




Newsletter of the THOMAS MORE COLLEGE of LIBERAL ARTS

COMMUNITAS

Student Issue 2026



PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE	3
THE HOLY LAND	4
ROME, WITH FRIENDS	6
BUEN CAMINO	7

COMMUNITAS

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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Cover: Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore by John Anderson '26





THE PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE

By Aaron Lammers '29

When I lived overseas, the thing that impressed me most was the presence of history. We were stationed in Napoli, Italy, living on an American naval base. In Italy, the land is alive with significance. Even the floor in the Navy Exchange (a sort of naval department/grocery store) on base had areas made of glass so that one could see the remnants of Rome and its empire, scattered just below the earth. One could walk through the airport or any number of simple modern places and find the same.

As for Rome itself, there is a reason it is called the Eternal City. From Romulus to Augustus to Peter to Constantine and beyond, the past is present. A thousand churches, great and small, contain ages of sacred treasures from all the eras of Christianity, silently present, waiting for the faithful.

The same can be said of all Europe, though Europeans may try to forget it. The very physical makeup of their homelands are built on sacred spaces and lost worlds, martyr tombs, holy wells, monasteries, cathedrals, and palaces. It is a rich land, its bones deep and strong, though at the moment its memory withering. The difference between that land and our own is striking in this respect, and it is felt most keenly in the region of the sacred. The very land can be a sacramental, sanctified material sign

which becomes a doorway of grace. The land is also a vessel of tradition, holding the memories of father and forefathers, of pains, joys, and mysteries extending from generation to generation with all its practices and stories, each tied to a specific place and time.

It is pilgrimage that allows us to tread the sacred path within the path of tradition, through the land, unto the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are united to those who were, those who are, and those who will come after us, with the Church Triumphant, Suffering, and Militant. And all of this is accomplished by walking, traveling, in time, on earth.

I was only eleven when I lived in Italy, and many specific memories and impressions have faded and been lost in the ensuing years. But there is one memory toward the end of our stay that remains. We were at Pietrelcina, and visited San Giovanni Rotondo, where Padre Pio's body is kept. As we walked through the church, down to where the body could be venerated, we passed mosaics, modern in construction and not the most beautiful. One showed Padre Pio being tormented by a demon which had taken the form of his pillow. The demon's face was frightening. Just beyond it there was another image. It was Padre Pio kneeling beside St. Michael the Archangel. The Archangel bore a crown and his hand rested on

Pio's head, while the other rested on his sword, at which the holy man was gazing. My father said something to the effect of, "Could you imagine?" I came under the impression that Padre Pio had been mystically knighted by the Archangel, which I suppose is more true than not, and I loved him, thinking that was the most glorious thing. Then we came to the body itself. We followed the line and came right to the glass sarcophagus and saw the saint lying, in all his monastic garb, crucifix in his hands. These hands which had borne the wounds of Christ were withered, but the face, eyes closed, was that of an old man. It was strange, awful in the older sense of the word, but it did not fully move me until we were about to walk past, and I looked at my mother. She seemed to be crying, or on the verge of it, distressed. "He looks like he's sleeping," she whispered.

Heaven and earth, body and soul, are not as separated as some would have us think. Already we are living with one foot in another world. Life is a warfare and a journey, with enemies and friends, seen and unseen, a journey aimed at the Holy Land, a Crusade to reach the Kingdom of God, its path leading through this world between worlds, this time, this place, and this earth.

ABOVE: AARON LAMMERS '29 AT THE CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION IN JERUSALEM IN 2023



THE LAND OF CHRIST'S LIFE,

By David Arias '26

Over Christmas break, I was given the opportunity of a lifetime: to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. My journey began in the quiet town of Nazareth. The first holy sites I visited were the humble homes of St. Joseph and Mother Mary. Kneeling on the ground where the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, I could truly see the Gospel story come to life.

