

Pilgrims Retrace the Steps of Msgr. Quinn

▲ by Msgr. Paul W. Jervis

The cause for the Canonization of Msgr. Bernard J. Quinn followed in his footsteps to France.

As the postulator for promoting the canonization, I led a group of 33 pilgrims there, from the evening of Easter Sunday, April 24, to Tuesday, May 3. (For the sake of simplicity and Msgr. Quinn's own preference as a priest, he will henceforth be referred to as Father in this article.)

The pilgrims hailed mostly from St. Martin de Porres parish, Bedford-Stuyvesant, with others coming from a neighboring parish and from the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., and Florida. Franciscan Spirit Tours, under the guidance of John Mattras, accompanied us and provided our accommodations and tours to various shrines associated with St. Therese of Lisieux. Father Quinn had visited these same sites during furlough from his ministry as a chaplain to American soldiers fighting in the Normandy region of France, at the height of World War I.

The first stop for the pilgrims was Notre Dame Cathedral on Easter Monday, shortly after their arrival in Paris. Father Quinn had visited this famous church upon completion of his service to the soldiers. A visit to the well-known Basilica of Sacre Coeur was next. We walked the crowded, narrowed streets, ascending up to Montmartre where the basilica overlooks the city. After this grueling tour, most pilgrims retired to their hotel for a needed rest, but a hardy few went on to the Louvre Museum.

Easter Tuesday presented the pilgrims with the sacred and the profane, so characteristic of the dazzling city of Paris. The sacred was the priority as we visited Our Lady of Victories Basilica. Having Mass there was nostalgic for the pilgrims from Our Lady of Victory Church in Brooklyn, one of the three churches comprising St. Martin de Porres parish.

Next was a visit to the Shrine of the Miraculous Medal, which has a prayerful atmosphere. It is unpretentious in its simple decor. The incorrupt bodies of Sts. Catherine Laboure and Louise de Marillac can be seen in iron-framed, glass, gold-leaf painted caskets.

The next shrine was the Church

of St. Vincent de Paul on a quiet street, off the beaten path of tourists. The church was just about abandoned by visitors, except for the few of us, who went there and found it to be an oasis of tranquility.

That was not the case when the pilgrims encountered the hustle and bustle of tourists converging at the Eiffel Tower. A boat-ride on the Seine completed the sightseeing. The pilgrims then departed by bus to Lisieux, arriving there by night to settle down for the important purpose of the pilgrimage.

Boarding and meals for the pilgrims were provided at The Hermitage, a spacious, Tudor-style facility for hosting pilgrims. It is a stone's throw away from the Carmelite Convent where St. Therese lived and died as a nun. On the following day, Wednesday of Easter week, we departed by bus to Alencon, to the home where St. Therese was born, on Rue St. Blaise. Father Quinn was privileged in 1919 to visit and to celebrate Mass in the living room of the home, the first Catholic priest to do so. The visit was confirmed by Madame Ethel Grant, a woman from Scotland, who was the caretaker of the home at that time.

I read the account of Father Quinn's visit to the home in Alencon from his Little Flower Booklet which was published for the occasion of the Canonization of St. Therese in 1925. Six years earlier, he had visited her home in Alencon, after reading her autobiography, "The Story of a Soul," which had totally captivated him. In reading about Therese, he found in her a kindred spirit and a spiritual guide for him as a priest.

The experience of celebrating Mass in a chapel attached to the home of St. Therese called to mind Father Quinn's visiting there and celebrating Mass. After leaving the home, we visited the Church of Notre Dame, where St. Therese was baptized on Jan. 4, 1873. Father Quinn celebrated Mass in that church whenever he had an opportunity during the course of the six months that he was tending to the wounded American and English soldiers in army hospitals surrounding Alencon.

On Easter Thursday, I was prepared to give a lecture on the extraor-



Photo courtesy Msgr. Paul W. Jervis

▲ Msgr. Paul Jervis led a group of mostly Brooklynites on a tour of sites related to St. Therese of Lisieux.

dinary priestly ministry of Father Quinn for my fellow pilgrims but, rather inexplicably, found myself speaking about St. Therese's powerful aid to priests in their ministry of the salvation of their fellow human beings. I pointed out that Therese was prepared for her task after being entrusted by her prioress to give spiritual guidance to two seminarians, Maurice Belliere and Adolphe Roulland, who were in need of her help after their priestly ordination.

Father Quinn was presented in my lecture as being a priest upon whom St. Therese lavished many favors in his priestly ministry of embracing his black brethren and their orphan children.

After my lecture, our pilgrim group set off to visit Therese's home in Lisieux, where she grew up with her family after they moved from Alencon. Awaiting us at the home were three American seminarians, students from the North American Seminary in Rome who were on their Easter recess and were delighted to meet us. We were pleasantly surprised at encountering them, so soon after my lecture on priests and seminarians. It occurred to me that it was St. Therese who had diverted my prepared talk to the topic that she saw fit for me to speak about that day.

It seemed that she also had an influence in determining the celebration of Mass by myself on the following day, in the chapel of the Carmelite Convent. As I was about to begin, the sacristan told me that the anniversary of St. Therese's beatification was that day, a fact I had forgotten. I was jolted and felt blessed to celebrate Mass on the anniversary.

During Father Quinn's visit there, Therese's sister, Pauline, who was the prioress of the convent and known as Mother Agnes of Jesus, was interviewed by Father Quinn. She was rather surprised by the young American priest who had such an insatiable thirst for knowledge about her saintly sister. His interview with her took place in the parlor of the

convent but a screen separated them from direct contact. On April 29, 1923, Father Quinn had observed St. Therese's beatification with a lavish novena celebration, that the church hierarchy felt was overdone for she was not yet canonized. That would happen two years later.

On Saturday, in Lisieux, the pilgrims trudged up the hilly slope to visit and have Mass in the crypt of the massive and most attractive Basilica of St. Therese, which sits like a jeweled crown above the town. A visit to the cemetery nearby was made by a few of us who went to the original grave site of St. Therese. The remains were removed a year later and reinterred in the Carmelite Convent where they now lie in an encased statue of her in death. The pilgrimage ended that day for most of the pilgrims who on Sunday, May 1, boarded their return flights to the U.S.

A few of us flew to Lourdes where we joined the nightly candlelight procession for the recitation of the Rosary. The mood was particularly prayerful and upbeat as a result of Pope John Paul's beatification earlier that day in Rome. Lourdes was a haven of peace where our pilgrims and thousands of others felt at least, physically renewed at Easter from the waters of the grotto. The two days spent in Lourdes included a Mass in the Basilica and a visit to the home of St. Bernadette who experienced the apparitions of the Blessed Mother in 1858.

It was fitting for the pilgrimage to culminate in Lourdes, for Mary is the mother of priests. The pilgrimage was truly a memorable, joy-filled experience where a spirit of camaraderie kept everyone happy. The daily prayers of the pilgrims for the cause of Father Quinn's canonization were fruitful, with the assistance of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face from Lisieux.

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