

Reflections While Walking Ancient Symbols

By Deacon Bob Salvestrini



Christianity spread rapidly in the years shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus evidenced in the Christian symbols that are found in places far distant from Jerusalem. One such place is the Roman city of Pompeii obliterated by the eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 AD. When excavation of the city was begun seventeen centuries after the disaster symbols of crosses were found carved in stones in the city streets. The image of a fish, another Christian symbol, was also seen as graffiti on buildings and store fronts in the city. Visiting Pompeii and encountering these signs of such early Christian presence can become a stimulus for meditation. There is a different kind of graffiti found in Pompeii that could also be inspiration for anyone who gazes on it and takes time to reflect upon it.

Among the ruins is a tavern that has on its walls markings that show the credit that was extended to various customers. All the accounts are marked paid except one. The suddenness of the Vesuvian disaster froze in time the indebtedness of one customer. Lava and debris permanently prevented the debtor from settling his account and it remains forever as a payment due.

We all have debts of a kind that are owed to our neighbor whether they are family, friend, or stranger. It could be a kindness, possibly forgiveness, or maybe simply getting in touch that will cancel a debt incurred through our own flawed nature. The timeless debtor of ancient Pompeii reminds us that the ability to resolve these obligations may suddenly be taken from us and these debts will remain unfulfilled and be forever outstanding, possibly with consequences. Whatever the debt, may it be great or small, we must not miss the chance to promptly settle the account while we still have the opportunity.