

## Living the Spirit Conversation Three

In this insert I will continue some personal reflections about summer activities I enjoyed. I mentioned last time how travel can be instructive and a maturing event. One learns from it the universality of many human traits. One sees the beauties of creation.

In the spiritual life there has always been a desire to use travel to search out places that have been made holy in some unusual way. There is a record of early pilgrims -- for that is what the travelers are called -- going to the Holy Land. One can think of the Empress St. Helena who found the relics of the Holy Cross by her pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

I have been fortunate to visit in my travels some places that have been made special by marvelous events. My first trip outside the USA was to Canada; where I was able to spend time at the shrine of St. Anne in Beupre. I also visited many beautiful and historic churches associated with early Catholic life in the New World.

My residence in Rome while studying at the Lateran University gave me many opportunities for spiritual growth. History came alive. One can only imagine how the believer feels when he finds himself in so many places associated with the earliest of our saints. The great Basilicas in Rome are symbols of a faith that still perdures. It is a faith that never becomes inactive in the hearts of those given the grace to live a life of faith.

Those who travel to Rome can certainly be considered as pilgrims, if they so desire. Most tours visit the four major churches, St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Mary Major, and St. John Lateran. One cannot visit them in faith without recalling much of the Gospel. In doing so, one is united to the multitude of believers who have lived the faith throughout the ages of time. One can find the original icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in the Redemptorist Church in Rome.

I cannot mention all the places in Italy that can be visited as places of pilgrimage. Most tours will try to visit Assisi, where the memory of St. Francis is still alive and his message of life in the Spirit still enchants the pilgrim heart. One can visit places where St. Catherine of Siena is recalled, or where St. Charles Borromeo's relics are preserved. One can stop in Padua to thank St. Anthony for his many times of simple help.

On my twenty-fifth anniversary I decided to visit places associated with Mary, our Blessed Mother. I never forget that I was ordained in the first Marian year. I have the belief that Mary was my support in my desire to become a priest in ways that I will only really know in eternity. So I visited Rome and its beautiful Basilica of *Santa Maria Maggiore*. It was a familiar place for I had visited often in earlier days. I visited Paris where I went to the *Rue de Babylone* where Mary appeared to St. Catherine Laboure, and gave us her Miraculous Medal. I included Lourdes where Mary appeared to St. Bernadette and gave us the assurance that she is truly the Immaculate Conception.

Finally I visited Portugal where Fatima was the destination of my pilgrimage. Let me mention here that the purposes of a pilgrimage will always be spiritual in nature. Some go in search of a miracle. Some seek some special grace. I tried always to let it up to a generous God to make of my presence in such places what he would want for me. I have often mentioned to friends that I never went to Lourdes, for example, without feeling some special grace. Lourdes manages to help the pilgrim appreciate the Eucharist as the center of a Catholic spirituality. Mary always desires to lead to Jesus the pilgrims who visit her shrines.

It would be unthinkable for me not to mention visiting Knock in Ireland, where Our Lady appeared. My visits there were always off-season, and so there was no formal activity of a scheduled pilgrimage. I managed to say Mass there in both the original church and in the newer basilica Church. I wondered what my Irish grandfather would have made of it all.

I visited other places in the course of my travels. Vacations gave me the opportunity to keep alive my desire to be open to the spiritual messages that have been given in many different ways in places where faith has come alive. Now in my present time I can recall many of those messages. I can still be open to what they teach me about God's plan for all of us. In a way memory becomes a prayer. That is an ever-recurring gift from pilgrimage.

Let me now mention what I would have you share with me. As valuable as pilgrimages to famous shrines may be, we need not travel to find those graces that come from visiting them. We can make our own pilgrimage to the nearest Catholic church or chapel. There we will find present the Lord of life. Our life. The life of the Church. The life so many still search for without finding.

To live the Spirit is not to travel to distant places only. It is to be found in daily life just where you are. It can be found in the simple joys of one's life, whatever they may be. One can find grace in the hard things of life too, even in sufferings. We can even see in death an opening to new life. At any given moment you and I are at some point of living the Spirit if we are living our faith.

Let us take time to speak to the Lord in prayer. Let us tell a loving God that we believe, that we place our hope and trust in Him, and that we want always to love Him by keeping His commandments. Let us in this Year of Mercy allow Him to be merciful to us. For He surely hears our prayer:

***Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!***

*God love and bless you always!*  
*Monsignor Morrison*