



## ROME PILGRIMAGE 2024 INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimages begin, physically speaking, at a specific time and place and they have an itinerary, a route and an end goal towards they inexorably are headed. They are usually blessed by company, whether it be four or four hundred or four thousand.

The deeper truth is that a pilgrimage begins in its planning, in its intention and, first and foremost, in the orientation of the heart.

It also begins with an expectation and hope of encounter.

Even when we travel alone, we are accompanied by the joyful burden of those whose prayers have been entrusted to us and by their companionship in intercession before the throne of grace. And though we inevitably look towards the end of our proposed journey for the climactic encounter, mirroring that of our life and death, nevertheless the very road, the pilgrim way is rich with encounter and the revelation of the unexpected and deeply longed for affirmation of the Presence.

This year I have put out my usual invitation for prayers as we prepare for our annual pilgrimage to Rome. This has been a regular feature of our lives for more than twenty years. In previous years I have taken a good number of requests. This year there has been an avalanche and I am deeply conscious of the precious burden I am now entrusted to bear on my heart before the Lord. It would be a cliché to say that this is very humbling but it remain the truth. To be a priest is always to come before the Lord, like Aaron, with the people on your heart. Some times it is more obvious than ever that this is the sacred duty and ultimate privilege of the ministry to the faithful, to be, in that greatest of all the titles of the Holy Father, the Servant of the Servants of God.

So, this Monday morning, early and well watered and fed at old friends' (and fellow converts) house overnight, we set out for Bristol Airport. Still the requests are coming through on the email and the case being repacked, porridge consumed, fully medicated and caffeinated, we commit our days to the prayers of Our Blessed mother and our patron saints. If you are able to join us in prayer today or any day, that would be much appreciated.

There is a great Hasidic story that goes something like this....

The Rabbi was noted for his incredible healing powers. People flocked from all over Poland to ask for his prayers. One day a disciple asked him,

‘Rabbi, where on earth do you find the time to pray for all these people?’

The Rabbi replied, ‘I pray for them during the eighteen benedictions.’

The disciple was puzzled as, at best, this would take the Rabbi about three minutes.

‘How is that possible?’, he enquired.

The Rabbi looked at him and replied; ‘In that time I stand before the Lord and simply say to Him. ‘Lord, Look what these people have done to my heart’

Such brevity and profundity, of course, only comes from a long and hard won intimacy with the Lord. For the rest of us it tends to take a little longer. But you get the drift....

Fr Robbie Low