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OUR LADY OF MERCY PARISH NEWSLETTER

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Pope Benedict at Yankee Stadium

The “golden ticket”

By Barbara Polster

One morning while I was listening to the radio, I heard the news about Pope Benedict’s plans to visit New York City, with a Mass to be offered at Yankee Stadium. At Mass on Sunday morning I was excited to learn that our parish, OLM, would receive five tickets for the Pontiff’s Mass.

Immediately I entered my name for a chance to win one of the five “golden tickets.” On the following Sunday the names of the lucky winners were drawn, and much to my delight my name was among them.

The five “golden ticket” winners met bright and early at IHA on that eventful day for our bus trip to New York City. The day was overcast, breezy, and a little chilly as we arrived and made our way to the assigned seats in the stadium. We were entertained by a wonderful concert during the afternoon prior to the Pope’s arrival. Once the concert was finished, the sun started to peek through the clouds. The excitement of the Pope’s appearance was building. We were waving white



and yellow handkerchiefs as Pope Benedict XVI entered the stadium in his Popemobile. With a huge smile on his face, he waved to all of us, and the crowd went wild!

When the Mass started, everyone listened intently as the Pope prayed. The music was not only beautiful, but also very moving. Pope Benedict’s message was that we should use wisely the blessings of freedom, and also that we must show that our faith plays a role in our public life. I saw hundreds of priests distribute the Eucharist to the thousands of people attending the Mass, and I was amazed that it only took fifteen minutes. At the conclusion of the Mass, Pope Benedict once again entered the Popemobile to ride one last time around Yankee Stadium while Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” resounded.

My pilgrimage to see the Pope at Yankee Stadium came to an end as I boarded the bus and headed back home, but I knew that I would have wonderful memories that will last a lifetime!

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Pope Benedict at Yankee Stadium from page 2

A time to remember

By Maria Martinez

I had won a raffle once in my life, but when it was announced that five papal tickets were to be randomly given out, I was confident I was getting one. I had never been so certain about something! I marked my calendar and told my husband, Ron, to make sure he was available to bring me to Yankee Stadium on April 20th. I was entering my name, and I was going...God wanted me to go. So, when my name was announced at Mass, I was thrilled! My husband jokingly asked if I could do the same thing for the lotto, but I told him, "Nope, not that one. God doesn't want that for me."

Our Papal pilgrimage began early in the morning on a bus filled with many people. Small world that it is, the woman who sat next to me in the bus is from our parish. Barbara was my "buddy" for the day, and she was a wonderful companion. We bonded while telling stories and patiently waiting in long lines together.

Outside Yankee Stadium on this windy and cold day, Barbara eked out a tiny spot for us as a police officer joked with us. I had never seen such a concentration of police officers and Secret Service personnel. Their presence could have been worrisome, but the atmosphere was calm and filled with anticipation and excitement. Inside, the stadium was packed, and the hours of waiting passed quickly as we met other lovely people along the way. Seated beside me was a nice gentleman whose kids are now off to college and a lovely woman from Philadelphia who had seen Pope Benedict in Rome. Surely we all had different reasons for being where we were, but these reasons, some trivial others not, had brought us together. Here were hopeful people from everywhere in New Jersey and other states who had come together to witness the Pope. It was very touching.



Our authors from left to right: Maria Martinez and Barbara Polster

Pope Benedict could only be seen from a distance using the binoculars I managed to borrow from a young boy, and a close-up view via the big screen. Yet, I experienced the love and goodness that radiated from him, and ultimately from God, through the people around me. The singing and the skies above moved me to tears. The woman next to me said, "The higher we are, the better; we're that much closer to God!"

Today, long after the Papal Mass, I remind myself that love and goodness exist through the people around me. My Papal Pilgrimage may have ended, while a journey with people of shared faith continues as my own faith in God is rekindled.

More information about the Pope's trip to America can be found at www.papaltrip.org and www.vatican.va.

