



To celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, Lonny and I took an incredible trip! Prior to joining our Diocese's Annual Pilgrimage to Rome, we added on a Western Mediterranean Cruise. We feel very blessed and fortunate to have the opportunity to travel abroad. We experienced awe and wonder every day and it is difficult to fully comprehend and explain the intensely emotional experience of our trip. We will share with you a few major highlights. Hope you enjoy traveling with us via these Facebook posts.

Our trip began with a rocky start at the New Orleans Airport. When we arrived, Delta informed us our plane to JFK had mechanical issues and our flight would be cancelled. They rerouted us through Atlanta to Rome via Paris. (FYI -- Our layover in Paris was at the exact same time the deadly attack on the Kosher Supermarket was happening. We were safe though. Security was tight and we never left the Paris airport.) However, our final destination was Genoa, Italy to board our cruise. The NO Delta gate agents were being difficult and would only route us to Rome. When we arrived in Atlanta, we appealed again to Delta personnel. We had an extremely nice gate agent who rerouted us direct from Paris to Genoa without going to Rome. She assured us that our luggage would follow us. She was wrong! We arrived in Genoa without our luggage! Thanks to Delta's lovely new app which now tracks your bags, we knew exactly where our bags were – they never left Atlanta! Lonny was prepared, but I was not! Thankfully, we weren't boarding our cruise ship until the next day. We picked up our luggage at the Genoa airport just before getting to the Cruise Ship Terminal. Despite the early troubles of our trip, I was surprisingly calm and didn't let it affect our state of mind for this exciting trip. All was well – after all, we were in the middle of Italy – how bad could things really be! God is good all the time!



That's a first I ever saw! The Paris airport had Sony PS3 terminals to keep travelers busy while waiting for their flights.



The first night in Genoa, birthplace of Christopher Columbus, we shared the best bruschetta!



Our first stop was Marseilles, France. The French flags were at half-staff in honor of the tragic Massacre that happened the day before.



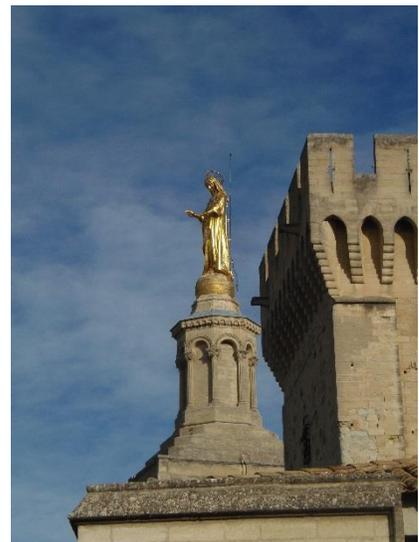
We traveled to Avignon, France. The Popes relocated away from Rome to Avignon during most of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. During that time, there were 7 Popes who were all French, which made it the longest period when the Papal Court was away from Rome. This caused the great “Western Schism” (Controversy of the Antipopes) in the Catholic Church. The Avignon Papal Palace became the residence of the Popes and is one of the largest and most important medieval Gothic buildings in Europe. While the Popes stayed in Avignon for 70 years, Rome suffered, population dwindled, and conditions got very bad. The case to return to Rome was made in the hope of achieving peace in the Papal States in Italy and the conviction that the seat of the Papacy could only be at the tomb of St. Peter.



Model of Avignon Papal Palace



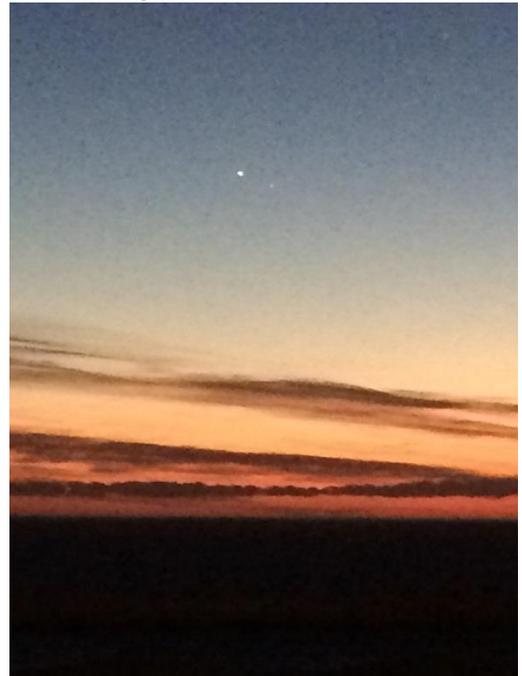
The Avignon Cathedral, located next to the Papal Palace, was built primarily in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The gilded statue of the Virgin Mary atop the bell tower, erected in 1859, weighs 4.5 tons and has her outstretched arms protecting the city. She is soooo beautiful!



