

Br Herbert and I once had the opportunity to visit Rome- it was for the canonisation of Blessed Bernard Tolomei, our founding Saint, and we chose to go via Camogli, one of our monasteries near Genoa, hiring a car in Lyons to take us on our way. We had all sorts of adventures including smashing the wing mirror of the car on a stone wall in one of the narrow tortuous lanes in Camogli. When we eventually got to the monastery, perched high on an old Roman road, overlooking the Bay of Genoa, I was in a state of almost total collapse – we parked the car in the only bit of space I could find and walked back to the monastery entrance to be greeted by a kindly monk in white top and jeans who showed us the proper place to park and brought us in. We were given a palatial set of rooms with a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean and an English-speaking monk showed us around. At supper we were led into the dining room and given seats at the high table but there didn't seem to be any superior present. The monk in white top and jeans served us and took his meal near the entrance to the kitchen with the strange mix of lay residents, other guests and a few monks. We left the next day for Rome by train – I couldn't face any further driving - but before we left we couldn't resist asking where the Superior was, assuming he'd already gone on to Rome but no, it was the monk in the white top and jeans, serving everyone else. Interestingly, when we got to Rome, we never saw him there because he came and went with the hoi polloi – not joining us at the high table of St Peter's, but remaining once again with the mass of people on the great concourse below. He impressed me more than anyone else we met on that occasion – the highlight of our visit to Rome and Camogli.

This is a variation of the great parable we hear in today's gospel reading but perhaps even more apposite- the variation being that even the host, the giver of the feast, refuses to take the highest place but sits with the people in the last place of all. And this is Christ, the Son of God, as he came to us in Palestine and comes to us now. If we want to find him, to know him for who he is, that is where we have to look, not at the high table but at the kitchen door, not only as one of the poor and needy, but serving them as one of the poor and needy, which indeed is really how we all are.

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