

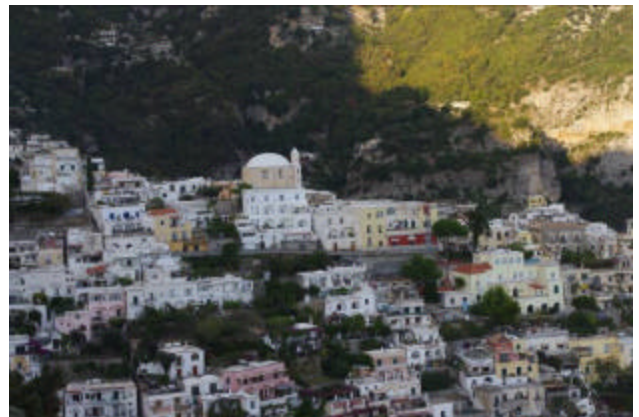
The Italy Trip, 2014

Back in 1966 when we left Kenya, we took advantage of the airplane policies of the day to tour Europe. You were allowed to stop as many times as you wanted as long as you moved in the correct direction. We ended up with a seven-week vacation. We started by going from Nairobi to Cairo, then to Athens, then to Rome. We visited Berlin, Munich, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Paris, Brussels and London. However, at Rome we reached a disagreement. Jane wanted to go to Venice and I wanted to go behind the Iron Curtain. We ended up spending a few days in Prague. It was a victory for me but left me with an obligation to make that Italy trip at some time in the future. In 2014, I paid my debt. I was on sabbatical in the fall and told Jane that this was the time. She was very excited and found a nice tour of seventeen days. The tourist crowds were down and the weather much improved over July (when we went there the first time).

To prepare, I read *Michaelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* by Ross King, and a biography of Savonarola (*Fire in the City* by Luaren Martines). These were good preparation. We also started watching Italian movies, to get a feel for the countryside and to start thinking in an Italian way (whatever that means). We watched *The Italy Trip* (a comedy road trip), *Roman Holiday*, *The Tourist*, *Sunflowers*, *Divorce*, *Italian Style*, and other films with Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni.

These are some high points of the trip, some very personal.

Most memorable image: The view of the Amalfi coast from the window of our hotel. This was our first stop but one of the best. The Amalfi coast is thirty miles long and features scenery beautiful beyond words. Everyone said we would love it, and we did.



Most amazing work of art. Hands down, the statue of *David* by a young (25) Michelangelo. Of course, his *Pieta* is hard to beat but *David* does. He is a handsome youth, sling in his hand, looking with confidence and calculation at his enemy Goliath. You see determination in his eyes, not fear. I do not believe in miracles but also I do not believe that Michelangelo could have produced this masterpiece without divine assistance. Perhaps this explains why some of these works inspire even non-believers. The concept of a “gift” may be relevant here, that God gives this gift, perhaps even to an unworthy, obnoxious person such as Michelangelo. Most people think the Sistine Chapel

is his greatest work. I think if he had died the day after this statue was finished, we would view him as one of the world's great artists. (When I posted these photos on Face book and someone said that David's face had a feminine quality, a friend made the following comment: "The unbearded youthfulness of David evoking his need of divine assistance against the 'giant-sized' Goliath is analogous to what you suggested about the making of the sculpture. Michelangelo takes on the giant block of marble...")



I also have a personal favorite, the wooden statue of Mary and Jesus in the cathedral at Amalfi. She seems so young and so pretty and so proud of her child. Young moms are fascinating, how they dote over their babies. So many Madonna and Child paintings seem like cliché's. This one does not. When you combine the innocent, optimistic young mom with the dead Christ nearby, the contrast is painful. (Question: Why did Mary cry when she realized she had a boy child? Answer: Because she knew that boys get crucified. That is not original with me. It was in Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*).





A Realization. In Assisi, we stopped at the Church of St. Mary and St. Felipe Niero where the guide noted that the pillars were constructed in honor of Minerva. The building was later turned into a Christian church. We took our obligatory photos of the pillars, then moved on. As we were leaving, we gathered outside the church and several of us went inside. It was stunning, a real masterpiece. I realized that if this were in the Midwest people would drive 500 miles to see it. Italy is filled with masterpieces that get overlooked because an even greater masterpiece is down the road. UNESCO has a list of 1,007 designated World Heritage Sites of which fifty are in Italy, more than in any other country. (China is next with 47, Spain with 44, Germany and France with 39, Mexico with 32, UK with 28, Russia with 26, US with 22). When you read the individual lists you realize that Venice and Florence are one site each. That is weird. We could come up with scores of sites in Florence that in another country would have an individual listing. What makes Italy unique is its strong bench. This is an amazing country.

Snippets

- If Italy were five countries, people would want to visit each one for ten day vacations. For the tourist industry, the unification movement was a setback.
- Italian has become my favorite language. English is wonderfully functional and is the international language, but Italian has a very nice music to it.
- In the Coliseum, the boxes for the Senators were almost at eye level with the lions. Security guards stood about in case one got hungry.
- Around Rome, people dress as Roman soldiers for tourists. I cannot look at these men without thinking of Bugs Bunny when he was sent off to be fed to the lions, and was chased by the Roman legions.
- Although the Sistine chapel was tightly packed, during tourist season there would be several times as many people in here than we experienced. Ouch!

- Actual bodies and body parts are on display. John XXIII is on display in the Vatican (since it is a relic we were allowed to take photos). We also saw the arm of John the Baptist, St. Clare's body in Assisi, and the head and finger of Catherine in Sienna. Hmm.

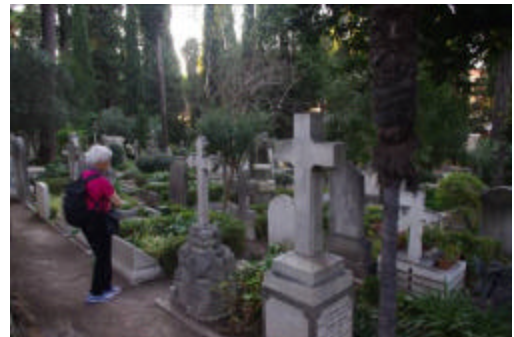


- The first Roman Emperor with a beard was Hadrian. He had a skin condition. Roman men shaved their eyebrows, then drew in substitutes. Note: I grew a beard because I hurt when I shaved.
- We had demonstrations of wine making, pasta making, glass blowing. My favorite was watching ceramics being made in Deputa.
- Italians are noticeably thinner than Americans. They walk more (or maybe pasta has a thinning quality that scientists have not discovered). Also they smoke more. This is very noticeable, even on the street where smoke is wafting about.
- I am going to write a book entitled *Under the Tuscan Fog*.
- Venice had an island where arriving sailors had to stay for forty days during the Black Death to see if they had the disease. The word quarantine (based on the word *quaranta* meaning forty) came from that practice.
- The last thing you want when you are taking a photo of a picturesque Italian street is to have a tourist in the photo, taking a picture of a picturesque Italian street.

