

Daily log
CIB Symposium 2010
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This day was the spiritual highlight of the Symposium. Very early in the morning, we boarded buses and left Rome. We traveled past farm fields and vineyards and through the mountains — miles and miles of luscious green hillsides interrupted by steep rocky cliffs. Finally the bus stopped and we got off. We were in Norcia. And why did we choose to visit this little burg 70 miles northeast of Rome? For Benedictines, it is a sacred place. It is the birthplace of Saints Benedict and Scholastica.

Norcia, also known as Nursia, is an ancient town, inhabited already in the 8th century BC. It is located in central Italy in the region of Umbria and the province of Perugia. It is still surrounded by walls that date to Roman times and the Middle Ages.

Norcia has a population of about 4,000 people who, when they have the urge to attend Mass, can do so at a pro-cathedral, an oratory, a basilica, or any one of three regular churches. The Basilica of Saint Benedict is in the middle of town and is built on what is believed to have been the birthplace and family home of our twin saints. The façade of the church dates to the 14th century.

At this basilica, Abbot Primate Notker Wolf celebrated the Eucharist with us. After Mass, we went downstairs to the crypt where we saw architectural remains of the family home and where there is a small chapel in which we had time for quiet prayer and reflection.

Then we wandered around Norcia where there are a number of those charming little shops that have hunks of cheese, salami and ham hanging in the doorways, like stockings hung from the chimney on Christmas Eve. Norcia has a reputation for pork products as evidenced by the taxidermied boar heads that stare at passersby from the exterior walls of these shops. According to our travel guide, “Anything that can be done to a pig, food-wise, the Norcians apparently do, and better than anyone else.”

We did not eat Norcian cheese and pork, but gathered instead to eat our sack lunches at the Abbey of Saint Antony the Abbot, which was founded in 1406 and is now home to a community of about 14 Benedictine nuns.

Finally, we got back on the buses, but not to return immediately to Rome. The best part of the day was just a few miles outside of Norcia. That’s where we visited the Church of St. Scholastica. This church is built on the site of what is

believed to have been the country home of the family of Benedict and Scholastica and it is theorized that St. Scholastica spent her earliest years of religious life here. The present church dates to the 15th century. Unlike other old churches in Italy which are carefully preserved, this one is in bad disrepair, although frescoes of Benedict and Scholastica are still visible.

It was in this church that we gathered in a circle and renewed our monastic profession. And just as each one of us did on the day we made our profession, we chanted, “Uphold me, O God, as you have promised and I shall live; do not disappoint me in my hope.”

We got on the buses one more time and traveled through the mountains, and pass the farm fields and vineyards to return to Rome and Sant’ Anselmo — renewed, re-dedicated, re-committed.