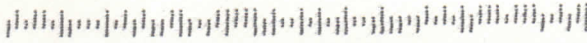


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Christmas 2018

Dear family and friends,

Buongiorno from Rome! Another year has come and passed and I hope to share with you as much of it as I can fit on a standard Italian size A4 sheet of paper. My first year here gave me a lot to be grateful for. I met a lot of new friends with whom I met Pope Francis, had a snowball fight in Rome, ran across the entire width of Italy, and won the "Clericus Cup" soccer championship in Rome. It was packed with unforgettable and adventurous times.



Finishing my first year of Theological studies before summer brought a great feeling of accomplishment. Getting through final exams in Italian was stressful a breeze and the opportunity for mental recuperation a wonderful summer was presented to me. In my continued effort of *becoming* an Italian, I moved into a parish and spent the summer with an Italian pastor at a parish in Northern Italy. It was a great 5 weeks of Italian community, kids camp, and Italian *cibo* (food). I was able to see much of beautiful Northern Italy including Milan, Verona, Mantua, Trent, and Brescia. I returned to Rome feeling like I could take on the world with my new Italian comprehension, but reality hit me with a big Roman accent which seemed foreign to me at that point. I was back to square one.



Returning to Rome actually brought a lot of joy. I was especially blessed to welcome my family in September. It was wonderful to see them for the first time in a year. A highlight for me was giving them a tour of the excavations under St. Peter's Basilica, which is my pastoral work as a seminarian. The tour explores the Ancient Vatican Necropolis which predates the first century. However, my favorite part is ending at the tomb of St. Peter and being able to see his bones resting

deep under the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica. Being a tour guide has been a work that I thoroughly enjoy. It often leaves me awestruck that I get to guide others to the bones of one of my personal heroes and a hero of the Christian faith. My family's presence during this time filled me with a joy that is carrying me through this final period of time away from home before returning in June 2019. I'm very fortunate that the holidays are special here as well.

Our Thanksgiving festivities of the seminary this year were a joy. The annual 5k around Vatican City on Thanksgiving morning proved to be quite the *turkey trot*. I was pleased to defend my title and finish the race in record time, while all the time dressed as my 1970's self.



I'm away from home for Christmas again, but I will be spending my time in places which have resided in my mind and heart since I was a child. Leading into the New Year, I will be on pilgrimage in the Holy Land. Our pilgrimage group from the North American College will be walking the footsteps of Jesus and the early Catholic Church. The Holy Card inserted has our itinerary. It is a dream of mine to see the places that fill the writings in the Bible; the Scriptures for which I am developing a huge passion. Studying Hebrew and Greek have been influential in this increasing love, but I owe a lot of growth to the homiletics training we are receiving at the seminary this year.

Writing homilies is awesome. In our preparation for preaching, we have homily *practica* in which we write and deliver homilies in front of our teacher and fellow students. I learn a ton about the Catholic faith and I grow in a deeper love of Jesus through this preparation, not to mention through the many theology classes I'm taking (which I can finally understand!). Now I just have to stop daydreaming about returning home during class. I can't help but look forward to what the year ahead will hold.



I am looking forward to returning home in June 2019 and reconnecting with friends and family, but I have a lot to look forward to in the meantime. On February 24th I will be installed as an Acolyte. This ministry in the Church entrusts me to attend to the service of the altar at Mass. It is a big step that precedes ordination to the Diaconate. It's an opportunity for me to thank God for his presence in my life and guiding me to this point in my journey to the priesthood. Talk about a reason for gratitude.



The year ahead also holds a couple weekend adventures around Europe, training for the "all roads lead to Rome" Marathon in April, playing in another soccer season on the seminary team, the North American Martyrs, and, of course, I'll also be studying (that one's for you, mom and dad)

I hope this letter finds you while we're still in the Christmas season, but I would like to leave you with a bit of Italian poetry I found concerning the New Year ahead.

*"The only joy in the world is to begin. It is beautiful to live because to live is to begin, always, every moment."*

Cesare Pavese

We are presented with the newness of this 2019 year, but I pray that you find the beauty of beginning in every moment. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

*Hyde Poje*