Graveyards

I find cemeteries uniquely valuable in helping to understand life. I visited four.

English Cemetery: The English Cemetery in Rome was stunningly beautiful and the lady who ran the reception desk could easily have been Miss Marple's neighbor, getting ready to serve afternoon tea. It is sometimes called "the Protestant Cemetery" but officially it is the "Non-Catholic" cemetery (*cimitero acatallico*). It has graves of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and non-believers. Oscar Wilde once wrote that it is "the holiest place in Rome." Shelly had written that "It might make me in love with death, to think that one should be buried in such a sweet place." He was cremated and his remains buried here. His heart would not burn and was returned to his widow who buried it in Dorset. His stone has the Latin phrase *cor cordium* (heart of hearts) and the following inscription:



*Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange*

Keats died from consumption at age 26. He had fled England because of unfair criticism. He asked that his gravestone have only “*Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water.*” His friends added, “*This Grave contains all that was mortal, of a YOUNG ENGLISH POET, who on his Death Bed, in the Bitterness of his heart, at the Malicious Power of his enemies, desired these words to be Engraven on his Tomb Stone.*” His friend Severn, who accompanied him to Rome and cared for him, is buried nearby along with Severn’s young son. He wrote his own eulogy for Keats.

*Keats! If thy cherished name be ‘write in water’
Each drop has fallen from some mourner’s cheek;
A sacred tribute; such as heroes seek,
T-ough oft in vain for dazzling deeds of slaughter
Sleep on! Not honored less for Epitaph so meek.*

Gregory Corso, the San Francisco Beat Poet is here, as is Antonio Gramsci, the founder of the Italian Communist party and a great intellectual. Corso’s stone has a poem:

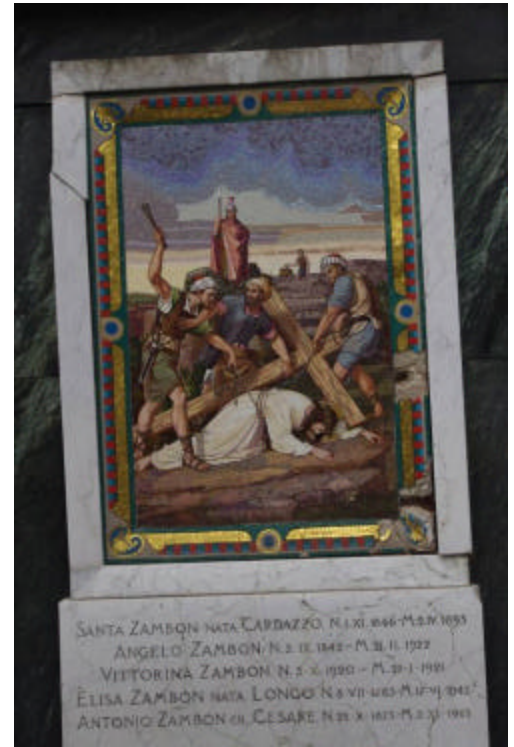
*Spirit
Is list
It flows thru
The death of me
Endlessly
Like a river
Unafraid
Of becoming
the sea.*



Above is the original Grieving Angel. It was made by the sculpture for his wife.

Italian Cemetery. *Cimitero di san Michele* is in Venice. It is on its own island in the lagoon. After a couple decades, people get recycled to an Isle of Bones unless they renew their lease. I took the water bus to get there. Officially it is Catholic, but there are Protestant and other sections. Stravinsky is buried in the “Greek” section, Ezra Pound and Joseph Brodsky in the “Evangelical” section. A young woman with long blond hair stood at Brodsky’s grave, contemplating it. It looked like a scene from a film, with a wonderful back story. There was a veteran’s section, a priest’s section, and a Campo de Bambino section. There were crypts and many stacked graves. One mosaic showed an individual protecting Jesus, something I had not seen before. Many families and prominent individuals were buried in the wall that surrounds the cemetery. Many graves had small religious statues sitting on them, including several with John XXIII. Quite by accident I saw the grave of Evardina Huberta, baroness von Wijnbergen, a. k. a. Tine. She lived from 1819-1874 and is considered the greatest Dutch female writer of her age. Her grave is a national monument maintained by the Dutch government.





American Military Cemetery. We stopped at the American Military Cemetery outside of Florence just as the sun was going down. There are 4,402 Americans here. The cemetery is neat and impeccably maintained. We participated in the lowering of the colors.



Bone Cemetery: In Rome, the Capuchins, a branch of Franciscans, collected the bones of their brothers from around the world and created a display. There are 3,700 bodies here from people who died between 1528 and 1870. One wonders at the strange genius who conceived this affirmation of life and death. There is a quote from Saint Francis in *Canticle of the Creatures*: “Praised be You, my Lord, through our corporal sister Death, from whom no mortal can escape.” The wall has a familiar statement: “What you are now, we used to be; what we are now, you will be.” There is also a quote from Hawthorne, who visited in 1860: “But the cemetery of the Capuchins is no place to nourish celestial hope: the soul sinks forlorn and wretched under all this burden of dusty death...thank heaven for its blue sky; it needs a long, upward gaze to give us back our faith. Not here can we feel ourselves immoral, where the very altars in these chapels of horrible consecration are heaps of human bones.”