"Each day, throughout this land, you and so many of your neighbors pray to the Father in the Lord's own words: 'Thy Kingdom come.' This prayer needs to shape the mind and heart of every Christian in this nation. It needs to bear fruit in the way you lead your lives and in the way you build up your families and your communities. It needs to create new 'settings of hope' (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 32ff.) where God's Kingdom becomes present in all its saving power."

*Pope Benedict XVI
April 20, 2008, Yankee Stadium*

Book Review

The Grunt Padre

By Father Daniel L. Mode

Reviewed by Cos Ferrara

When Vincent R. Capodanno, Jr. decided to become a Maryknoll priest, it is unlikely that he expected to be the Christ-bearer to American soldiers in Vietnam during one of the deadliest of wars. After seven years in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Father Vincent became a U. S. Navy chaplain, serving Marines in the battlefields of Vietnam.



The Grunt Padre by Father Daniel L. Mode (CMJ Marian Publishers, Oak Lawn, IL, 2000) tells his story. The book is the result of painstaking research, including Father Mode's speaking with Father Vincent's family, his fellow Marines, and military officials.

The Grunt Padre

Father Vincent Capodanno arrived in Vietnam in April 1966. An average of 40 US soldiers were dying there every month. Speaking of Father Vincent, one Marine said: "He was not standing on any soapboxes. The only thing he asked of the grunt Marines was the honor to be with them, and that meant he had to become one of them." "Grunt Marine" is a term used only by enlisted infantry Marines.

Father Vincent lived as a grunt Marine. Wherever they went, he went. Whatever burdens they carried, he shared. No problem was too large or too small, day or night. The Marines recognized Father Vincent's determination to be one of them. They respectfully and affectionately dubbed him "The Grunt Padre."

Whatever It Takes

He heard confessions, instructed converts, and administered the sacraments. He accompanied Marines positioned in distant jungle outposts. He wrote letters to families of dead and wounded Marines. One family said: "It had been a week of terrible worry for us, and his letter was the most important thing in the world to us."

Asking to be assigned to the operations entailing the greatest risk, Father Vincent went on dangerous operations. On November 25, 1966, during Operation Rio Blanco, Captain David L. Walker was wounded in an open, flat rice paddy. He lay in pain and exposed to enemy fire. He later said:

Father Capodanno was the first at my side, even though he had to run about 75 meters through heavy enemy small arms fire. After summoning a Corpsman, he then assisted in carrying me to a safe area where I was med-evaced. During this time he was constantly exposed to enemy fire.

Grunt Padre from page 3

With the Medical Battalion

After eight months, Father Capodanno was transferred to the 1st Medical Battalion. During 1966, the Medical Corps there treated more than a million South Vietnamese civilians and nearly 6400 wounded Marines and sailors.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation was particularly important to the wounded who were fearful that they might die. In addition, Father administered the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, known then as Extreme Unction, to many about to die.

Lieutenant Joseph L. LaHood, a Navy doctor, commented on the gentle way Father Vincent carried out his pastoral duties:

I am a doctor and after a year in Vietnam saw much. But never had I seen such dedication and selflessness, not as a sticky 'piety' but as a 'way.' For the hundreds of cigarettes he held for the wounded, many of whom could no longer reach their hands to their lips, and for the hundreds of letters he wrote and helped to write for his men, the Marines will never forget that he is one of them. This priest of God is a hero.

Operation Swift

With three months left on his tour, Father Vincent asked for a six-month extension. On September 4, 1967, he accompanied his Marines on Operation Swift. Lieutenant Joseph E. Pilon, M.D., gave this account:

On Labor Day our battalion ran into a world of trouble. When Father C. arrived at the scene it was 500 Marines against 2500 North Vietnamese Army regulars.....

Casualties were running high and Father C. had his work cut out for him. Early in the day, he was shot through the right hand, which all but shattered his hand—one corpsman patched him up and tried to med-evac him but Father C. declined, saying he had work to do.

