

**Canonization of Charles de Foucauld in Rome,  
International Council in Graz  
Diary of Matthias Keil: 13 - 25 May 2022**

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**Friday, 13.5 2022**



In the morning I arrive in Roma Termini by night train. On the train I met the Little Sisters Marianne and Helene and Daniela, one of their friends. At the station we buy a weekly ticket for the public transport system and have our first Italian caffè and a small breakfast. Then I take tram H across the Trastevere district to the outskirts of the city and after a short walk I find Via della Nocetta 111, the Generalate of the Società Missione Africane (SMA). The house is close to the large Villa Pamphillii park. Andrea Mandonico, whom I know from the

Nazareth Month 2013 in France, made it possible for us, the International Council, to stay in his house. On arrival, he is just at the front door and takes me straight to lunch.

The religious community's main goal is the African mission. So it is not surprising to meet some African students and priests in the house, but also the General Director Antonio Porcellato and his team or council members. In the house, which is very quiet and surrounded by greenery, everything is very



*Società Missione Africane, Via della Nocetta 111*

uncomplicated. I move into a pleasant room, we enjoy the meal and take pleasure in the stimulating table conversations, primarily English and French are spoken. To my delight, I meet Pierre Sourrisseau from Paris in the house. He has written the most comprehensive work currently available with a wealth of detailed knowledge about CdF. What was new for me was that he knew exactly about the archives of our priestly community, which are in the church of St. Augustin in Paris and which he has catalogued.

We had been on the trail of information about "our" archive for a long time.



In the evening, I attended the first event in Trinità dei Monti, or rather in the beautiful inner courtyard of this church, which is situated above the Spanish Steps, an introduction for mainly French-speaking pilgrims. There were two talks, one by Father Ardura, the postulator of the canonisation process, another by Jean-Marc Aveline, the Archbishop of Marseille. He tied his reflections to the places of Nazareth (hiddenness), Bethany (friendship) and Golgotha (surrender, fruitfulness of impotent love). In the cloister there is a beautiful exhibition of contemporary paintings from the life of CdF by the artist Veronica von Degenfeld ([www.vvdegenfeld](http://www.vvdegenfeld); [veronica@vvdegenfeld](mailto:veronica@vvdegenfeld)). The first interesting meetings took place: with a priest from Burkina, a Little Sister who is responsible for Morocco and Algeria,

and above all with Marc Helfer, a priest from Strasbourg who works in Morocco and whom I have been looking for a long time as a contact person for the priestly community.

### **Saturday, 14.5.2022**

In the morning I make a short visit and tour of the city: Piazza Navona, Piazza Argentina, Pantheon, Piazza Venezia and back by tram 8. At noon we are complete: Fernando (Chile) had already arrived the day before, Honoré (Burkina), Eric (Philippines) and Tony (Philippines) joined us only now after exciting visa stories. In the afternoon we meet for a first exchange round, we had met only once since our election 3 years ago in South Korea in presence. But very regularly, almost monthly, we held our video conferences.

In the evening we attend a vigil in San Andrea della Valle. I was a little late, as I had just visited Aunt Helli Lod-Fe, her daughter Catarina and her husband Arturo, and it takes quite a long time to get from one place to another in Rome. Among others, the Archbishop of Marseille and Père Hugues, the Abbot of Notre Dame des Neiges, who I already knew from our unforgettable trip to France in 2017, spoke at the vigil.

Abbot Hugues was the one who answered the not very outstanding question from our group about what Trappists do all day: "We pray for the conversion of the Austrian priests!" That evening I was sitting next to a Little Sister of the Lamb who lives as a hermit in the south of France. She was happy to see an Austrian, as Cardinal Schönborn is the person in charge of this community. The return journey to our quarters was not easy because it is difficult to find a taxi.

### **Sunday, 15.5.2022**

Today is the day of the canonization. Antonio takes us by car to the vicinity of St Peter's Basilica (Cavalleggeri), from there it is only a few minutes to the entrance to St Peter's Square. We were already there at 7.15am and therefore one of the first, but the entrance was still closed. While waiting, we already had our first encounters, among others with Marianne Bonzelet. Then the entrances open and we luckily find the right entrance for priests who are allowed to concelebrate. There it gets exciting again because Eric and Tony didn't have tickets, but they too are waved through in the crowd and we are at St Peter's Square and in the right section. A great relief for the time being!

