



## ROME PILGRIMAGE 2024

### DAY TWO

I hardly slept. Woke up on the hour every hour. Eventually got up at 4am.

Nerves. Excitement. Have to be at St Peters for 6.45 to get in to celebrate 7.15 Mass.

Fortunately there is a quick way in now for worshippers as opposed to tourists. We waited by the 'speedy boarding' sign. At 6.45 they let in hundreds of tourists through the slow lane. We got through finally at 7.05. Not the perfect preparation but typical Roman nonsense. A nun is arguing with a policeman who won't let us go through security urgently. She wins.

This year there are no servers and I have to balance chalice, missal and vessels through the crowd and down to the crypt. Finally arriving safely at the chapel of the Saints of Europe we are treated to some grisly modern hymns sung by neighbouring chapel pilgrims. (The note from St Peters quite clearly forbids this.) Fortunately our acoustic is good and we sing the parts of the Mass as the mystery of the Sacrament takes over and the 'magic' of the place infuses our worship and the privilege of being there trumps any irritation and the importance of our prayer burdens take proper priority.

Refreshed, encouraged and high, we emerged into the Basilica to make confession and to visit our favourite saints and invite their prayers for an hour or two.

There is something very special about place. There is no more power in the Mass here but nonetheless by offering it here we are embracing the unity of the Church, touching its foundational history and made vividly aware of the miracle of this universal and eternal family to which we belong.

At eleven we emerged for a coffee and bun down the Borgo Pio – a happy street of cafes, souvenir junk and cheap vestment shops.

At noon we had to be in the Via Monserrato for a special treat. Courtesy of a recent encounter at a baptism in Cornwall with a Spanish lecturer at Santa Croce University, we had been invited to visit the house and chapel of St Philip Neri. I had been to Chiesa

Nuova many times and celebrated on the altar where his body lies but did not realise that his home had been here in a church I passed every day.

A very jolly and informative Sister took us round the beautiful church, his rooms, the various chapels and the 'mezzanine' which was his little bedroom, now a beautiful chapel. We had time to pray where St Philip levitated, and kneel where he had his vision of Our Lady. At the end we thanked our hosts profusely and I was allowed to read my poem about St Philip in his rooms. (I was always drawn to his sense of joy and humour in the midst of the utter seriousness of what we are about.) An extraordinary privilege which I shall always remember.

We went just around the corner onto the Campo de Fiori to get some pizza from the famous bakers then repaired to the College to eat our very late lunch.

Our Spanish friend Marco had invited us to Santa Croce for 4pm to view Rome from the roof terrace and point out the famous buildings and streets. It was a time for cameras and the stunning view. What is notable about Rome is that it has resisted the urge to modernity which has seen cities like London submerged and its historic outlines erased by the modernist signature of defecating brutalist concrete architectural obscenities all over it. Rome retains its history and its human scale, its scruffy charm and its worn elegance. It is a place of real people and not imperious corporations.

Each then to his own explorations of the city, the night walks, the discovery of favourite restaurants and, filled with the excitement of what we have seen and where we have prayed, an early bed. There is a very real sense of closeness, at the holy sites, to the hearts and situations of those who have asked for our prayers. Blessed are.....

Fr Robbie Low