Due to extremely high winds, we were delayed four hours from leaving. They even had white caps inside the port.



But, things always happen for a reason! Due to our delay in leaving the port, we witnessed a heavenly view of the first two planets of our Solar System. Mercury and Venus were seen in sky together in a rare viewing at dusk. In fact, Mercury, seen to lower right of bright Venus, is rarely seen. Mercury is the most difficult planet to view due to its small size and always being so close to the Sun and therefore gets faded out by its light. It is only ever seen during about a half hour of early twilight. We feel blessed to be able to have such a beautiful clear sunset view of the horizon in Earth's Eastern Hemisphere to observe this heavenly view of God's beauty and grace. We probably would have never looked up in the sky to view this had we been at home in our incredibly busy lives. God is good all the time!



## Barcelona, Spain

One of the things we never anticipated was the vast number of different languages of the passengers aboard a Mediterranean Cruise. Only approximately 10% of the passengers spoke English. We often felt like we were living in biblical Babel where we understood nothing around us. Therefore, our shore excursions were often cancelled because of a lack of English participation. Our only excursion option in Barcelona was a French and German speaking tour to Montserrat. Figured we would hope to understand some of the French. However, the German tour guides' pronunciation of French still sounded like German. We understood nothing and could not tell when he switched between the two languages! Lonny really wanted to tour the many Gaudi Masterpiece Buildings in Barcelona including the famous Sagrada Familia. Instead all we whizzed by on the bus was this row of houses built by 3 different architects. Gaudi's Casa Batllo is to the right. Guess we will have to return to Barcelona one day. Hope to see you next visit Mary Rodrigue Hidalgo!



## Sagrada Familia Cathedral

After having studied Gaudi's design when he earned his Architecture Degree at LSU, Lonny was most looking forward to visiting Gaudi's unfinished Cathedral of Sagrada Familia. He was sadly disappointed we did not have the time to visit. We only passed by it on the bus on the way to Montserrat without even getting a photo. This is a stock photo.

It is probably impossible to find a church building anything like it in the entire history of art. It is the most extraordinary personal interpretation of Gothic architecture since the Middle Ages. The construction of Sagrada Família began 133 years ago in 1882. Gaudi was a Spanish Architect, who joined the construction in 1883, was famous for his unique style and highly individualistic designs. At the time of his death at age 73 in 1926, less than a quarter of the project was complete. He was well aware that he would not finish the church in his lifetime. On the subject of the extremely long construction period,

Gaudí is said to have remarked: "My client is not in a hurry." An anticipated completion date is 2026, the centenary of Gaudí's death. The building is in the center of Barcelona, and over the years it has become one of the most universal signs of identity of the city and the country. Gaudí's original design calls for a total of eighteen spires. So far only eight spires have been built. The completion of the spires will make Sagrada Família the tallest church building in the world. Guess we will have to return to Barcelona one day. Hope to see you next visit Mary Rodrigue Hidalgo!



We visited Vilarnau – a fine Spanish vineyard well known for sparkling cava wine made in the French tradition of secondary fermentation in the bottle.



The Monastery of Montserrat is a Benedictine Abbey located near the top of the 4,000-foot mountain and is home to about 80 monks. We were even above the clouds!



The Black Madonna of Montserrat is located in the Basilica of Montserrat in a throne room above the sanctuary at the rear of the chapel where an altar of gold surrounds the icon. Before entering the Basilica, we purchased an English audio guide to help us tour the Basilica because we could not understand our guide!



You can see the Black Madonna Statue sitting above the altar area if you are sitting in the church's pews.



The Black Madonna of Montserrat is a wooden statue of Mary and infant Christ believed by some to have been carved in Jerusalem by Saint Luke. The statue has always been considered one of the most celebrated images in Spain. Contrary to popular belief, she is not black due to a portrayal of a Black African Madonna. It is known from historical descriptions of the Madonna that she was originally white and has simply darkened over time. They attribute the change either to prolonged exposure to candle smoke or a chemical reaction caused by a varnish used as a paint sealant. The statue was repainted black by successive generations of restorers.



