you are not alone as a Catholic believer. Maybe, if you are lucky, you will find yourself looking at the many faces of Christ.

God love you always!
Monsignor Morrison