As we still had 2 hours before the start, I wandered around and, rather against my habits, spoke to all sorts of people, especially in English and also in French.

There were:

- a Canadian priest who held retreats for CdF's relatives in the flesh in the days before;
- a priest from Alaska who has worked in Siberia for 35 years;
- an Irish "White Father" who has lived for a long time in Algeria and the Arab world;
- a Nigerian priest who is secretary to Cardinal Arinze;
- a student from Indonesia whom I wanted to associate with Lius;
- a Dutch priest whose uncle was very close to the new Dutch saint who died in the concentration camp;
- an Indian priest from whose parish came the Indian saint who died as a martyr ...

It is a very unique experience: St. Peter's Square filled with 10,000 people from all over the world, the large crowd enclosed by the colonnades as if by two huge arms, in front of it the covered tribune with the altar at which the Pope stands in his fatherly and familiar manner, and behind it the wonderful façade of St. Peter's Basilica on which 10 banners with the portraits of the new saints have been placed. CdF would certainly have liked the fact that not all the attention was focused on him alone, but that he was one among several to be canonized. The act of canonization takes place right at the beginning of the Holy Mass. First, the "Veni creator spiritus" is sung, and Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, who is responsible for canonizations, comes before the Holy Father together with the postulators and asks that the new "candidates" be admitted to the ranks of the saints. He then read out short biographies of each of them. The Litany of All Saints is sung, the Pope pronounces the official text of canonization and signs a document attesting that the new saints may now be universally venerated in the Church. .... Carolum de Foucauld, ... Sanctos esse decernimus et definimus, ac Sanctorum Catalogo adscribimus, .... Finally, the Cardinal and the Postulators thank the Pope and the Mass continues with the Gloria.

Impressions from St. Peter's Square:



St. Peter's Square is in the blazing sun on this Sunday and so we are all glad that the liturgy lasts less than 2 hours in total - a truly good mix of solemnity and simplicity. Everything was perfectly organized.



Since everything was very intense in the end, we rested in the afternoon, I was allowed to discover the huge and wonderful park

very close to our you can walk for green. In the of going back oratorio on CdF worth seeing, we the house chapel worship. So



quarters, where kilometers in the evening, instead into town for an that was certainly preferred to use for a time of

the canonization of Charles de Foucauld.

ended this long awaited 15 May 2022, the day of

## Monday, 16.5.2022

7.30: Lauds, followed by breakfast.

8.30: Departure for S. Giovanni in Laterano for the Mass of Thanksgiving, for which we arrive just in time. As concelebrant I have a very good place behind the altar and can look into the wonderful nave. A not long but special part of the Mass was a thanksgiving directly to CdF immediately after the Gospel. It was very nice to hear not only a thank you to God for CdF, but also for once words addressed directly to him: "Thank you for loving life and daring to explore it in all its dimensions. Thank you for descending to the last place. Thank you for all the relationships you have woven with such fidelity. ..."

Meetings after Mass: LS Franka (fellow sister of LS Monika in Algeria), LS Katharina Zimmerbauer from Graz, ...



*Thanksgiving Mass at San Giovanni in Laterano, May 16.2022*

13.00: Lunch in a typical Italian "bar" with fellow Irish brothers John McEvoy and Liam. Short walk to the Collegio Irlandese for the meeting of the European leaders. Wonderful old villa from the 17th century, for a long time used for the Irish students in Rome; today, unfortunately, there is not a single Irish person left, 29 post graduate students from all over the world live in the house, furthermore 9 American students.



*European Team: Kuno KOHN, John DEEGAN, Alain FOURNIER*

Our meeting is very well attended, the only ones missing are those responsible from France, Wallonia ... I can personally meet some of those I only know from my address file, such as Gigi (It.), Aquilino (Span.) and Niall Ahern (Irl.). The next European meeting will be in Annecy in July 2023. After this meeting we take the metro to the meeting of the leaders of the Spiritual Family in Via Aurelia 218 and after an adventurous stretch on foot on the edge of a busy road we arrive there well.



