

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.”*

Rest, He said, not relaxation or escape from what is tiring. Rest par excellence is that of God who after creating, rested, contemplating what he had done. Rest is a place and a time everything makes sense and finally finds a reason.

Rest takes place in silence and relative solitude, to guarantee a distance from business, allowing not an escape from reality but affirming the *primacy of meaning* over *things*. Here, one discovers that Christ is our real rest. He said, in fact:” Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” Mt 11: 28-29

My vacation has been an ‘intense’ resting in God and I’d like to share some reflections about this period spent at home. Upon my reentry to The States a few friends of mine asked me if it was hard to leave behind my family and, if I was happy to be back.

I have to admit that I enjoyed my stay: at home I could use my own language, the places and the people around me were familiar from my childhood, few things had changed and several new houses had been built over the years. At the beginning it took a while to get readjusted, but then I fitted in again perfectly.

During my stay at home I realized how my relatives and friends had aged and how my many nephews and nieces had grown up graciously. My family had expanded and how I was now the eldest in the family, the one to whom the whole group was looking for guidance and advice.

My family could be divided in two large groups: one residing in the northern part of Italy and the second one in the Southern. The composition of the two groups and their cultures were so different complimentary to each other.

In the South relations and their interaction are regulated by traditions that, at time are very rigid, unspoken rules that must be followed as a sort of a ritual. Arrivals and departures have a fixed pattern to be followed. Every newcomer must acknowledge, by visiting and greeting in a traditional order all the members of the family, acknowledging and strengthening, in this way, family ties.

The main event that brought my family together was the celebration of my Priestly Golden Jubilee. We gathered at my hometown, Reggello (Florence) where I was born, and where I celebrated my First Mass and the Silver Jubilee.

Many of my relatives and friends who had be present at those celebrations, were no longer there. The mayor of my town had been an altar server at my First Mass was.

The Readings of the liturgy expressed the deep gratitude for the past. I made my own the stupor and gratitude of king David who, after the promises made to him by the prophet Nathan, went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

During the three weeks at Reggello I gave conferences to the various parishes trying to read the “signs” of our time, what God wants of us and how to give sense to what seems to have no sense.

Many people, from all walk of life, shared their sorrows and hopes. I was surprised by their trust. I had chosen to reside at the rectory to meet people for a chat or for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I felt honored by their trust, encouraged by their faith. The chance to have a deeper look in the hearts of people made me realize that every time we approach a human being we are approaching an invisible Cross and I was praying that I could be an “helper” in carrying those crosses, asking God to help me not to add to their sufferings.

During the epidemic Guido, my brother got sick and I had planned to go with him to Lourdes to ask for his healing, but it was not possible. He died two years ago. Nevertheless I wanted to keep my promise to Blessed Mother, so I went to Lourdes and prayed for his eternal rest. I took also a bottle of the water which I sprinkled on his grave upon my reentry to Italy.

The rest of my stay was spent in the south of Italy where the other side of the family lives. I stayed at Alberobello (Ba) with my sister-in law- who owns a building and a piece of land.

Tuscany and Puglia are quite different, and I had to adjust accordingly. In Northern Italy people in situations when wants to show affection or friendship, tend to be more reserved, keeping their feelings for themselves in order not to embarrass people. To them, deeds speak louder than words. They would give you the house-keys with the words: “make yourself at home”. Leaving up to you to organize your stay as you like.

In the south people tend to sort of kind to “kidnap” you! They like to show affection: I never received so many kisses and hugs in my life as during the days I spent in the South. They shovel food in your plate: more food, more love (more weight!). Eating together strengthens relations and friendship.

They like to be close to show love! They shout and gesticulate to make their point. No breakfast or supper, only a long lunch at 2:00pm when all the stores are closed and nobody is in the streets because of the heat. This year we had temperatures round 104-110 F.

In the south people like to waste time together chatting, snacking and chatting. Usually lunch lasted for long hours, probably to make up for the time one was away.

The more guests at table the merrier: you don’t need an official invitation, we can always squeeze up and there is room for everybody.

Friendship and cordiality seem to take precedence over order and organization.

A host in the north would get crazy, almost faint if a uninvited guest shows up because the table has been set for a certain number of people only. In the south this is a secondary detail: people come first!

Although the majority of Italians are Catholics, the way religion is lived is quite distinctive. In Northern Italy religion seems to be quite simple and clear: one has to be upright, hard working and generous.

In the South there is the so called popular devotion, where the whole of the time is involved Pope Francis commenting on this said: “If you want to KNOW about Mary, ask a theologian, if you want to LOVE Mary, ask the people.

In the south, saints seem more important than God, He is too busy running the universe to be disturbed by petty problems such as the loss of keys, a typical case for St. Anthony to come in.

The saints are “our protectors and defenders” they patronize us. They talk to people in dreams to advice and worn them. Their statues are carried along the streets of the village on the shoulders of devotees, to make sure that everybody is known to them and put under their protection.

The heavier the statue, the more abundant the sweat, the more blessings you receive! The saints know that to be a human being is not easy and that is impossible to keep all the commandments and they will put a good word for us with God.

People also, tend to believe that there is only one “Our Lady”, the one in my village, the one I am familiar with.

Two world-views so beautiful and so different and so complimentary at the same time. It was time now to pack for the reentry. On the way back north, we stopped at two famous shrines: Padre Pio and “Monte Santangelo” where St. Michael appeared on the Gargano Hills.

Leaving Italy the clergy asked me if I wanted to remain behind: “there is a lot of work to do also here!”. They forgot that I belong to a Religious family and my “richness” and diversity compared to the local clergy come from the vast experience of my Missionary Congregation.

Missionaries are “prophets” and their job is to point the way while working to become redundant. Missionaries are the people of the dreams, the people who, because carried on the shoulders of the local clergy can see far and show the direction towards which direct our steps.

I love my country, my people and leaving them behind is an act of faith. I realized, in fact, that I was saying goodbye to people whom, given the age and their ailments, I would not see again. But I consider the Xaverians my real family in God. What unites us is not the fact that were born by the same physical parents, but by the Holy Spirit: “children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” Jn. 1,13 Besides, our faith reminds us that “we don’t have here a permanent city”.

This is why I am happy to be back, grateful to God for the ten years I could spend in Wayne with you because you are my real family.

## My Ordination: Sept.27th, 1970





## Golden Jubilee Celebrated on June 19th 2022





## Family and Friends