The museum part had a small booklet made by Italian prisoners in Nyeri. They had been captured in Ethiopia and taken to Kenya where they were put to work building

roads. They believed that reports on the war were propaganda and made themselves a small 19-page booklet on their lives. I was fascinated by a drawing. It showed a defiant eagle with a fasces cord of wood in its beak, a chain in its claw dragging up battlefield items such as barbed wire and wooden wire holders, and disrupting enemy positions. The chains were broken. Mount Kenya was in the background. It was entitled “Italian Children in Nyeri,” children being a term for soldiers (“our boys”). This reminded me of the short memoir, *No Picnic on Mount Kenya*. Three of those soldiers decided to make an Italian flag, leave the camp, plant the flag on top of the mountain, and return to the camp. They agreed that this was not an escape but a demonstration of Italian pride. One of the men betrayed them and escaped, but the other two returned to camp after their victory.

There are five crypts, small rooms with bones arranged into designs. In the Crypt of Three Skeletons, two monks in robes sit erect under an arch of vertebrae. Two more lie on the side of the room with an arch of femurs. An undraped skeleton is on the ceiling. Other rooms are the Crypt of Shin-Bones and Thigh Bones, the Crypt of Pelvises, the Crypt of Skulls, and finally the Crypt of the Resurrection, which features a painting of Jesus reviving Lazarus. In four different places there were scorpions made of bones. These were very realistic, as if they were really scorpions. The people walking through (not many to be sure) seemed very quiet. Clearly they were thinking. One cannot leave this place without taking something away. What it is, I am not sure, but it is profound. This is not a morbid place. Nor is it depressing or discouraging. As someone who has taken his grandchildren to graveyards since they were very small, I think you learn something in a place like this, something that makes you reflect.

Photography was prohibited but I found some images on the internet.



Roman Cemetery: In the Forum, there is a honeycomb of graves now being excavated. It was just a small section, but similar enough to contemporary practice to be noteworthy.

Most Charming Genius: The award goes to Raphael. While Michelangelo was obnoxious, anti-social, dirty, and of indeterminate sexuality, Raphael was charming and beautiful. Everyone loved him, especially women. He died at 36 after a night of fun and games with several ladies. There are images of him in Sienna and the Uffizi but he



is buried in the Pantheon. The inscription on his tomb says, “Here lies Raphael by whom Nature feared to be outdone while he lived, and when he died, feared that she herself would die.” There is a bronze of the young artist.

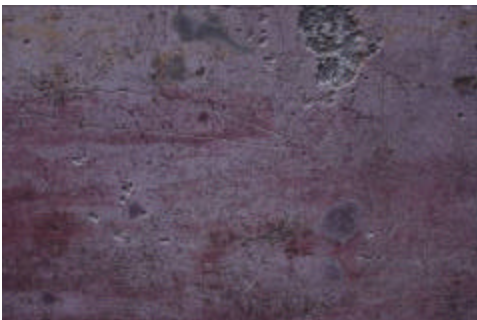
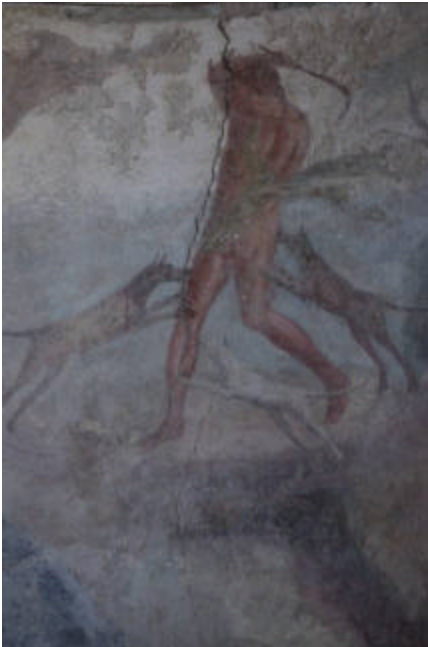
The Pantheon is remarkable building, dedicated to the ancient gods but turned into a Christian church. It has a simple design with an amazing dome. Victor Emmanuel II, father of Italian unification, is buried here, as are Umberto I and II.



Roman Roads: We have all heard of the Roman Roads and the saying that “all roads lead to Rome.” In fact these were military roads used to rush troops to rebellious provinces so in a sense “all roads led from Rome.” Along the way were Milestones telling people how far they were from Rome. In the Forum was Milestone Zero. It was clearly the center of a vast empire, and saw itself that way.

Thought: They say that inside of every Egyptian peasant is a pharaoh struggling to break free. I wonder if inside of every Italian there is Roman emperor struggling to break free. Certainly, Mussolini thought that way. And I recently heard the new Italian prime minister interviewed on Charlie Rose. He said his vision was that Italy would become the center of the European system. Hmm.

Pompey: This was an enormous city. Large sections are yet to be excavated. It has long roads, a business section, an educational section, a residential section, an amphitheater. There are even stepping stones for when the streets have water. Everyone knows the story of how Vesuvius erupted and spilled 28 feet of ash over this amazingly advanced metropolis. 1,225 bodies were recovered. Some are on display, including a dog, a pregnant young woman, and a man sitting. Joan Rivers once said that if she had been there, she would have been in stirrups, preserved eternally in that position. There were several naughty carvings about (although the dirtiest are in the Naples Museum).



The Tau: St. Francis adopted the Tau as an alternative symbol to the Cross. It looks like a T with no extension above the cross-bar. I bought a book on the subject because I had not heard of it. Apparently it was the symbol put on the door of the Hebrews in Egypt so the Angel of Death would pass over their first born. It is also mentioned in Ezekiel 9:4 and Revelation 7:2. It implies protection while the cross implies suffering. There is a large Tau hedge outside of the basilica in Assisi.



Gelatogate. Some paparazzi got a photo of a female minister, Maria Madia, 34, in a car with her husband, eating a gelato ice cream in a way that looked romantic. The Berlusconi newspaper *Chi* published it with the comment, “She knows how to do it with an ice cream.” Berlusconi’s girl friend called the story “disgusting.”



Destruction of Jerusalem. In the Forum, there is a victory column showing a triumphant Roman army carrying off the menorah from the Temple. In Venice, we saw an image of the event as a tragedy. While the soldiers are carting off the menorah, people are being massacred as a callous ruler oversees the catastrophe. How times change.