*Middle: John Gordon Mac William, Bishop of the Sahara*

Meetings: LS Benedicte from Paris, who belongs to the Little Sisters of the Gospel, the first foundation of the Spiritual Family from 1931. There were never more than 50 sisters in their community; LS Giuliana, discepoli d'Evangelio, whom I already know from Viviers; Andreas Knapp; John Gordon MacWilliam, Bishop of the Sahara; Return journey by taxi.

## Tuesday, 17.5.2022

After Lauds and breakfast, about 25 min walk to the bus, which takes us to St Peter's Square (Cavallegieri). A visit to the Ancora bookshop, where I am delighted to find a long sought-after brochure with the Eucharistic Prayers in 8 different languages.



Then comes the visit to the Congregation for the Clergy (Piazza Pio XII), which is initially associated with a certain amount of excitement. As the Prefect, Bishop Lazarus, cannot be there in person, his secretary, Bishop Andres Ferrada, conducts the conversation with us. He is a good acquaintance of Fernando and, to my surprise, the titular bishop of Tiburnia, which in ancient times was near Spittal an der Drau. The building of the congregation has little attraction about it, it looks like an administrative building. The conversation takes place in a pleasant atmosphere - Bishop Ferrada has prepared well for the conversation. He pointed out to us that in some respects our statutes no longer correspond to the reality of the priestly

*Entrance of the Congregation for the Clergy*

all members of the  
areth month, but in  
does so. Surprising

conclusion: We should adapt the statutes to reality and not vice versa. Elements of spiritual life do not have to be in the statutes, but can be described in a separate Directory. Bishop Ferrada recommends an expert, Agostino Albertini, who knows a lot about "associazioni" or "private international associations of priests", which is what we are under canon law. The conversation then touched on other topics: Ongoing formation and that the carelessness of some priests is a problem. A beautiful word from in between: "God's love reaches us. We testify that this makes us rich."

After the talk, Eric says goodbye and "moves" to the meeting of the Spiritual Family, Fernando has a meeting with a Jesuit as a postulator of a Chilean priest, and Honoré, Tony and I leave for Tre Fontane to visit the Generalate of the Little Sisters. Another special experience! All kinds of people seem to go in and out of there these days.



I myself am happy to meet LS Katharina Ruth (Zimmerbauer) and to talk for the first time with LS Monika Greti from Kirchberg a.d. Raab, who is a member of the General Council. She asks that we contact priests from Hungary, where she lived for many years. There are supposedly some CdF priests there: Attila Thorday in Szeged, rector of the seminary in Budapest ... Contact person could be LS Nelly. Monika Greti: 0039 349 8160791; [jktmoni@gmail.com](mailto:jktmoni@gmail.com) The return journey by public transport takes about 1 ½

hours.

*In Tre Fontane with LS Ruth Zimmerbauer  
and LS Monika Greti from St. Margarethen/Raab*

## Wednesday, 18.5.2022

Mass, breakfast and taxi ride to visit the Clergy Congregation for the 2nd time. This time Honoré and I are alone to meet Agostino Albertini, a canonist of the Clergy Congregation. It is again a conversation in an uncomplicated and cordial atmosphere. We receive some valuable advice for the reformulation of our statutes.

Afterwards, I go to St Peter's Square and just hear the concluding Our Father of the General Audience. Fortunately, this is just in time to reach Hubi Pott, who is on her way with a small delegation of Styrian guests and the Austrian ambassador. Interestingly, the ambassador used to be in Algeria, which is why she is familiar with CdF. Mrs Valeskini, whose daughter Lisa Maria I baptized 22 years ago, belongs to this group. I have the rare opportunity to visit the empty St Peter's Basilica and the tomb of St Peter the Apostle, where I pray for our priestly community and some other intentions. I also have the opportunity to visit the archives of the St Peter's building lodge. A very friendly taxi driver from Sicily brings me back to Via della Nocetta.

