

Rome Generalate

For the next two years I traveled extensively throughout my newly assigned missions. I arrived in Rome in October of 1960, happy to be able to settle down and not to have to travel for a while. As soon as I had completed my report on my visit to the Chinese Province, I sent it along to the Superiors in France and promised to keep in touch with them until the satisfactory completion of the new Generalate with their arrival in Rome scheduled to be on May 24, 1961. From October on I rested and was briefed on what was still to be completed for the May arrival of the Superiors. The place was by no means left empty between meetings of the Generalate, for there were always several different communities living in our house in Rome. For instance, the college students from various Provinces who were here for studies in Rome, or for the completion of the Jesus Magister course, which is a special course for Scholastics from various Provinces, stayed in the Marist house in Rome. Besides that, a community of nuns has its own residence in one wing of our giant construction, and there is also a sector for the employees.

The main Generalate building has three floors. The first is for the various general offices and reception rooms with auxiliary dining rooms, etc. The main entrance has a majestic stairway to the floor of the Major Superiors on the first floor of the residence. Then the second floor houses some of the religious who work for the General Administration. Finally the top floor of rooms is for the Brothers who live and work there, as well as spare rooms for visitors. At the entrance to our building, besides the receptionist at the right, there is a three-floor building for the many visitors that we continually have at the General House. The regular community of Brothers who work at the service of the Superiors has its own Director and forms a separate community. On the second floor at the top of the marble staircase is the floor of the Superiors and houses their private chapel. I had my own quarters on the floor of the Generalate, but while waiting for them to come to form the community, I had my meals with the Brothers in the main house.

We needed some qualified employees to do the necessary cleaning of the house, so I went over to our Italian community and school at St. Leone Magno, a bit beyond the city of Rome, and asked them to guide me in employing reliable workers for the General House. It was the start of a wonderful relationship with some of the young workers given to us, all of whom were natives of Sardegna. Thus this was the start of a fine relationship with a few families of Sardegna whose sons were all employed by the Marists in Rome.

The first two to be brought over were Beniamino Naitza, better known as Mimo, and his cousin, Graziano Lecca. After they had been with us for a while and proved themselves, I made a trip to Sardegna with Mimo to visit the various families and also to interview Mimo's twin brothers, who were also looking for employment. The twins returned with us and started the work program. There was plenty to be done to get ready for the arrival of the General Council.

After a few years of satisfaction, they were brought to the U.S.A. to complete high school at the Mount and at Bayonne, and they went on to complete their college studies at Marist. All are married and have children, and are still close to anything Marist that they come across. My time was divided in seeing to the completion of their work in the preparation of the Generalate to make sure everything was ready for the arrival of the Superiors.

It was my job to keep the Superiors alerted to the progress of the Generalate. It also gave me time to make the needed acquaintances for a successful meeting and to learn and practice Italian so that I knew at least enough to get by. I was able to welcome the incoming candidates for the Second Novitiate and soon made valuable contact with the Rome authorities. They welcomed my offer to be of service to them in my various travels to the many countries where I would be visiting. Before leaving for the countries I was to visit, I would notify them and ask if they had any official documents to be hand-delivered. This was a means of my also getting the Vatican passport, which proved to be very useful on many occasions, and I became an unofficial courier for them. I will refer to this in some of the chapters on the various countries I visited. The Vatican authorities were only too happy to make use of me as a courier.

Preparations proceeded smoothly for the arrival of the Superiors from France who were coming in May of 1961. Brothers Alessandro, Vicente, and I ended our meetings and turned everything over to the Bursar General.

Everything was in place and ready for the arrival of the Superiors except for one thing. Brother Vicente was keen on having the Superiors come out of their cars at the main entrance and walk up the hill in some majestic procession as a way to properly receive our Major Superiors. They had been seated a long while and did not mind the climb up the hill that led to our General House. In fact it was a solemn approach to our beautiful outside chapel, and it was our custom to first visit the chapel on our arrival in the tradition of our Blessed Founder. The many Brothers working for the Generalate and our Italian workers had done a tremendous job getting everything spic and span for this solemn occasion.

I still remember the comments of our Superior General, Bro. Charles Raphael, as we walked up the hill together. He was amazed and a bit overwhelmed at the beauty of the gigantic building, and he actually told me that he was tempted to turn around and go back to France. Bro. Vicente Lorenzo was quick to get his ear and explained to him that in Italy marble was cheaper than wood and therefore more economical to use. Besides, we had only inherited the building from the previous administration. I remember when I showed the General the huge room in the basement that we had set up to be used for our General Chapters. It was set up with booths to provide the various translations to deliver any message in the four languages in use in the Institute and with a modern voting system where one could vote for/against/abstain with the totals appearing on screen, on stage. He began to understand the need for the huge space and facilities for the large crowds that would be coming to meetings. He knew that all this was needed even if he still preferred the cozy little chapel on the Superior's main floor next to his own quarters.

My six or so months of work in Rome had given me a needed rest and the time to make some valuable contacts. I would be ready to take to the road again. In the meantime our parks, walks through the gardens, the flowers, and the superb view of Rome with a backdrop against the sea all were a wonderful treat to enjoy. The rooftop walk was in itself a quiet meditation that would easily bring one closer to the Lord and help us forget one's petty problems while walking so high and feeling so close to the Lord, as if He walked with us.