

WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

It's hard to believe, but this week is Thanksgiving! I wish you a blessed Thanksgiving and pray you have much for which to be grateful.

I am grateful for many, many blessings. Most immediately, I am very thankful for an absolutely wonderful pilgrimage with 25 parishioners to our nation's capital. Truly, everything was great, from the weather, to the hotel, the sites and the people. The first day we visited the Museum of the Bible, something I only recently heard of. Well worth the trip. The second day we visited the Franciscan Shrine of the Holy Land, with beautiful gardens offering an amazing display of Fall colors. The third and final day, we went to the St. Pope John Paul II National Shrine, ending up at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral.

I don't want to bore you with a day-to-day itinerary, like someone back in the day showing slides (remember slides!) of their vacation! I would like to share a few insights, or what I think of as graces, from the trip that I brought home with me. The Museum of the Bible is an enormous exhibit with far more than you can see in the few hours we were there. We were blessed to see a temporary exhibit of icons from Patmos in Greece. The other multiple floors displayed many aspects and impact of the Bible. I particularly enjoyed the floor that told the story of the Bible. Walking through the various rooms, you are surrounded by images from those stories as the history is narrated. Of course, I knew the story, but I felt as if I was experiencing the story of salvation. It was a reminder that the Bible is not just words, but it is an encounter with our God.

The Franciscan Shrine of the Holy Land is an opportunity to have an experience of what it would be like to actually be in Jerusalem and visit the Holy Sites. It is interesting to me that from all of that, one small part of the tour really struck me. We went down into their replica of the catacombs, the burial place of numerous Christians. One of the exhibits was the remains of one of those martyrs, St. Innocent. His body was brought at first to Chicago under the care of the Augustinians, the Pope's order, and then brought to Washington. What was striking to me is that Innocent was only five years old! His body was discovered buried between two people, presumed to be his parents, with a palm frond on his tomb, an indication he was a martyr. I kept thinking to myself that was I was looking at the actual body of a this completely innocent boy, barely starting out in life, and his life taken by the cruel persecutions of his day. For some reason, that, above all else, stayed with me from that day.

At night, we had a bus tour of Washington, and to my surprise, we made stops and were able to get off the bus. It was Veterans' Day, and we stopped at the various war memorials, very moving and powerful. With my dad serving in World War II, to be at that memorial on that day, with its' amazing fountains and lights, was very emotional. We also went to the Lincoln Memorial. I kept thinking of that scene from Forrest Gump! I also walked down to the spot where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his I have a dream speech. I wonder what he would think of us today.

The St. Pope John Paul II National Shrine was moving as I relived his courageous story. What struck me was his passion and commitment in taking the Church into the Third Millenium, especially coming out of his personal experience with tyranny. It struck me that, in some ways, we have lost his spirit of a "new Springtime of Christianity." As I reflected on his legacy, I couldn't help but think that we have taken a step back from his enthusiastic proclamation of the Gospel. I felt an inspiration, somehow, to rekindle that spark.

The National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception is a must see if you haven't been. And, if you go, don't miss the gift shop--huge! Yes, it was a great three days! Now, I'm all relaxed, charged up and ready to keep going! Happy Thanksgiving!

"Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His mercy endures forever!" (Psalm 107:1)