

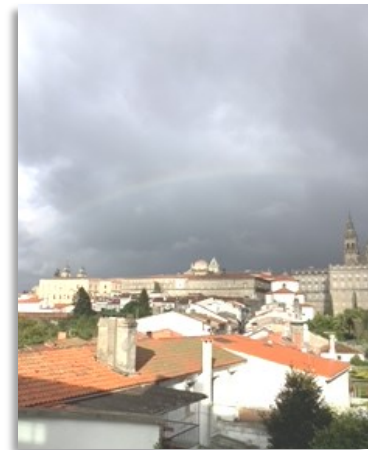


## FROM THE DESK OF FR. MIKE

Last Monday started out like just about every other Monday. The alarm went off, I hit the snooze button, I managed to get out of bed and get ready for the day. I began the day in prayer and I started taking care of the tasks on the calendar and the responsibilities of the day. Then Monday, October 2 became anything like every other Monday. Emails started flooding in; texts were rapidly being received. The sad news that Bishop Kevin Birmingham died in his sleep was being sent around the world. Bishop Birmingham was the youngest auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese. He would have been celebrating his 52nd birthday this Saturday, October 7.

I had the chance to work with Bishop Birmingham in many capacities throughout the past twenty-five years. We were pastors of neighboring parishes in Vicariate VI in the south suburbs for six years. He was the Secretary to the Cardinal for over five years before being ordained a bishop. I would interact and work with him in a variety of ways during those many years. I would spend time with him socially as well as at Archdiocesan celebrations. Bishop Kevin was at a diaconate fundraiser the night before he died in his sleep. At the fundraiser he was his joyful self, praying, laughing and enjoying life with others who minister in the Archdiocese. He would regularly share stories of travel with his mom and siblings. May Bishop Kevin Birmingham rest in the peace of our Lord. We are waiting to hear of the funeral arrangements for the youngest Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Yes, this past Monday was nothing similar to just about every other Monday.

I have heard from many parishioners of their experiences walking the Camino to the Church of St. James / Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. If a picture is worth a thousand words, here are five thousand words from my recent experience last month.



Along the Way we met people from around the world, some walking by themselves, some families walking together, other in groups like the twelve I was part of. The pictures from top left to bottom right are of one of the leaders of our group I was with, a father and his seven and nine year old sons from Brisbane, Australia, an artistic use of abandoned shoes and boots along the way – they recycle in Spain, the tomb of St. James underneath the sanctuary in Santiago – the goal for the pilgrimage across northwest Spain, and if the experience of safely walking 80 miles / 120 kilometers wasn't enough, God's final blessing to our group, a rainbow over the church and surrounding area. It was a very unique experience for me.

On September 28, our group of 12 pilgrims were twelve of the 2,684 pilgrims that arrived in Santiago and received their official document of completing the pilgrimage. To date there have been over 372,539 people that have walked the way of St. James in 2023. I find myself to be a blessed member of that group.

Thanks for supporting the many efforts at the Church of St. Mary as we share our respect for life through many different agencies and their ministries to God's children in need as we support mothers and newborns in need, help clothe our sisters and brothers, and care for migrants in our Archdiocese.

God bless you in "Eucharistic lives" of gratitude, generosity, and compassion,

*Fr. Mike Naciri*