A stairway leading up to the statue has doors made of repoussé silver.



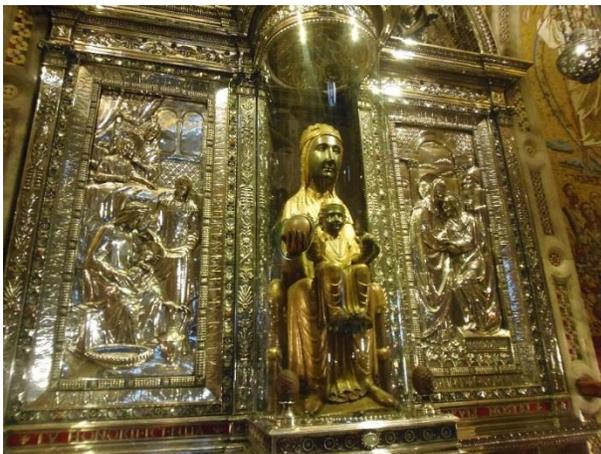
Repoussé Silver is a metalworking technique in which it is shaped by hammering from the reverse side to create the design in low relief.



The statue sits behind a sheet of glass. The body is thin, the face elongated. She holds an orb of the earth in her right hand and is not behind the glass. It is tradition to kiss or touch the Virgin's hand while opening out your other hand to Jesus. The Child's hand is raised in a formalized and traditional Eastern blessing.



The Black Madonna herself sits on an incredibly ornate throne which is covered in Venetian mosaics. After recovering from wounds of battle, St Ignatius of Loyola visited the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat (March 25, 1522), where he venerated before the statue before later founding the Society of Jesus.



This is the Chapel on the backside of the Black Madonna of Montserrat. You can see the rearview of the statue behind the glass above the altar. Lonny loved using his new selfie stick! Don't we look cute with our headphones?

## Mallorca

Mallorca is an island off the coast of Spain in the Mediterranean Sea. We visited Palma de Mallorca, the Capital City. Junípero Serra, the Franciscan friar who founded the mission chain in Alta California was from Mallorca, Spain. Pope Francis expects to canonize him in September 2015 during his first visit to the United States.



Bellver Castle is a Gothic style castle on a hill built in the 14th century and is one of the few circular castles in Europe. The Castle originally served as a residence for the Kings of Mallorca whenever they were not staying in mainland Europe. The views from the top of the hill are amazing!



We visited a Mallorca Pearl Factory to watch the pearls being made. However, the tour brought us there to mainly shop their store. Majorica pearls are different from oyster pearls. Majorica pearls are man-made in a factory, whereas oyster pearls grow in nature with frequent irregularities uncontrolled by man. It takes only several weeks to produce a Majorica pearl, while it takes years to obtain a sizable oyster pearl and only 5% are gem quality pearls. Majorica pearls lack individuality, as every Majorica pearl is perfectly matched and round-shaped whereas no two oyster pearls are alike. Oyster pearl's peculiarity stems from its certain blemish, similar to birthmarks or fingerprints.



Across the street from the Mallorca Pearl Factory was a massive Bull Fighting Arena – Puerta de Palma. This impressive structure was built only a century ago and is more known for the concerts held there than the Bull Fights.

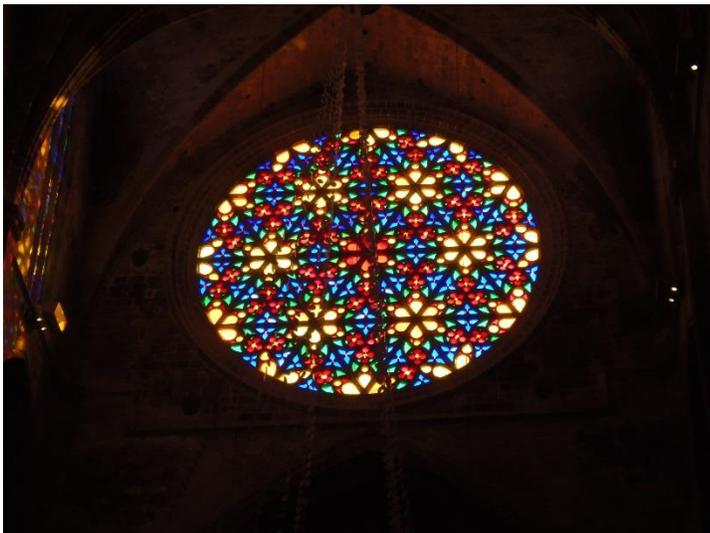


The Cathedral of Santa Maria of Palma, more commonly referred to as La Seu, is a Gothic Roman Catholic cathedral built on the site of a pre-existing Arab mosque. King James I of Aragon built Le Seu in

