

Rome's Roving Reporter (RRR)

By Deacon Owen Rogers

The saying "All roads lead to Rome" is certainly true as the RRR found to his amazement, the enormous amount of Pilgrim traffic that headed to St. Peter's Basilica for the canonisation of Mary MacKillop on Sunday 17th October 2010.



On approach to St. Peter's Square you could not but be filled with awe seeing a huge banner of Mary MacKillop hanging from the of St. Peter's Basilica alongside five other additional banners of other candidates who were also to be canonized; (1 Canadian; 1 Spanish; 1 Polish and 2 Italians). There were about 8,000 Australians present for this great event along with many thousands from all over the world

A few days prior to the canonization, we had the opportunity to see Rome through the eyes of a very young Mary MacKillop who in 1873 went to Rome to have her Rule of the Sisters of St. Joseph approved by the Holy See, Pope Pius XI. We were able to see where Mary stayed during her first nights in Rome and it was reported that the staff at her hotel (Anglo Americano Hotel), were bemused that her entire luggage was contained in one small box.

Very close to where she stayed was the Church of 'Sant Andrea El Quinale', and the tomb of St. Stanislaus Kosta one of the young Jesuits priests whose lives impressed Mary very much so. Mary frequented this Church as did Pope John Paul II as a young studying when studying in Rome as a novice.

We next visited 'Quirinale Gardens' the site of the once 'Santa Sacramenta' church where Mary went faithfully most evenings for Benediction. And while on this pilgrimage we could not but feel 'drawn back' in time and feel a real presence of Mary's presence amongst our group. It was in a sense being captured in the (past) moment, as if really present today.

One other highlight was to visit the Church of the 'GESU' where Mary loved to be and pray, as this Church remains the mother church of the Jesuit Order and it is here where St. Ignatius of Loyola lies in repose. Time precluded our group continuing on the remaining stages of Mary's journey.



One could not be a visitor to Rome without paying a visit to the amazing Vatican Museum and it's impressive chambers of history which led up to the breathtaking Sistine Chapel. Everyone in our group was in absolute awe at seeing Michelangelo's masterpieces including his ceiling fresco of the Last Judgement.

One of the world's most beautiful Church's is no doubt St. Peter's Basilica and we had the privilege of viewing this magnificent structure. What was most impressive was our visit to the Crypt containing the tombs of several Popes including Pope Paul II. I was moved as I glanced and prayed at his resting place. We were able to look out and see the great St. Peter's Square which was to become the focus on the approaching day of Canonisation.



There were many highlights, one of which occurred the day before the Canonisation Mass. This was a very special presentation “Vigil Celebration of Mary’s Life”. The performers from the Australian Catholic University acted out and recreated a dramatic and cultural tribute honouring Mary as a woman for all people. It was an excellent portrayal of the life of Mary. The actors captured the entire audience and they wanted more. A first class presentation vigil on the life of Mary. It was indeed spectacular, and both sittings were standing room

only for the thousands who were invited to attend.

What impressed all of us at the Canonisation Mass on Sunday 17th October 2010 at St. Peter’s Square, was the order and way the Canonisation took place. The words spoken were in the Latin Language. but somehow we were able to follow the proceedings. Mary’s life history was read aloud so all could hear and Pope Benedict XVI responded and replied in Latin which effectively enrolled Mary in the Catalogue of Saints. The large tapestry banner of Mary hung from the Basilica for all to admire and venerate.

Well what a scene – words cannot be found to describe fully the enormous exhilaration that permeated the whole atmosphere. All present were on a high. We were all thankful, and after the Canonisation Mass on the day following (Monday 18th October 2010), an official Mass of Thanksgiving was held in the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls. An estimated 4,000 Australians jammed into St. Paul’s Cathedral including many Sisters of St. Joseph,; Cardinal Pell (Principal Celebrant); Bishops (including our own Bishop Anthony), Priests and of course many Australian Pilgrims. It felt like we were back home in Australia. The Thanksgiving Mass was celebrated in the English language.

After the Thanksgiving Mass, our group continued our journey and visited the Basilica of St. John Lateran (the Cathedral of Rome), being one of Rome’s four major Basilica’s. Many of us had the opportunity of climbing the Holy Stairs on our knees. These stairs were brought from Jerusalem to Rome by St. Helena.

Before visiting the ancient Catacombs (St. Sebastian), the underground burial grounds for Christians and Hebrews: we visited the Basilica of ‘Santa Crose’, which housed fragments of the Holy Cross and other extraordinary collections from the Holy Land. This was an absolutely amazing place to be.

Some members of our group had the opportunity of visiting Assisi on our final day, a visit worth undertaking.

I am impressed by many of Mary MacKillop’s sayings, one of which is “Never see a need without doing something about it.” Mary always had a soft spot for the poor and marginalized. “If we have love in our hearts, we shall have God with us”.

In conclusion, a magnificent Pilgrim Journey, great to be part of such a wonderful occasion when Australia had acclaimed its first Saint; Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop.