

SACRED HEARTS COMMUNITY

† RETREAT MINISTRY †

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My Dear Friends,

I am writing to you from a plane 35,000 feet in the air as I wing my way home after a five day whirlwind tour of Church celebrations. It has been a glorious production of pageantry, faith, prayer and tradition.

It began with the St. Damien Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. Everyone who came said, "*It was magnificent!*" The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the Pope's ambassador to the U.S., was the main celebrant for the Eucharist. Twenty priests concelebrated, twelve of whom were Sacred Hearts. We had pilgrims from as far away as California. Members of Mother Teresa's Community were there with their Superior General from



India, Sister Nirmala, Mother Teresa's successor. The crowd in the Basilica was outstanding. Our Provincial, Fr. Bill Petrie, gave a moving homily about St. Damien. I sat there, so proud to be an SSCC, and so proud to be one who was following St. Damien's love of God through the love of others. The Apostolic Nuncio gave a final benediction at the end of Mass. It



was extraordinary. It was about St. Damien, but was also a blessing for our Sacred Hearts Congregation and why young people should be a part of our community. It was so inspiring. The end of the liturgical celebration was such a prayerful experience of praise and song to God. The Gospel Choir from the parish we serve in Seat Pleasant, Maryland sang the meditation song. My heart and emotions leapt with joy as they sang; it was so beautiful! My heart kept saying, *Yes! Yes! Yes!* to the Lord. It was a day of great joy.

I had asked the Deacon from one of our Virginia families, Emil Myskowski, to serve at the Mass. He was great. I also had three of the young men from our parish in Fairhaven as altar servers. Two of my parishioners, Cynthia Days and Martha McCormack were gift bearers for the offertory and with them presenting the gifts were two people who had been cured of Hansen's disease. To say I was and still am



"flying" is an understatement. People were so impressed with the beauty of our Eucharistic pageantry and prayer. St. Damien did it again! To understand what it means to become a Saint and to know he is a member of the community to which I have given my life, because of him, brings me to prayerful tears. "*Praise to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary*".



After the Mass, we had a reception in the lower level of the shrine. It was great – so many came. Then at 6:00 pm that evening, we had a banquet at our hotel. What a surprise. Fr. Bill Petrie, our Provincial, had arranged a Hawaiian Luau. There was great food, song, and Hawaiian dancers; but the best of all was, they taught us the hula. It was such a fun time. The people at the banquet were pilgrims who had come from all over; there were 72 of us. During the hula, the dancers decided to have the pilgrims learn to dance. I got picked first, with my parishioners. Then they called up more of our SSCC brothers including the provincial. It was a blast.

The next day, Monday, I flew to our home missions in the Brownsville Diocese in Texas. I was stationed there for six years. The Diocese was installing their sixth Bishop. Because I am Vicar-Provincial, I went to represent our Provincial, Fr. Bill, who had a conflict and was unable to go. The installation of a Bishop is filled with traditional ceremony, prayer, joy and celebration. It was an incredible experience. The Bishop is Daniel Flores; he is just 48 years old and filled with God's love. A magnificent choir sang as the procession began. There were seminarians, hundreds of Deacons, 300 Priests, 32 Bishops, two Cardinals, Bishop Flores and his family and 250 people from the Diocese. The whole experience made me glad I am a Catholic.

Now I'm on my way home and back to the reality of another snow storm. My twin brother and I are celebrating 140 years of life on the 12th. You can imagine how that's going to be - as we say, "*a blast!*"! Thanks for your support and love of the preaching ministry. It is how God "*gets around*", especially through you.

My blessings and love,

Father Tom, ss.cc.

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