

September, 2008

Life here in Italia is grande. I am trying my best to learn Italian as fast as I can, but languages always take time, so the Lord is teaching me patience as well. I have two more weeks of intensive Italian before school starts next month. I am really honored to be here at the North American College (NAC) with so many excellent men who are fervent about dedicating their lives to Jesus Christ and his bride. I have included a picture of my class below. I am in the 2nd full row center behind our rector, Msgr. Checchio. I also included another of the rector and I near Castle Gandolfo.

The first month I spent here in Italy at an Italian language school in Siena. It is beautiful, and I was there for Palio (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palio_di_Siena). It was an incredible experience and a time of growth for myself and the other 8 men who attended the school. While in Siena, we lived in the Basilica di San Francesco (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Francesco,_Siena). The Basilica houses a Eucharistic Miracle: 300+ year old Eucharistic Species. We had benediction with the miracle every week and the seminarians were able to examine the hosts up close. It was truly beautiful to see the faith confirmed: He is truly "God with us". While we were there, we also lived with 3 friars, which is obviously also cool.

It can't even begin to recount the graces that God poured into us there, but I will share such gift of the spirit. In particular God was teaching me about how absolute my trust and abandonment must be if I am to follow him. I meditated much upon the 19th chapter of Matthew. One of the things which I noticed for the first time is that, in his dialogue with the rich young man, Jesus never explicitly answers the man's question until the very end: "what must I do to **obtain eternal life**?...And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mothers or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and **inherit eternal life**." Eternal life is inherited in the giving of everything to follow Jesus. As Jesus slowly and patiently comes to invite this youth to personally follow him, he slowly reveals that hidden in the young man's question is the real problem.

It seems that our Lord creates a two-fold movement: it is impossible for eternal life to be "acquired" like the other earthy treasures of the rich youth. The rich young man went away sad precisely because his possessions could not give him life; nothing that we can "obtain" can truly satisfy even the rich. Rather what we actually desire is to be obtained ourselves, to enter into something bigger than ourselves, to come home. The treasure that we have in heaven is nothing less than this family. It is a mind blowing reality that in being free to follow Jesus, the apostles were able to spread the faith - to participate in the new creation of this family of God. Similarly, to enter into eternal life, we have to follow Jesus all the way in, all the way home to the Father. In doing so we bear that witness which draws all men to Christ and brings heaven and earth together forming that which is already but not yet.

Well, I have so much more to share, but I have to go to bed now. I love and pray for my family at IHM often.

We are family,

Andrew