Fourth Crusade: We read in the history books that this was the last battle of the Great Schism separating eastern and western Christianity. But as I tell my students, whenever you see a religious struggle, there is always something more important than religion at the heart of the conflict. In fact, this crusade was more venial than religion. Venice was a commercial empire and they were nursing an old grudge in which their merchants in Constantinople had been killed. The Crusade was aimed at Jerusalem but in 1203 Doge Enrico Dandolo hijacked it into an attack on Constantinople. By 1204 the destruction was complete. While the allied armies contented themselves with rape, murder, and pillage, Venice began a systematic looting of the greatest city in Christendom. Vast treasures were taken home, including the magnificent four horses in the Hippodrome. The war left the Byzantine Empire seriously weakened so that when the ultimate Turkish assault

occurred in 1453, they could not survive. Doge Enrico is buried in Hagia Sophia. Here is how a British historian described the event:

The Latin soldiery subjected the greatest city in Europe to an indescribable sack. For three days they murdered, raped, looted and destroyed on a scale which even the ancient Vandals and Goths would have found unbelievable. Constantinople had become a veritable museum of ancient and Byzantine art, an emporium of such incredible wealth that the Latins were astounded at the riches they found. Though the Venetians had an appreciation for the art which they discovered (they were themselves semi-Byzantines) and saved much of it, the French and others destroyed indiscriminately, halting to refresh themselves with wine, violation of nuns, and murder of Orthodox clerics. The Crusaders vented their hatred for the Greeks most spectacularly in the desecration of the greatest Church in Christendom. They smashed the silver iconostasis, the icons and the holy books of Hagia Sophia, and seated upon the patriarchal throne a whore who sang coarse songs as they drank wine from the Church's holy vessels. The estrangement of East and West, which had proceeded over the centuries, culminated in the horrible massacre that accompanied the conquest of Constantinople. The Greeks were convinced that even the Turks, had they taken the city, would not have been as cruel as the Latin Christians. The defeat of Byzantium, already in a state of decline, accelerated political degeneration so that the Byzantines eventually became an easy prey to the Turks. The Fourth Crusade and the crusading movement generally thus resulted, ultimately, in the victory of Islam, a result which was of course the exact opposite of its original intention

Lake Trasimene: As an undergraduate, I took a class in Roman History. We had to write a book report so I chose Leonard Cottrell's new biography of Hannibal entitled *Enemy of Rome*. That book has stuck with me. Rome and Carthage (settled by Phoenicians) had been struggling for a century over control of the Mediterranean. Carthage had a stronger navy, Rome a stronger army. In the Second Punic War (of three) Hannibal attacked Italy from the north, bringing armed elephants and a massive army. This was 218 B. C. He destroyed the Roman army at Trebia, then another army at Lake Trasimene, then a crushing blow at Cannae. (My recollection of Trasimene was that the Romans were against the water and that Hannibal attacked in the fog, they being caught off guard). At one point, the Romans freed their slaves to create a new army, but it too was defeated. Finally, a Roman General named Fabius Maximus proposed an alternate strategy: Since we cannot defeat Hannibal, and since he has a massive army to feed, why not just avoid contact with him and let him collapse under his own weight. Hannibal continued to ravage Italy for 17 years but he was never able to conquer anything. And he had to keep moving lest the Romans attack when he was off guard. (In Britain the reforming socialists—George Bernard Shaw and others of his persuasion—created the Fabian Society using the same assumptions, that in time the system will collapse from its own weight. It was too strong to attack so the best strategy was to prepare proposals for the day after the collapse. This strategy was very successful and had a major impact on how the Labour Party behaved when it came to power in 1944).

Meanwhile, after 17 years, the Romans decided to take the battle to the enemy. They attacked Carthage itself, forcing Hannibal to rush home. He met the Roman army under Publius Cornelius Scipio at a place called Canae and was soundly defeated. Scipio was given the honorific title Scipio Africanus. We passed a plaque commemorating him in the Forum.

Fifty years later, with the struggle ongoing, Cato the Elder, leader of the war hawks, rose in the Senate and demanded that Carthage be exterminated. He ended each speech with the phrase *Carthago delenda est*, Carthage must be destroyed. This time, the Romans did not leave any loose ends. They razed the city, ploughed up the soil and spread salt over the land so it would be uninhabitable.

When my sons were little boys, I would tell them stories about little boys. I invented a little boy who was four. He had a little brother, one. The older boy was called P. Cornelius. The little brother was called Brutus Marcellus, nicknamed B. M. It was shameless potty humor.

I did not get a photo of that battle site from the bus, but like the Horns of Hittin in northern Israel, where Saladin crushed the crusaders, I saw it with my eyes and have it in my memory bank where anecdotes are stored.



Monte Casino. In 1944 when the Americans took Naples and landed at Anzio near Rome, everything seemed to be going well. But the Germans set up the Gustav line near Monte Casino and entrenched themselves. This monastery was on a mountain top overlooking the city. It was a historic site, a storehouse of treasures. The Benedictines had saved ancient culture by copying ancient manuscripts from Greek, Latin, and Arabic. It was designated as a neutral site, not to be bombed, but the Americans bombed it anyway. This was during three hours on February 15. First they had bombed the city below but then they hit the monastery itself. They believed the Germans were going to fortify that place, which they did as soon as it was demolished. This made the Allied task even harder. Four hundred people had taken refuge in the monastery, convinced it would be safer than staying in the city. All died. A painting shows some surviving monks walking out of the ruins. They had hidden deep in the structure and were spared. In the weeks prior to the attack, the Germans told the monks that the Americans would probably attack. They offered to take the manuscripts and art works to the Vatican where they would be safe. Hundreds of trucks appeared. All but three or four actually arrived in Rome. Those few disappeared, probably into Germany. A small service fee.

I had never understood why it was necessary to capture this position. Why not just drive around it and keep pushing north? Being there, I understood. The road was bounded on the right and left with mountains. There was only one route north, past Monte Casino. The battle to dislodge the Germans from the ruins was long and bloody. The role of the Polish units, who finally captured the citadel, was significant. They were under the command of General Anders. At that time, negotiations were ongoing in Europe as to future borders. The Poles really wanted Lviv, a mixed Ukrainian/Polish city. They thought if they proved their value to the Allies that would be their reward. Alas, Stalin had other ideas and Lviv went to Ukraine.



The Polish cemetery is visible from the monastery. It has over a thousand graves. I wanted to walk in that cemetery and visit the grave of General Anders (who died in 1970 and requested that his body be returned to Italy so he could be buried with his men). Alas, time did not allow such a diversion. This is the inscription in the cemetery:

*For our freedom and yours
we soldiers of Poland
gave
our soul to God
our life to the soil of Italy
our hearts to Poland*

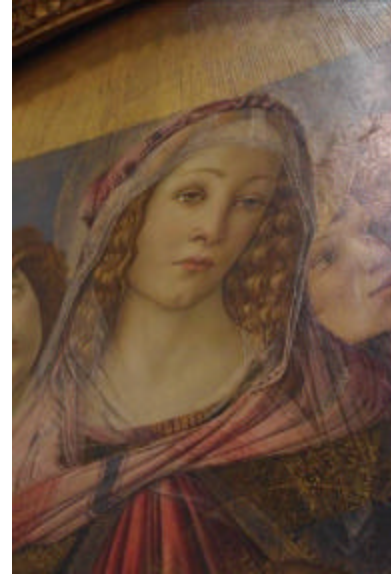
St. Catharine. 1347-1380. She was from Sienna. She refused to marry her dead sister's abusive husband and became a Dominican nun. She wrote a book and over 300 (surviving) letters to prominent individuals, working to end warfare between the Italian towns. She played a role in getting Gregory XI to return from Avignon to Rome. She received a stigmata but it was invisible (at her request). She is considered the founder of Tuscan literature. Her body is in Rome but her head and thumb are in Sienna. The Good Elders of Sienna decided she would surely want to be buried in her home town instead of in Rome where her tomb is. They snatched her head and put it in a basket. When the security guards stopped them, they prayed to her and she turned the head into rose pedals. When they got to Sienna, it had once again become a head. She is the patron saint of Italy (along with Francis of Assisi). She is also one of the patron saints of Europe.

Themes

When I am traveling, I often focus photography upon some theme. Four this time.

Blond Women without Head Cover: Much to my surprise, many depictions of Mary and Mary Magdalene portrayed them as blond. This seemed unusual because most Italians have dark hair. They were also portrayed as not covered. (Perhaps living among

Muslims, I would be attentive to that). Mary Magdalene is almost never covered. Mary at times looks like a nun, other times like a young woman with her beauty and even sensuality emphasized. (Look at the eyes in these paintings). Often the women have long curly hair. Mary Magdalene is almost always in one of two positions, comforting Mary, who has fainted with grief, or clinging to the feet of Jesus. Often she has a look on her face which is not just someone who lost a friend. The artists seemed to be telling us something.



Slaughter of the Innocents. A story in the Gospels tells how King Herod received a prediction that a rival king had been born in Bethlehem. Seeing a threat, he ordered the mass killing of all boys under the age of two. This theme, dead children, has a universal appeal. In Chaim Potok's novel, *My Name is Asher Lev*, a young Hasidic boy grows up in a strictly aniconic culture. You cannot even draw stick figures lest they violate the commandment against images. And yet he is given a gift, the ability to draw. He struggles with this as he realizes he has this talent. Shall he put it to use or shall it be, in the words of Milton, "lodged with me useless?" When he prepares for his bar Mitzvah his mentor tells him to go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to a certain gallery to see a certain painting. It is *The Slaughter of the Innocents*. As he looks at the painting, shocked, he realizes those children so revered by Christians are actually Jewish children. Suddenly the ideas of universal themes comes to him. The story moves towards an even more central Christian image, frightening to Jews, anguishing to his parents.

These paintings, which are very common, share certain images: children dead and mute, babies ripped from the arms of their terrified mothers, the horror on the faces of the hysterical women as they try to protect their children, the callousness of the soldiers as they carry out their task, the poised indifference on the face of the ruler giving the order. There is something universal in these paintings: A Syrian child, an Iraqi child, a Palestinian child, a Sudanese child, a Black child in Detroit.





Judgment Day: In the 1200s there were Christian heretics called Cathars. They did not believe in the Day of Judgment. They were concentrated in southern France around Albi (hence Albigensians) where they were dominant until they were suppressed in a crusade. The cathedral in that city has an amazing mural of the Final Judgment. It covers the whole wall behind the altar. It has a format that is found elsewhere: Christ in the center judging, the righteous on one side, the damned on another, the angel blowing the trumpet. To my surprise, the Cathars were also prominent in Umbria. In Orvieto was another large cathedral mural of the Final Judgment. On the outside there were additional images of horrible torture, just in case heretics decided not to go inside. In the mural, the dead are rising from the earth, sometimes with their skeletons greeting their old/new bodies. (We will be resurrected with our youthful strength, according to some teachings. See Isaiah 26:19. “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead”). The saved souls in the painting are happy (which is boring) so our eyes turn obsessively to the damned. This mural is a series of individual stories. People are being tortured in the most horrible way, each in terms of their particular sin. Gluttons are being force fed, gossips are having their tongues pulled out, sexual offenders are having their genitals eaten by monsters. The devils are thoroughly enjoying their task. The purple unicorn monster assaulting a women is filled with ominous images. I was also struck with the image of the devil above and the man on the ground, both with their penises showing. I am not sure what that devil penis is all about, but it scares the heck out of me. This was hard core propaganda, a warning to those who doubted the teachings of the church. Similar images of the Judgment Day were found on our journey (the last two show an earlier mural) but the one in Orvieto (by Signorelli) really struck me. The other one was in Venice, by Hieronymus Busch.

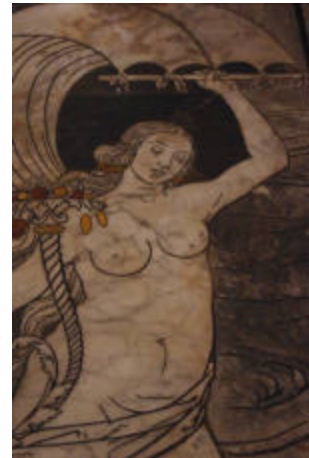




Least Surprising Miracle: In 1263 a priest from Prague came to doubt the Eucharist and the trinity. He was on his way to Rome, for whatever that meant in those scary days. On the way, he gave a mass and, lo and behold, the bread began to bleed. Clearly it was a sign from God. His faith was restored. The church was so grateful for this wonderful miracle that they built a cathedral in Orvieto to house the blood-stained altar cloth.