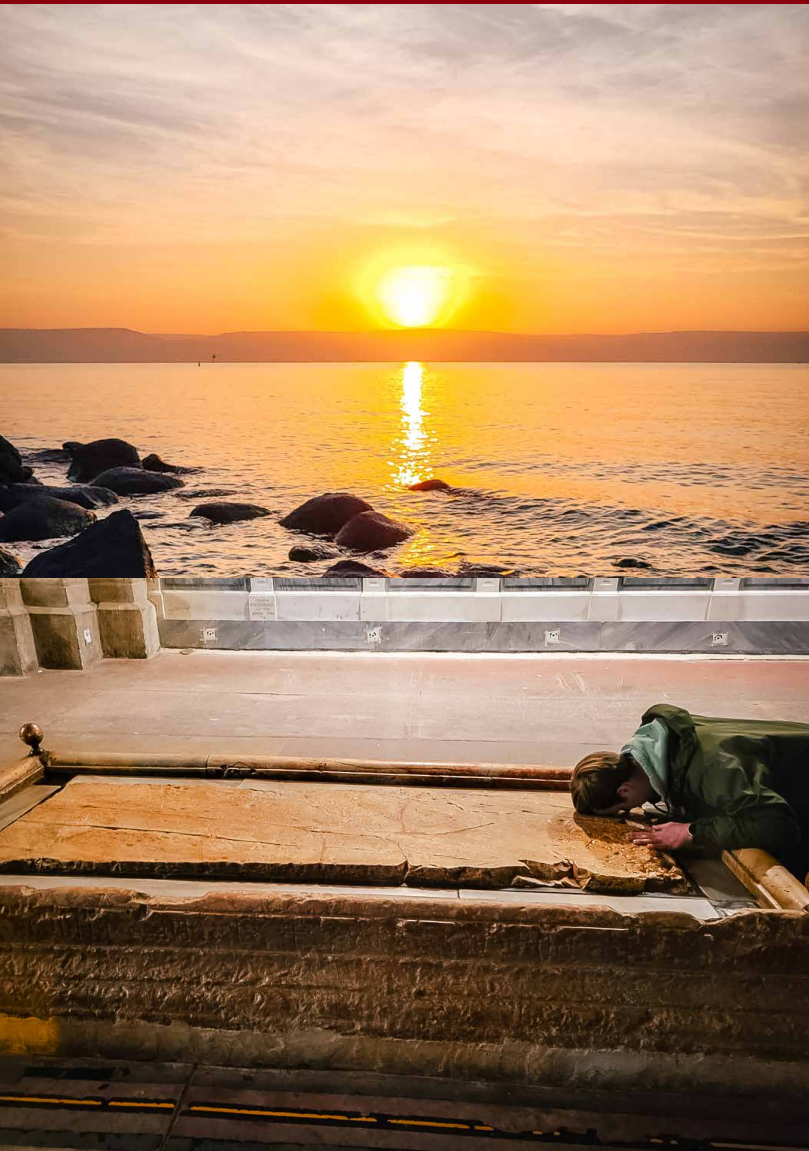
This was a truly humbling experience. Being there in that place, I could do nothing but pray for my vocation—that God's will be done in my own life and that I accept it with humility and trust, just as Mother Mary did when she said,

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). Not a stone's throw away from Mary's house was the home of St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse. There, I prayed to St. Joseph for my father and for all fathers around the world, that they may be modeled after St. Joseph.

From Nazareth, I traveled to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Our Lord. Here, Christ was born in a manger. One thing I learned while being there is that Bethlehem means “House of Bread.” This was very striking to me because Christ tells us in John 6:35–40 that He is the Bread of Life, and that if we do not eat of Him, we shall not have eternal life. Christ was born in a manger—a place

where animals eat—which is symbolic of Him being the Bread of Life for us and for our salvation. Venerating the site of Our Lord's birth brought to mind a passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (23:12). The Son of God's entrance into the world was the most humble entrance—an innocent babe in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger. Yet He was and is exalted by angels, shepherds, His family, and—of course—by all pilgrims and people who come to His birthplace and His Church every day. It was very powerful.

After departing from Bethlehem, I traveled to Jordan, Cana, and Galilee.



DEATH, AND RESURRECTION

The Sea of Galilee was one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. Seeing it brought to life all of the Gospel stories that take place there—Christ walking on water, the calming of the storm, and the calling of the first disciples. Galilee was very peaceful and quiet.

After a few days there, I continued my pilgrimage to Jerusalem. My favorite experience there was staying overnight in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. After visiting all the holy sites of Our Lord and the places of His Passion—from the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane, to Golgotha—I made my way to the Holy Sepulchre. I could feel the air change upon entering the Tomb; it was like walking into a warm

embrace. I cannot fully put this feeling into words—it was truly life-changing. I was able to spend a few hours by myself, kneeling and praying inside the Tomb of Christ. I remember that once I began to pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Holy Rosary, tears began streaming from my eyes. I could not fathom that I was there, where Christ rose from the dead, conquered death, and saved us.

I am truly blessed to have been able to go on this pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and I am deeply grateful to all my benefactors who made it possible. I am especially thankful to my parents, my Nanna, my uncle and aunt, my sister, and my friend Molly, all of whom helped make this journey possible. This

pilgrimage changed my life, and I will never read Sacred Scripture the same way again. While I may not yet fully understand all the ways this pilgrimage has affected me, I know it will continue to impact me for the rest of my life. I hope to return to Israel again soon.

L–R: DAVID ARIAS '26 AT THE DEAD SEA; VIEW OF JERUSALEM FROM THE KIDRON VALLEY; A CANDLE BURNING AT THE SITE WHERE ST. HELENA FOUND THE TRUE CROSS; THE SEA OF GALILEE; DAVID ARIAS '26 PRAYING AT THE STONE OF ANOINTING; SOFIA SEIDL '26 AT CALVARY IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE, JERUSALEM.

ROMA, CON AMICI

By Jackie Clark '27

During our time here at Thomas More College, we are privileged to spend a semester abroad in the Eternal City. Every upperclassman tells the Sophomores that Rome will change their lives forever, but never says exactly why or how. I believe this is because it changes each individual in drastically different ways.

One of the biggest impressions Rome left on me was not just a result of the beautiful places I saw, but also who I was experiencing those places with. Traveling to Rome is truly a pilgrimage, and although pilgrimages are beautiful and fruitful, they can also be challenging. Because of the difficult aspects of a pilgrimage, it is crucial to have good people surrounding you to help you along the way.

