

QUO VADIS

Tuesday morning turned out to be wild goose chase for Lisa and I while the others hung around the apartment. But it was a rewarding balance for the rest of the day.

We originally were scheduled to go to the Sistine Chapel by mid morning after Lisa and I would have finished getting a Police Report. By bus ride and part walk, we got to the Carabeniere office at just past 8. But no luck there. They don't issue Police reports. We had to go the bigger station 2 stops past the Colosseum (we had the map and gesticulated to show where they wanted us to go).

Communicating always has been a problem, as most Italians don't know English, and our broken Spanish is of little help. I looked around for a Tabacchi for bus tickets, and there were none in sight. Lisa stood by the bus stop, and struck up a conversation with a Pinay with a kid in a stroller and she offered us two extra bus tickets, and refused our refund. As a caregiver to some rich Italian, she was going to her amo a block away from our destination. What happens when you board a bus without a ticket, we asked? Nothing, unless the random inspectors board and catch you, then it's a Eu100 fine, and some embarrassing legal issues. How about all those others who didn't seem to have tickets? They have a monthly pass.

I looked for a pay phone to call the apartment, and this girl offered her cell phone. Braddock and company said they'd just wait for us, no matter what.

To make a long story short, we went to that larger Carabinieri station, then were directed to go to the Police station some distance away, where after a long wait, we finally got a Police report. Seems like the Carabinieri are different from the Police. It was important for me to document the fact that I had lost my driver's license.

Getting back by bus was another problem. The Tabacchi nearby had run out of bus tickets, and the closest one was four blocks away, at the next bustop. Anyway, we got back to the apartment at 1:00 pm. The others were relaxed and taking it easy, having done laundry work as the clothesline at the balcony outside our room was full.

We decided to go to the Sistine Chapel tomorrow. For the rest of the day, we'd drive around in the van, seeing what sights we could.

We drove to the Colosseum, which Paul and Nena hadn't seen yet, and surprisingly found easy parking right across, where two old watch-your-car men were directing traffic. I wouldn't be surprised if they were ex-Carabiniere (we tipped them when we left). Lisa rested in the van, while the others went off to the Colosseum. I went up the hill to an area of the map that indicated were the Baths of Trajan, but there wasn't much to see. I remembered what the tour guide had said: of all the old structures built 2000 years ago, only those that eventually become churches or other Christian places of veneration survived intact.



Above is a clowning photo at the Colosseum of a gladiator trying to cut me in two.

Then we drove off in search of Appia Antica, the ancient road where almost all areas flanking it have historical significance. We got lost and went in circles, passing the Circus Maximus twice, and the Arch of San Giovanni (near our apartment), and which I later read was where the American army marched through during WW2.

We finally found the Appia after asking around, and it turned out to be a narrow but much used shortcut for the motorists, so traffic was slow, but in a way was good because we could see the old ruins and structures alongside. At a sharp bend, we saw the sign Callixtus Catacombs, and a parking space, so we pulled in. Aha, these were the types of catacombs I was expecting. There were hordes of tourists, and we paid Eu15 each to descend down into the 20 km length of tunnels and caves carved out of the living limestone over 2000 years ago, and maintained for the next 300 years to inter the Christian dead. It was abandoned for over a thousand years until 1854 when it was rediscovered. We had to be led in (with about 30 others) by a tour guide, who was an English speaking Salesian priest from England. Their Order is tasked by the Vatican to maintain this site. I noted other tour groups for German, Italian, Polish speakers were all in queue. We of course didn't go all the 20 km. The tour took about 45 minutes and took us 20 meters down, where it actually was chilly, despite the balmy weather outside. At times, the tunnel was just wide enough for us to go single file. In one of the larger crypts, we saw a finely carved marble statue of St Cecilia the martyr. What struck me was the large inscription below saying "In memory of Cecilia McBride of New York". Well, it turns out that this was just a recent copy of the celebrated original work made in the 16th century, obviously donated by a rich NY family. Wish they had been anonymous.

It already was dusk when we left, and at the other end of the road, we saw the Quo Vadis Church, a small church which houses a stone marker indicating the spot where St Peter met Jesus while fleeing persecution in Rome. A mass had just started, and we attended, adding to the total congregation of just about 14. It was a fitting way to end the day.

Back at the apartment, we had another fine meal, and skipped the rosary.