A few hours later a mortar landed near him and left his right arm in shreds hanging from his side. Once again he was patched up and once again he refused evacuation. There he was, moving slowly from wounded to dead to wounded using his left arm to support his right as he gave absolution or last rites, when he suddenly spied a corpsman get knocked down by the burst of an automatic weapon.

Father C. ran out to him and positioned himself between the injured boy and the automatic weapon. Suddenly, the weapon opened up again and this time riddled Father C. from the back of his head to the base of his spine.

Father Vincent was among 127 Marines who died in the Que Son Valley that day. He was awarded the Bronze Star, the Medal of Honor, and the Purple Heart. A Navy vessel was named in his honor—the USS Capodanno. His name is inscribed on the Vietnam Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C., along with the other 58,181 dead and missing soldiers from the Vietnam War.

In May 2006, Father Capodanno was declared Servant of God, the first step toward canonization as a saint in the Catholic Church.

Normandy

By Most Reverend John W. Flesey

In Normandy
The children sing
And play their games
Upon the barren sand.

Above the beach
The silent crosses stand
And keep their vigil
For the memory of the dead.

No more the sounds of war
The awful screams of bodies torn apart
The wreckage of ten thousand families' lives
Strewn in blood red piles
Where the flowing waters
Greet the land.

For now there is peace in Normandy.
But will we hear the voices of the dead
Call to us across the years?
Will we hear their pleas
To make of their great sacrifice
An end of war?

For they were children too
Before they stepped upon the beaches
Where they died.

Most Rev. John W. Flesey is the Regional Bishop of Bergen County and the pastor of Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Franklin Lakes. He wrote this poem as a tribute to the late Jim Fahy who landed on Omaha Beach and recounted the experience to Bishop Flesey. This greatest wartime invasion, now commemorated as D-Day, occurred on five beaches of Normandy, France on June 6, 1944 during World War II.

We thank Walt Applin for sharing "Normandy." Permission to reprint this poem received from Bishop Flesey.

Dusty Words

By Luis Boza

Words gather dust just as things do. Words once vibrant with meaning become dull and meaningless as the dust of repetition and historical interpretations settle over them. We continue to use them but we don't feel their fire any more...until we dust them off. These are the experiences that dusted off the word "pilgrim" during a recent trip that my wife and I made to Northern Spain.

- ❖ *Shapes of scallop shells carved on the stones of old country roads.*
- ❖ *Tired people gathered around a campfire telling stories of old miracles on their way to Santiago.*

Scallop shells are common in Galicia where they are used to symbolize Santiago ("Sant Iago" or Saint James) and to guide people to his sanctuary in the city of Santiago de Compostela. From Portugal on the South, from France on the East, and from far-away cities in Spain, through mountains and coastlines, the shell shapes appear on roads, lampposts, and maps, marking the different routes to the sanctuary in Northwest Spain.

- ❖ *Two young men, at dawn, laden with backpacks, leaving a hostel in a medieval town.*

They look to us as if they did not have much sleep the night before and yet here they are, starting once more on their quest. "Are you on the way to Santiago?" we ask. "Yes!" they answer in Dutch-accented English, adding with pride that they "had left coastal San Sebastian about a week ago" and that "it would take more than a month to get to Santiago." The following day it took us several hours to drive from that medieval town to San Sebastian. What a tough time they must have had! We knew that an even tougher walk was ahead of them, with higher mountains, and colder, windier and rainier weather.

- ❖ *A fountain outside the Santiago cathedral, and a huge incensory that swings from the top of its nave.*

Two practical symbols in a land full of symbols. The fountain enabled people to wash away the dirt and grime of months of walking, a baptism-like cleansing before entering the cathedral. The incense rose from the enormous incensory as prayers rise to the Lord.