thanks for his survival during a great storm when sailing to Mallorca with his army. A storm raged so violently during the 3-and-half day journey that the young king feared for his life, so he made an oath to God promising, should his enterprise succeed, to erect a temple dedicated to the Virgin Mary. On New Year's Day 1230 the foundation stone was laid on the site of where the main mosque originally stood, so it faces Mecca rather than Jerusalem. La Seu took 400 years to build.



La Seu has one of the worlds largest stain glass windows containing 1,236 pieces of glass, and measuring almost 12m across.



Inside La Seu, the Spanish Architect Gaudi added the wrought-iron canopy over the main altar in 1909. He raised the canopy as a chandelier designed to look like the Crown of Thorns.



Le Seu is the only major cathedral which faces the sea. It stands out from its surroundings, a demonstration of the might of Mallorca's Christian conquerors to all who arrived by sea.



Pompeii -- Fascinating, haunting, and amazing all at the same time! The most surprising thing about Pompeii was that the Ruins are not so Ruinous at all. Pompeii is the best preserved Roman city in the world. The city is frozen in time and untouched for centuries. This visit was as close to time travel as you can get.



Mount Vesuvius is the only active volcano on mainland Europe. It is also one of the most dangerous in the world due to the proximity of population so near. Approximately 600,00 people live within the "red zone" -- identified as 9 miles near the volcano who stand little chance of survival in the next eruption. Scientists expect that the next eruption will be an incredibly forceful explosion. In the past, Mt. Vesuvius has had a roughly 20 year cycle of eruptions. However it is well overdue for the next eruption since the last eruption was 1944.



They say this was evidence of a Fast Food Place with burners keeping the food warm at an outdoor market.



These were the first bodies found in Pompeii. However, they were NOT victims of the eruption. They were “Robbers” who got crushed when the roof collapsed where they were stealing.



When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, it buried the city with up to 20 ft of volcanic ash and rock. Extreme heat exposure to at least 482 °F was the main cause of instant death of people, even if people were sheltered within buildings. During early excavations of the site, occasional voids in the ash layer had been found. The spaces were left by the decomposed bodies. The technique of injecting plaster and clear resin into them is used to fill the voids and to recreate the forms of Vesuvius's victims. This allowed one to see the exact position the person was in when he or she died. It puts a chilling face to this tragedy. There are many ghost-like body casts throughout the ruins.



The cart tracks in the paved roads where the wheels of the carts have driven deep ruts into the Roman paved roads.

View into narrow street of Pompeii



Plaster Cast of Small Boy Praying





Plaster Cast of the body of a pregnant woman.



The Amazing Carrara Marble Quarry



The Leaning Tower of Pisa (on right) is located in the Piazza del Duomo which is a walled off square which also includes the medieval Cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption (middle) and The Baptistery, dedicated to St. John the Baptist (on left).



The tower's tilt was caused by an inadequate foundation on ground too soft on one side to properly support the structure's weight. Due to a mere three-meter foundation, set in weak, unstable subsoil, the design was flawed from the beginning. Prior to restoration work, the tower leaned at an angle of 5.5 degrees, but the tower now leans at about 3.99 degrees. It was, however, considered important to retain the current tilt, due to the role that this element played in promoting the tourism industry of Pisa.



We climbed to top of tower's 296 steps.



At the top is a bell chamber added in 1372. There are seven bells, one for each note of the musical major scale. The largest one was installed in 1655.



The Baptistery, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, stands opposite the west end of the Duomo as the largest Baptistery in Italy. Its circumference measures 107.25 meters. Taking into account the statue of St. John the Baptist on top of the dome, it is even a few centimeters higher than the Leaning Tower.