Naples Blood: Naples has a vial of blood of an ancient saint, San Genaro. Once a year they get it out to see if it will become liquid. If it does, it will be a good year. If not, well, good luck. (It liquefies as his head is brought near). The last time it did not liquefy was 1944. That was a bad year for Italy in the war, and the last time Vesuvius erupted.

Surprised: There was a topless woman in the Sienna cathedral. Actually it was a mosaic of a topless woman on the floor. I had not anticipated this, but the Italians were into natural things so perhaps this made sense. Of course, the Sistine Chapel has nudity but it is high up so you have to look hard to see the naughty bits. Michelangelo was strongly criticized to this and had to add fig leaves, but he got his revenge. There was an unwritten rule in those days that you should not criticize a painter until the painting was finished. Michelangelo drew his critic in hell, sitting at the feet of Satan, ready to do things to his private parts. Oh, my.



Bishop of Rome. Technically the Pope is the Bishop of Rome. As such he has his own cathedral, St. John Lateran. Of course, he has a deputy bishop who performs daily duties for him. This is one of seven extra-territorial places in Rome, places that are like embassies in that they are legally inside of the Vatican. When we went to the American Military Cemetery in Florence we were legally inside of the United States.

Two Basilica: The Basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli (St. Peter in Chains) is famous for Michelangelo's statue of Moses but it also has on display the actual chains that bound Peter while he was waiting to be executed. Moses was to be a part of the aborted tomb of Julius II but Michelangelo got diverted to the Sistine Chapel and the tomb was never finished. There was a religious service being led by a bishop and a cardinal. The recessional was very inspiring. The church of Santa Maria Maggiori is far more spectacular inside and outside. It is often visited by the Pope.



A Predictable Reversal: As soon as he died, the Church proclaimed the humble Francis of Assisi to be a saint. They built a humungous basilica in his honor. Buses carrying wealthy tourists from around the world descend upon this place by the hundreds of thousands. (We were among them). The saint would be appalled.

Underground City: Orvieto was an Etruscan city, built on a butte that overlooks the main roads. Saint Catharine helped persuade the Pope to return from Avignon, France to Rome. He settled here first because he had serious security concerns and this place was defensible. Popes continued to use this as a summer retreat when Rome got too hot in the summer. His palace is still there, looking like a large office building. The Etruscans who lived here were a part of a twelve-city federation. Unfortunately, they had no integrated military force so the Romans pushed them aside in the 400s B. C. In this high place, they built deep wells. The Romans, who were secure, lived near rivers and had aqueducts. In this city, people dug under their houses to create working basements. There are at last 440 of these, with hundreds more being explored. They were used for an oil mill, wine cellar, quarry, rope making. Pigeons were kept here for food. Each house had one.



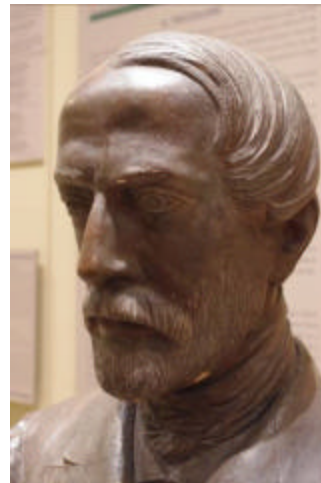
A Disappointment: In Florence, I was a few hundred feet from the tomb of Machiavelli and had to miss it. It was my own fault, miscalculating the time, but to a political scientist being so close and yet so far was a disappointment. Fortunately, I saw his bust.

Political Rally: We saw political graffiti and political rallies along the way but the best was in Venice. The Venetian Independence Movement was holding a rally with speeches and flags waving. Venice has its own traditions and its own dialect. They marched about shouting slogans and coordinating with each other. I think they are a part of a larger



movement to make the northern provinces (some of whom have German populations) independent. Just a month before our visit, Scotland failed to pass an independence referendum and just as we were returning home Catalonia voted overwhelmingly (in an advisory ballot) to leave Spain. I bought a Venetian flag, just in case they are successful. I also bought a Papal flag, since the Vatican is officially a state.

Political Events. I was very interested in the political system of Florence where the Medici family ruled (and were driven from power); where Savonarola, the revolutionary priest ruled and was burned; where Machiavelli was a military commander; and where Michelangelo lived. Machiavelli and Michelangelo both attended the sermons of Savonarola. (The cathedral was always packed when he spoke). Machiavelli criticized him in *The Prince* for relying on popular support. When it was withdrawn, he was overthrown almost without an effort. He was tortured grievously, tried, hanged, cut down, then burned. A plaque in the square commemorates the spot. In Rome, I went alone to the *Risorgimento* museum where there are paintings and other items from the lives of the great leaders of the unification movement. The heroic Garibaldi (right) is prominent, as is the intellectual diplomat Cavour (below), the passionate activist Mazzini (below), the first king Victor Emmanuel II (below) and Pius IX. Pius began his reign as a reformer but ended up a hopeless reactionary. When Italy united and he lost his kingdom, he declared himself infallible, swore he would never leave the Vatican, and promptly excommunicated everyone in the Italian government. No comment.



Villa Lecchi. This was everyone's favorite place to stay. It was an 800-year-old villa in Tuscany. After the post-war land reform, the sharecroppers left and the owners, the Venturi family, abandoned it. It was rehabilitated in the 1970s by the family that now runs it. The villa was elegant and wonderful, the views spectacular. Jane and I had a top floor apartment with two rooms and a circular staircase to an upper room for viewing. It was foggy most of the time so the viewing room did not do much good, but the grandmother made wonderful food, and Laura, who ran it, was delightful. What is memorable about Tuscany is not the sun, which we seldom saw, but the fog. There is ominous fog and friendly fog. Tuscan fog is that second type, filling the valleys but leaving the peaks free. It is very beautiful with the colored fields and small villages peeking out. It is a haze, a blanket, a transparent veil, allowing beauty to mix with mystery. Jane, who had read *Under the Tuscan Sun* and seen the movie more than once, said, "This is so beautiful, just like you thought it would be." So say we, all of us.