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## Thursday, 19.5.2022

### Day of the trip to Graz

For various reasons I did not want to fly to Graz with "my troop", which might have been easier, but make this journey by train and bus. It turned out to be a beautiful and impressive day of travelling with frequent "changing of camels". First Antonio takes us to the metro station Cornelia, from where we go to "Roma Termini". Our "Frecciarossa" departs punctually at 9.35 and takes us at up to 250 km/h through an enchanting landscape to Mestre. There we have to change to a bus to Villach, from there we continue by train to Klagenfurt and finally by bus to Graz. I am glad when we reach our destination well in the evening at about 20.30, and marvel at how precisely all our means of transport were on the way, as we only had about 15 min each to change. A single delay would have upset the whole itinerary.

## Time in Graz

### Thursday 19.5. until Wednesday 25. 5.

I found the time in Graz a very intensive time. Life in the vicarage and the services here in the church, the joint work and also the visits we made, everything went very well in the end. We visited our bishop, who very spontaneously took time for us on Saturday before he went to a confirmation. After the bishop's visit we went to GEA to buy shoes. This was my gift to the confreres and was symbolic of walking on a common path. On Sunday, after the farewell Mass for Prof. Schaupp, we went to visit "Mama Lotti". Mami is in surprisingly good shape, speaks good English and visibly leaves an impression. Except for Fernando, who prefers the now familiar surroundings of the vicarage, the rest of us go to



*Arrival at Graz, Heart of Jesus Parish*

a desert day on the Schöckl on Monday. Because of the limited time, we take the gondola, which is an exciting experience, especially for Honoré, who has no mountains at all in Burkina. Tuesday takes us to the seminary and to Regens Thorsten Schreiber. Since priestly formation is a big topic for all of us, both Thorsten's stories and the tour of the house are very interesting. Thorsten generously invites us to lunch in the beautiful refectory followed by a café. In the evening of that day we celebrate Holy Mass with the Little Sisters and are also invited to dinner with them. We experience wonderful hospitality, but also "a bond in the spirit".



Left: visit at  
Bishop  
Krautwaschl

Right: with  
Mama Lotti



Left: at Gea  
shoe shop

Right: Gondola  
to the Schöckl  
Mountain



With the Little Sisters from Graz



As far as our work is concerned, we made the parish salon on the top floor of the rectory our "conference room". The first item on the agenda was a review of the first 3 years of our mandate, a mid-term review, so to speak. It was remarkable that, thanks to the possibility of video conferencing, we have met more often than probably any team ever has before. The Asian meeting in South Korea in 2019 and the joint participation in the canonisation in Rome were important moments in our ministry. Another special feature was the worldwide survey we did to get

an up-to-date overview of our priestly community. We also spent some of our time here working on the renewal of our statutes as recommended by the Congregation for the Clergy. Finally, we also made plans for the future. The most significant decision was that we have set our next world meeting for January 2025 in Burkina Faso. We also thought about how we can bring the charism of Brother Karl and the concrete form of our priestly community to countries where we are not yet present. Indonesia and Vietnam were concrete suggestions, but also Hungary and Venezuela. A report from me on the state of the treasury and treasury management was presented and the request was made to Eric that he visit the archives of our priestly community in Paris, where he would then travel on to.



Two services were very special these days: the thanksgiving celebration in the Sacred Heart Church for the canonisation of Charles de Foucauld on Friday evening, during which Eric addressed a few words in English to all present, translated by Sigrid Weiss. On Sunday we celebrated the last Mass with Prof. Walter Schaupp, who was taking his final farewell from the parish. Especially in such a dense and intense time, I

particularly appreciated the quiet hours of adoration together. The common meals, provided by Renate Belaj, were accompanied by joyful and interesting conversations.



On Wednesday and Thursday 25/26 May it was time to say goodbye. I almost missed the FlixBus to Vienna-Schwechat with Tony, but in James Bond style we were able to catch it on the outskirts of the city.

Now we are again living several thousand kilometers apart in our respective places of work, but newly united by the common experience of Rome and Graz and also newly motivated to be there for our priestly community and to strengthen it according to our possibilities.

Saint Charles de Foucauld - pray for us!

*fr. Ch. de Foucauld*

