

Reflections on our Ecumenical Pilgrimage – Bishop Jim Gonia

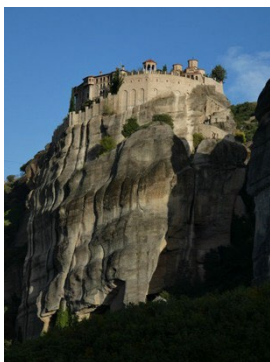
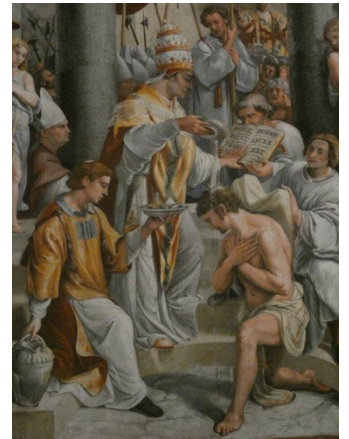
We are heirs of the reformation legacy of Francis of Assisi and Martin Luther ...



From Greece our pilgrimage took us to Italy – first to Rome and then finally to Assisi. While the Orthodox churches of Greece were stunning to behold with their intricate interior paintings and abundance of icons, the basilicas and churches of Rome were a testament to the power and authority of the church.

The church's future changed forever when the Roman Emperor Constantine outlawed the persecution of Christians in 313.

Thanks in part thanks to a vision he received at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine began to support and fund many endeavors of the church, and was finally baptized just before his death in 337. Some years later, another Roman Emperor, Theodosius, made Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380. This placed immense power and wealth into the hands of a church that began to merge political and spiritual authority.



It's not surprising, then, that over time there arose movements of reform inspired by those who remembered the humble origins of the church and longed to see the faithful focus on the essence of their relationship with Jesus and care of all God's people. The famous monasteries of Meteora in Greece (whose origins can be traced to the 11th century) and the ministry of Francis of Assisi (died 1226) were driven in their own ways by a rejection of the opulence and corruption of the church.

A few centuries later, the visit of Martin Luther to Rome in 1510 was a pivotal moment in the life of the young monk, who grappled with the extravagance and distortions of the church, with its focus on the veneration of relics and the selling of indulgences. Both Francis and Luther called upon the faithful to remember Christ's call to minister to the poor.

If our pilgrimage in Italy did anything, it convinced me that a focus on continued renewal within the church is always needed, so that we may always remember that we are loved unconditionally by God in Christ so that we are freed to love and serve our neighbor without hesitation. Our journey was a powerful reminder that we are heirs of the reformation legacy of Francis of Assisi and Martin Luther.



When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2: 1-5)



The Pilgrimage Group: Franciscan Monastery, Assisi Italy.



Pastors participating in the Pilgrimage, Ancient Corinth

Daily postings and photos from the Ecumenical Pilgrimage can be found on the [Rocky Mountain Synod Facebook page](#).