Films: After visiting the amazing city of San Gimignano with its fifteen towers, we watched *Tea With Mussolini*. It is about some English ladies (and others) who refuse to leave when the war starts because they are convinced that Mussolini is personally protecting them. Every single person in this film was a stereotype (except Mussolini, who really was that way). But the images of the places we had just visited were stunning. We also watched a BBC video *Francesco's Venice*, which was super. Mauro recommended some films for when we get back: *Avanti* (1972), *Macaroni*, about Naples; *Welcome to the South*; *Summertime* (romance with Audrey Hepburn and Rossano Brazzi in Venice), and any film by Rossellini.

Books to Read: Mauro recommended *City of Falling Angels* (about Venice), *The Italian Mind* by Severgnini, and *Rescuing Italy: The Secret Struggle Against Mussolini*.

Venice

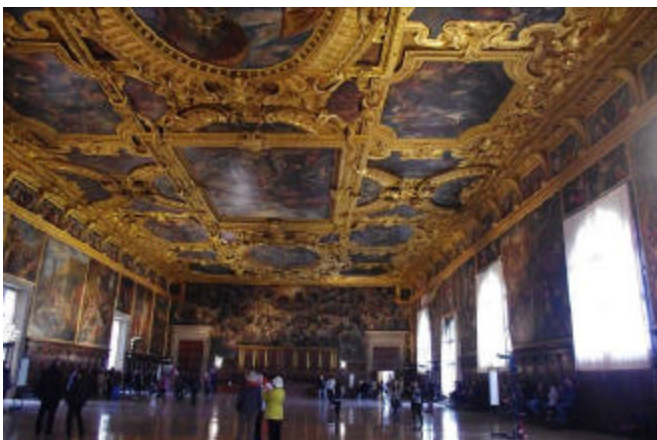
Most Surprising Miracle: Venice. Venice is a gift of Atilla the Hun. When he destroyed northern Italy in 452, the survivors fled to this lagoon, an area of 212 square miles. Here the water is so shallow that invading fleets would sink. It is hard to imagine how people could live here. Not only is most of the area water but the 100+ islands that dot the lagoon have such soft soil that they cannot sustain the weight of buildings. Everything is built on pylons. (One church is said to have over a million of them). The people built canals that have to be drained every two or three years for maintenance. Everything moves by water. There are no cars in the city, for any purpose. Even the ambulances move by water. There are water taxis and water buses to move people around. There are private gondolier boats that now specialize in tourism but were once a form of transportation. Over 400 bridges link the various islands together. All food and supplies have to be imported and all waste has to be shipped away. Garbage collection cans are dotted around the city. (The garbage is



shipped off to Germany for processing, then returned to Italy for recycled use). We even went to the airport in a water taxi. The enormous mansions that face the canal are slowly being recycled into hotels, casinos, businesses, office buildings. Often they have a water entrance as well as a street entrance. Living here is expensive so the population is falling. (85,000 residents and 25 million tourists a year. How do they handle that?)



The Doge: This city reminds me of Petra in a sense. It was not created by a powerful ruler as a statement of power, like the pyramids. It was created by a weak population of refugees determined to survive. They chose a place so uninhabitable that no one had ever claimed it. In the process of creating their city they created themselves. I think of the strong government necessary to achieve such wonders. They created the office of *doge*, a powerful ruler who, along with a council, could maintain order and sustain the city. The doge had to be seventy years old, to prevent dictatorships. One who tried to create a monarchy was removed from office. In the great hall, a display of all doges has his face covered over. He became an Unperson. There are a series of paintings of him being removed during a trial. The doge's assembly hall is the largest room in all of Europe. It is beyond spectacular.



Flooding: Venice is so close to sea level that it floods on a regular basis. 1966 was a legendary flood that swamped the city. They also have to deal on a daily basis with *Aqua alta* (high water) which pours into the downtown area on a tidal schedule. People walk around St. Mark's Square on elevated walkways wearing colorful boots provided by the local hotels or businesses. In traditional times, Venetians wore elevated shoes to navigate the waters. Houses along the canals have water deflectors on their doors. Some are home made, others provided by specialized companies. When there is no deflector, the doors rot from the persistent flooding.



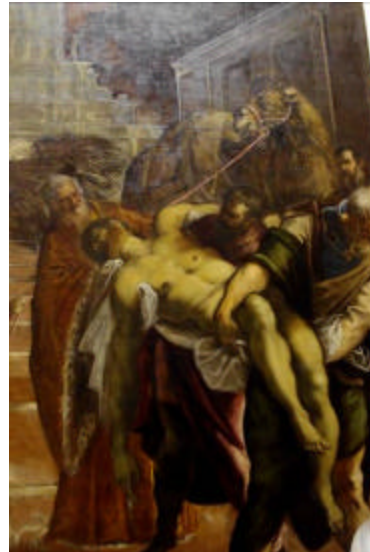
Scary Masks. Venice has a tradition of masks and masked balls. They appear to treat this very seriously. The shops are filled with masks and costumes. My favorite mask was the one used by doctors during the time of the plague. With the long beak, they could hide herbs and other items said to protect them from the disease. It sounds a bit like how doctors try to protect themselves from Ebola, which was devastating parts of Africa as we traveled, and had even penetrated the U.S. in a few cases.

Anonymous Accusations: In Venice, any citizen could submit an anonymous accusation by slipping it into the mouth of stone creatures placed about the city. An accusation was assumed to be true so the burden was upon the accused to prove otherwise. The prison, which is open to visitors, was a horrifying place. They used torture to extract the truth from accused persons. I suspect everyone confessed.



Snatching Mark. The patron saint of Venice is St. Mark, whose totem is a lion. The lion image is everywhere, often looking fierce, often with its back feet in the water but its front feet on land. These are wonderful images. Who would not want their city protected by such a lion? (Detroit has Lions but they have done a bad job of protection and usually get eaten by other animals). According to tradition, Peter sent Mark to Alexandria to spread the gospel. There he was arrested by jealous “pagan merchants” and was killed in 68. The good elders of Venice decided in 828 that his body should be in a better place so they sent a commando squad to snatch the body for proper internment. The commandos (led by the legendary Toma Cruzini) were successful in finding the remains but were in danger from the security forces who were told to prevent the body from leaving the city. The facade of St. Mark’s cathedral tells what happened next. In a Bugs-Bunny-type maneuver (“What’s Up Doc?”) they put the body in a basket and covered it with pork. The Muslim customs officials were horrified and refused to inspect the basket, thus enabling the rescue. The image of this story is all over Venice in mosaics and paintings. In one, his body is shown in perfect condition, unlikely after 760 years but consistent with a tradition that a saint’s body does not decay. In others, he is shown holding his gospel, properly printed and bound.

