

Pilgrimage to Assisi & to the Basilica of San Francesco

Friday 18th September: We all meet up at the departure gate of Vueling and after much guessing on how to pronounce Vueling; the British and Irish Delegation for the Constantinian Order boarded their flight to Rome. The five-man team consisted of HE Sir Anthony Bailey, HSH Princess Marie-Therese von Hohenberg Lady Bailey, Mr Rory More O'Ferrall, Councillor Clare Head and Sir William Jeffcock. Having successfully arrived to a hot Rome we boarded our black sprint van for the three-hour trip to Assisi. On arrival Sir Anthony had Order meetings to attend to, so we were left to settle in and explore the town. At 7:30 we all wandered down to the Hotel Giotto for a buffet dinner. Baron Miguel Horton e Costa the delegate for Portugal and a neighbour of Sir Anthony's joined our table. Cllr Clare Head managed to spot a black cloud and in five minutes it started to rain gently. Everyone rushed to the covered part of the terrace but within a few minutes the rain stopped and we returned to the evening air to enjoy the food and company. We met the Grand Chancellor HRH Princess Beatrice of Bourbon of Two Sicilies escorted by the Italian delegate and host for the Pilgrimage. After dinner we all strode up to the lower Basilica of San Francesco where we celebrated a short mass held by the Order's Grand Prior Cardinal Martino.

Saturday 19th September: Today was another hot day. HE Sir Anthony had meetings all morning in the Sala della Concilazione within the Palazzo del Municipio or Town Hall. Us pilgrims were set free to explore the castles, churches and cafes of Assisi. At one o'clock we all meet up for a seated lunch at The Hotel Windsor Savoia. Dressed in suits and ties, we all felt like boiled sausages by the end of our meal as the air conditioning was of the natural window kind. The pasta was delicious and the pudding certainly memorable. Prince Don Cristoforo Rocco also part of the UK delegation joined our table along with one or two members of the Italian delegation. Straight after lunch we all walked down to the Serafico Institute, a care institution for children and young adults with disabilities. A specially adopted bicycle for two was presented by the Order to the Institute. We were all most impressed by all the wonderful paintings done by the residents of the Institute. After the presentation, Sir Anthony and team jumped into a taxi and had an official tour of the Basilicas of San Francesco & Santa Chiara and the Roman temple of Minerva, which is now a church. After recovering from the heat of the tour (while still wearing suits) and the stimulating English explanations of the tour guide. We drove up to the Basilica for a beautiful concert led by the Constantinian knight Maestro Matteo Fedeli. Playing on a 1715 violin called Bazzini by Stradivari, we were treated to St. Paul's suite by Holst and Concerto in Sol Maggiore by Haydn. Afterwards we regrouped at the Hotel Giotto for dinner. The final surprise event of the evening was a candle light procession up to the Basilica of San Francesco to celebrate the arrival of Pope Francis in Cuba. Prayers were said and we all dispersed for bed.

Sunday 20th September: After early breakfasts we all got ready for the march of the "Sacro Militare Ordine Costantiniano di San Giorgio" into the Upper Basilica of San Francesco. Some 150 knights & dames prepared their mantles in the lower cloister of the Basilica and placed themselves in order of rank ready for the march up the hill and into the Basilica to celebrate mass lead by the Grand Prior Cardinal Martino. Following the banner of the Constantinian Order we marched: children in the lead, ladies and dames following in their ranks, and finally the knights of Office, Merit, Grace and Justice with the Delegates in the rear. Under the watchful eye of Giotto's paintings we entered the Basilica, took our places and celebrated Sunday Mass. After the mass we streamed out in order of rank under the bright Italian sun and to the astonished eyes of hundreds of tourists with their smart phones. It was a memorable morning. By 1:30 we had all dispersed in cars, taxis and buses to homes, airports and other destinations.

Thank you God for a successful and thoughtful Pilgrimage.

Sir William Jeffcock, KCN, KGCO,

27th September 2015