Here is one of the stories we heard: "A young man from Germany is walking with his parents to Santiago. They stop at Santo Domingo de la Calzada, where the innkeeper's daughter falls in love with him. When he rejects her, she hides a silver cup in his backpack and accuses him of theft. The young man prays to Santo Domingo—the patron saint of the town—before he is hanged for his "crime." When his parents go to collect his remains, they find him alive and well. Full of happiness, they go to the mayor to tell him of the miracle. The mayor is having stewed hen for dinner. When the mayor tells them that their son is as dead as the hen he is eating, the hen rises from the plate and cackles."

The story becomes the motto of the town: "Santo Domingo de la Calzada, donde cantó la gallina despues de asada" (Santo Domingo de la Calzada, where the hen cackled after it was stewed)! We can imagine the miracle stories being told and retold, richer and richer each time, to bring warmth to the hearts of the tired people on the way to Santiago.



The author, Luis Boza, with his wife is Rosa Maria.

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❖ *An older woman walking with her cane in the high plains of Leon.*

“Are you on the way to Santiago?” we ask in our Spanish-accented French. “Yes!” she says in her French-accented Spanish. “I am not going for sport, or for the environment, but for a great spiritual experience,” she says. “I still have about one month to go. My husband, my son, and my grandchildren will be coming from our home in France to wait for me in Santiago.”

“Are you walking with a group?” we ask. “Oh, no, I am 64 years old, and I am walking alone! But I have not been “alone.” I was sick with fever and people helped me and I was able to help others. I have made great friendships along the way. What a marvelous experience this has been.”

We wish each other a good trip, and off goes the French grandmother, tapping her cane along the scallop shell-shapes on the road.

❖ *The beautiful Santiago Cathedral on the immense plaza, lit by the moonlight in the dark of night.*

That’s what the young men and the old grandmother will see at the end of their journey. That’s what thousands of others have seen over the centuries. They will then enter the sanctuary to pay their final homage to their Saint and to God; final but not new homage since they have been paying homage each day and night, each dawn and sunset on their way to Santiago...and then they will rest!

For us now, the word “pilgrim” is no longer a dusty word, but a word alive with meaning, a word on fire! We now realize that we are all “pilgrims” on a journey. We now understand what the Second final



Rosa Maria with the “French grandmother.”

Vatican Council meant by our “pilgrim Church.” We are all walking the roads of time to reach the

final “sanctuary,” guided by the “scallop shell-shapes” that God places on our paths, each one of us from a different place, race, culture or nationality, struggling through the mountains and valleys of life, alone but not alone. At times we look back in wonder; at times forward with determination, telling and retelling the stories of the “miracles” that have happened in our lives, helping others and being helped, until we arrive at the sanctuary of God...where we will finally rest!

“Sacrifice,” “Freedom,” “Cross,” perhaps even “God.” How many dusty words we still need to make shiny again!

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COME JOIN US TO WORK ON THE NEXT EDITION OF THE PARISH NEWSLETTER.

J.S. Paluch Company, publisher of our bulletin, has donated the printing of this newsletter.

A Thanksgiving Prayer

In the United States, the fourth Thursday in November is set aside as a special day for giving thanks. It is a traditional day for families to gather and share a meal. Here is a blessing prayer that could be used for the occasion either by itself or along with another table blessing. If you wish to add a Bible reading, one suggestion is *Philippians 4:4-7*.

Lord, we thank you
for the goodness of our people
and for the spirit of justice
that fills this nation.



We thank you for the beauty and fullness of the land
and for the challenge of the cities.
We thank you for our work and our rest,
for one another, and for our homes.
We thank you, Lord:

(Pause for other prayers of thanksgiving.)

For all that we have spoken
and for all we keep in our hearts,
accept our thanksgiving on this day.

We pray and give thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

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Upcoming Events

Check the weekly bulletin for dates:

- ❖ Thanksgiving Ecumenical Prayer Service
- ❖ Advent Penance Service
- ❖ Advent Mission "Luke Live." A dynamic sharing of Scripture in a lively, thought provoking way by Paulist Father James Di Luzio.