



# IMMACULATE HEART<sup>OF</sup> MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

APRIL 29, 2018

Dear friends in the Risen Lord,

As you read this, my fellow pilgrims and I have landed safely in Rome and have journeyed to the storied medieval town of Assisi, where we immersed ourselves for two days in the world of St. Francis and St. Clare and experienced something of the simplicity and joy of Franciscan spirituality.

We have now returned to Rome, and as you gather at IHM for Mass today, we will be celebrating the Eucharist in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus.

The Roman Catacombs, as you may know, were ancient underground burial sites, which became very important to the early Church during the centuries of per-secution. The catacombs in which we celebrate Mass today were created by the future Pope Callixtus I (d. 222), then a deacon of Rome, under the direction of Pope Zephyrinus (d. 217). They were built beneath an area of about 40 acres, in 5 subterranean levels, along some 12 miles of tunnels, and it is estimated that they house about 500,000 burials. Although at one point those remains included 16 popes and 50 martyrs, many of those relics were removed from the catacombs over the centuries and placed in Roman churches for veneration.

The catacombs were largely abandoned after the conversion of Constantine, when Christianity became the official religion of the empire, and memory of them was lost altogether during the early Middle Ages. Some were found again in the late 16th century, but the Catacombs of St. Callixtus were only rediscovered and excavated in 1854.

Please know that we pilgrims are remembering our parish and our loved ones at every turn of our journey. Today we join our prayers, surrounded by the tombs of our earliest Christian ancestors, to your prayers at IHM. May the Lord bind us all together in his peace.

Your brother in Christ's word and work,