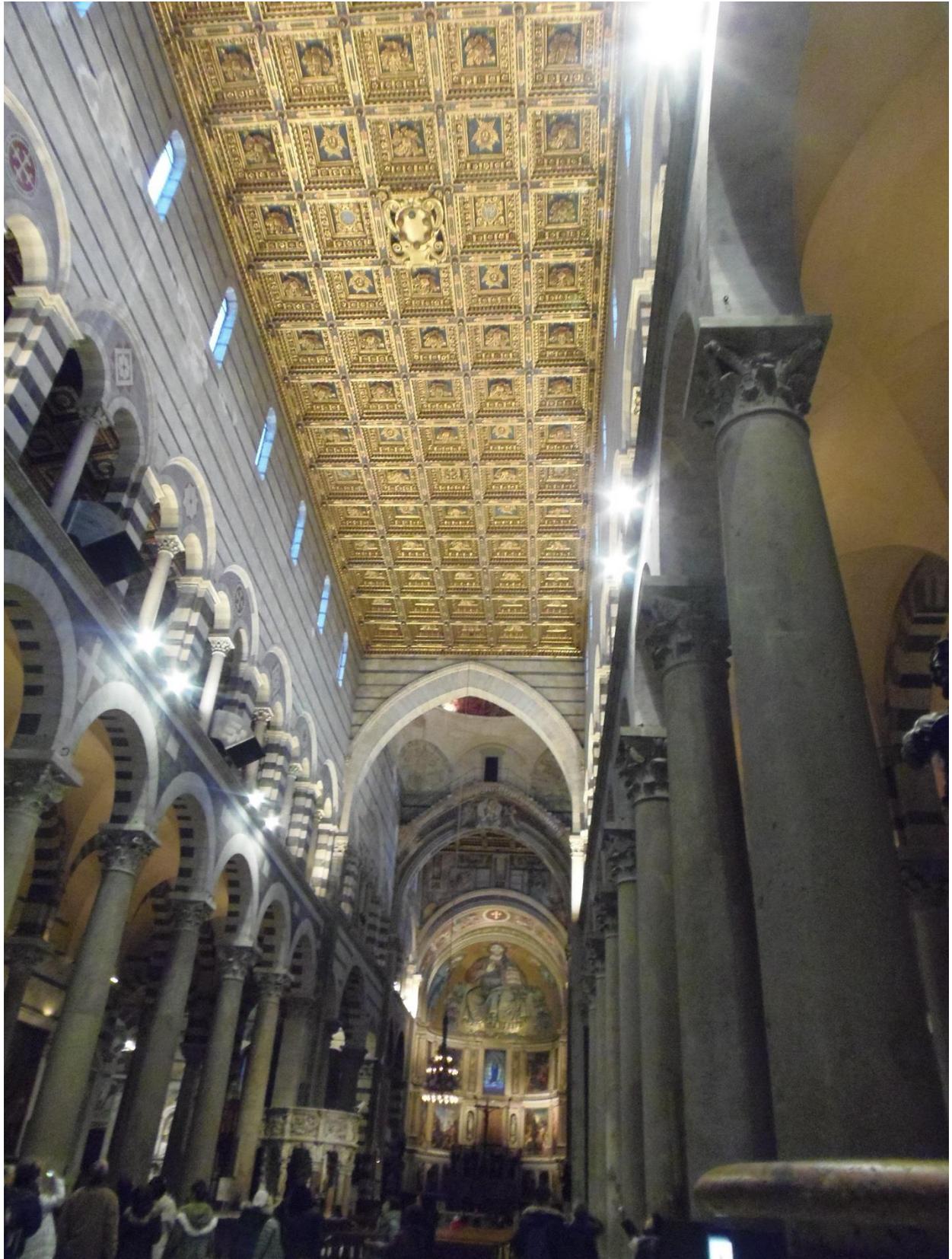
Under the dome of the Baptistery in Pisa a stunning acoustic effect can be heard. Notes sung here last so long, it's actually possible to sing with yourself -- new notes will harmonize with old ones still reverberating around the space. The Baptistery Guard demonstrates this beautiful effect.



The Medieval Cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption in Pisa -- Lonny says the inside is the most beautiful church he has ever seen in Europe! A Mighty big thought when you consider we have seen lots and lots of churches in Europe!



The Inside of the Cathedral in Pisa.



Galileo is believed to have formulated his theory about the movement of a pendulum by watching the swinging of the incense lamp (not the present one) hanging from the ceiling of the nave of the Cathedral in Pisa.



Lonny pretending to be Holding up the Leaning Tower of Pisa