Of course, this does not mean that getting to spend an entire semester in Rome was a struggle in any way (with the excellent wine, pasta, etc.). However, there were challenges such as homesickness, becoming accustomed to a completely new culture, and the immense spiritual growth that is inevitable in Rome and is sometimes painful. Being able to have my class and other mentors in Rome helped me shoulder some of these challenges.

Thinking about pilgrimage brings to mind one of the most memorable experiences in Rome—walking the Seven Church Pilgrimage with a few of my classmates and Executive Vice President Mr. Paul Jackson, Fellow and Dean Dr. Denis Kitzinger, and the Very Rev. Dr. Joseph Hamilton, our Latin professor. We walked a little over twenty miles and went to all seven major basilicas in Rome. It was a difficult but amazing experience, made all the better by the people I got to walk this mini-pilgrimage with. It is a time I will always look fondly on and is one of the prominent memories that comes to mind when I think of the most life-changing experiences in Rome. Visiting the Eternal City will always change a person's life, no matter when they realize it, but in my opinion one of the most important aspects is who you experience those life-changing moments with.

L: JACKIE CLARK '27 IN THE PIAZZA SAN PIETRO DURING HER ROME SEMESTER





BUEN CAMINO

By *Gavin Farinholt '26*

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

It was the evening of Holy Thursday, and assembled in a little house in the town of Arzúa was a group of extraordinarily gloomy pilgrims. If you knew our situation at the time, you may have found it odd that we were not rather exultant. We had just put behind us the eighteen miles that lie between Arzúa and Palas de Rei—the longest leg of our journey—and another twelve would get us to O Pedrouzo and would halve the distance to Santiago. In Galicia, however, the distance hardly tells the whole story.

As we gathered around, President Fahey provided us with a special weather bulletin, to which we listened with no great enthusiasm. There was a flash flood warning. Any of the previous days’ rains would have warranted a flash flood warning where I come from, and thus my initial impression on hearing this news was that this Good Friday would be the sort of day with which Noah had once become familiar.

We were in that moment as we had been the entire Way: weak and weary and, frankly, bewildered. No

“professional pilgrims” we. We were simply a band of college students who chose to take a step outside our ordinary lives into something unfamiliar and daunting. Its merit was that it was a trusting step. We tried to prepare, but no one can be prepared for the Camino. With its sudden hailstorms, roadside bagpipers, and countless other surprises, the Way is enchanted with the truest spirit of Catholic pilgrimage.

We often speak of pilgrimage in terms of the things we know to expect: the blisters, the hunger, the exhaustion, and so on. But on the Camino, the unexpected is what changes you. That road forces you to live in a constant adventure. It carries you along through moments of joy and of misery, of laughter and of grim silence, and all the while the only thing you know for sure is that you must go on and God will be with you. Life is extraordinary on the Way, and in my memory there lives an enduring perspective of that experience as a whole, that extraordinary life—as though I had seen an overwhelming landscape and been amazed that the very scope of its beauty was able to be realized on this earth.

So it was a beautiful journey, filled with unmistakable moments of Providence, breathtaking scenery, wholesome company—a fine pilgrimage.

But it ended, did it not? Eventually the return to “ordinary” life had to take place. It did. But in that return I found that the Way had one more startling truth to teach me: I never left at all.

The Way had followed me, or perhaps I had never stopped following it. Its laws of life, which amount to complete reliance on and gratitude for the Providence of the God Who carries our burdens—if only we would surrender them—were just as applicable in my hometown as they were in Galicia. The Camino taught me that very surrender, that gratitude, that reliance. I did not really discover extraordinary life on the Way at all; I discovered real life, the proper perspective, the Truth.

I never stopped following the Way, and I never will. The dust of that road is on my shoes forever.

What of the rain that Good Friday, you ask? In the morning it poured, but the clouds broke at noon. For the last three hours of our march, we walked in warm sunlight. The Way smiled behind us; God had lifted yet another burden.

ABOVE (L–R): GAVIN FARINHOLT '26, ANNA YOST '26, KATERI DAVIS '25, AND JACINTA SIGAUD '26 ON THE CAMINO



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Dear Friends of Thomas More College,

This edition of *Communitas* is dedicated to the theme of pilgrimage. We at the College are encouraged to view life itself as a pilgrimage—a journey that, though it inevitably contains suffering, is ultimately oriented toward eternal joy. Our Catholic identity is inseparable from the identity of pilgrims: travelers on the way toward a sacred destination, guided by those who have gone before us. To physically embark on a pilgrimage is a powerful reminder of who we are and where we are going.

The program of studies here at the College invites students to experience this sacred reality in a tangible way, and thus, it is not limited to the classroom. Whether studying in Italy, walking the Camino de Santiago, or visiting the Holy Land, students encounter the rich heritage of the Catholic faith and embrace the legacy they are heirs to. We sincerely hope that this student-edited edition of *Communitas* provides an insight into that pilgrim spirit alive within our student body.



Jacinta Sigaud '26
Student Editor