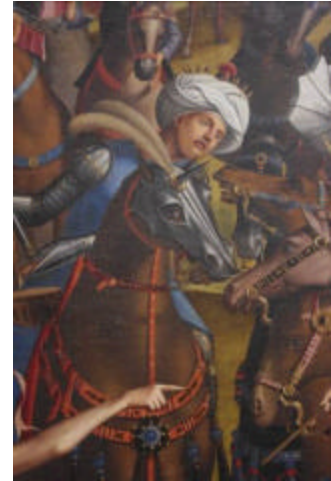
Alas, reality is often more complex than what we are taught. Andrew Chugg, a British expert on Alexander the Great, who is buried in Alexandria, says they got the wrong body. Christians had been protesting against something or the other and local authorities feared they would harm the body of Alexander. They decided to store it in the tomb of Mark, knowing the Christians would never harm Mark’s body. He says two bodies became one (the other disappeared) and the Venetians snatched the wrong body. What Venice has is the body of Alexander. That would be a good body to have but Alexander is no Saint Mark. Chugg suggests that there is an easy solution to this confusion. Since we know where the body of Philip of Macedon is buried, why not do a DNA test to determine if this is Mark’s body or not? Of course, the idea that the good elders of Venice would allow a DNA test that might delegitimize their saint is beyond ridiculous. In another complication, the Christian community of Alexandria has an annual parade featuring Mark’s head. I guess we just have to live with the legend and the doubts.





Surprising Stereotype: Throughout the trip, I did not see a single painting that depicted the people crucifying Christ as having the stereotypical features of hostile Jews. In fact, those who persecuted Christ and other Christian leaders were often portrayed as Turks. I had seen this in Vienna but Vienna had a near-death experience with the Ottomans in 1683. Their cathedral is virtually dedicated to the war against Islam. Italy had a more nuanced relationship with the Turks, alternately fighting them and trading with them. In Amalfi, the slogan of that once-maritime-republic emphasizes how they will fight for their religion against its enemies, clearly a reference to the Turks. When Saint Mark was killed in Alexandria in the first century, the people arresting him have Turkish-style turbans. And when his body was taken from Alexandria, the “pagans” are portrayed as Turkish Muslims. This makes me reassess. I once wrote publication analyzing how we mobilize images from previous conflicts to paste onto our current enemies, as if they have returned from the dead to attack us once again. What we see in Venice is less projection than retro-jection, taking images from today and pushing them back into historical conflicts where they make no sense. The Alexandrian authorities protecting Mark’s body would have been Turks but how would this work where his death is concerned? I guess their logic is that had such wicked enemies been there they would have been in the middle of it so we might as well blame them. Human logic can do strange things.





Jewish Quarter. Jews were admitted to Venice on work contracts. They functioned almost as guilds. There were four of these: doctors, money lenders, merchants, and used clothing dealers. They came in waves from different places, hence five separate communities and five separate synagogues. They were Germans from Eastern Europe, Sephardic (Spanish culture), Levantines (Turkey and Arab world, also Sephardic), Canton (i.e., Switzerland), and Italian (who had their own language, a mix of Hebrew and Italian). They lived outside the city but when an invasion threatened they were allowed to move into the area of the iron foundry (hence ghetto) for safety. Their numbers peaked at 5,000 in the 1500s. Today there are 500 Jews in Venice, 32,000 total in Italy (17,000 in Rome, 9,000 in Milan. Because the south was controlled by Spain, there were never Jews in that area). Now five Jewish families live in the ghetto itself, although the major community organizations are here. Others live in Venice. During World War II, many were shipped off, but most were protected and hidden by the Vatican or individuals. There is a plaque nearby that says “Our memories are your only grave.” The community is Orthodox but not Lubavich. (I had seen young Orthodox men walking about, and a large poster of Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, the late Lubavich “messiah,” so perhaps the guide was making a point for the sake of foreigners). I walked around the surrounding neighborhood. There were many Jewish businesses.

Little Known Facts (some that have not yet been confirmed):

- In the first draft, Pinocchio’s father was named Gelato. The editor changed it to Geppetto.
- Giuseppe Verdi was born in New York City under the name Joe Green. He wrote amazing operas but no one would produce them until he moved to Italy and changed his name.
- A popular Italian custom is to rub pizza on a small child and make it run across the piazza where there are pigeons.
- Gondola drivers live on pasta and Viagra.

- There is a saying among American tourists: When in Rome do as they do in Kansas. I have been unable to confirm this.

A Game: Whenever I travel, I make up short story titles. I started this in the Syrian town of Aleppo in 1996 when I had a group of students for six weeks. I was staying with the guys in the men's dorm. The outside doors were always open, and there were long curtains that reached the floor. Feral cats would wander into the dorm and hide in the curtains. I decided I could write a short story entitled "The Dorm Cats of Aleppo." It would have nothing to do with cats but would use the title as a jumping off point. Alas, I never got around to it. Here are some titles I generated during this trip.

- The Looming Towers of San Gimignano
- Ten Miles from Sorrento
- The Positano Bikini
- The Dry Blood of Naples
- Milestone Zero
- Shelly's Heart, Catharine's Head
- The Flying Pasta of Orvieto
- The Blond Madonna
- Missing Machiavelli
- A Home for Marko
- A Fig Leaf for Adam, A Rib for Eve
- Imprisoned in Stone
- David's Penis, Catharine's Finger
- A Piece of Michelangelo.
- Blood in the Bread
- Venice in the Rain
- The Pink Boots of Venice

Most of these have obvious origins. A few need explanation. There is a superb book about September 11 called *The Looming Towers*. In Sorrento, we were told that ten miles from that peaceful place people might be killing each other. Regarding Michelangelo, I noted that several places claimed that the great man had stopped in their town and was inspired to use their art for the Sistine Chapel.

Best Tour Guide. We had a super tour guide, Mauro Tonnelli. He was efficient, knowledgeable, entertaining, eternally patient. We got to meet his wife and four-month-old daughter Veronica.



Some Extra Photos

