

What Have We Gotten Into Now?

In the Line of Fire, Part Two

Rats! Wouldn't you know it! Here we were in a hurry to get into the city and my ultra reliable little Fiat 500cc died. It sputtered, coughed and then kaput – it was dead. We coasted to the side of the road, got out of that 'bucket of bolts' and after giving it some choice Italian descriptions of its worthiness, started to thumb a ride. Darlene was with me and we had little Star too. She was a real chatterbox three year old with long wavy hair.

We didn't have to wait long, but to our surprise it wasn't just another car that stopped to help us but a stre-e-etch limo – a huge Mercedes with tinted glass windows.

Admittedly, I was a bit nervous for we had just recently had our house 'cleaned out' by the mafia because we refused their protection and I wasn't looking forward to another encounter. (That's another story perhaps.)

As I cautiously approached the car, the rear window on the passenger side came down and a man in the back of the limo asked me in English if I needed help. It was about another half hour or so into Rome where we were headed so I reluctantly said, "Si, grazie Signore," and we climbed into the limo.

As I expected, Star began talking about everything she saw and though I wondered if it would irritate the man, he clearly enjoyed her curiosity. He was probably about 45-50 years old with just a touch of gray in his hair. It wasn't long before we had a lively conversation going about our work and Italy and

Italian food and... then he said, "Why don't you let me show you some real Italian food? Join me for lunch."

Not wanting to offend (and being hungry enough to eat anything short of toxic waste) we said, "Sure!" As we were still fairly new to Italy, we knew how to get around Rome but we didn't know the whole city that well. Initially, I recognized the areas we drove through until suddenly, the limo turned off the main road and began squeezing through some narrow alleys and back roads. We were still having a great conversation, but I gradually began to be concerned. Were we in trouble? I was definitely lost. When the car finally came to a stop, I got even more worried.

We were in front of a shack, I mean it wasn't much more than a shanty, and as he led the way inside, we half expected to meet more mafiosos with an attitude. Darlene and I looked at each other with an 'oh boy, what have we gotten into now' look.

But as we entered, it was a whole different world. In fact, we'd never seen such a place – it was beautiful! Lots of people were enjoying a wonderful classic Italian atmosphere with the hearth fires burning, old wooden beams draped with garlic weavings and antiques, the smell of indescribably delicious food cooking, on and on it went. Amazingly, the inside seemed much bigger than the outside. As we sat down, our host explained that this place was only for Italians – no tourists allowed. And the food was, indeed, out of this world.

Of course, as we conversed, we shared that we were living in Italy in order to minister the gospel. This

was something quite curious to our new friend for he thought that since Italy was so pervasively Catholic that our efforts would be better spent somewhere else. But then we explained the Words of Jesus concerning knowing Him and having a relationship directly with Him by faith. This intrigued him, and as lunch was drawing to a close (albeit slowly – remember, we were in Italy) he insisted that when he dropped us off, he would give us his home phone number.

When we parted, he said most sincerely, "Now, you must remember to call me."

A couple of weeks passed and we thought that we ought to call our new friend if for no other reason than to again thank him. (By the way, his hospitality, as great as it was, was not uncommon in Italy!) He was thrilled to hear from us and asked us to come to his home for a special dinner. It was a large early afternoon meal really.

Arriving at his home, we met his wife and children and had just a wonderful day of fellowship and fine dining. He was still quite curious about our previous talk of salvation and a relationship with Christ. It was a concept he'd never considered. As a sincere Catholic, he hoped to go to heaven based upon how good a life he lived, and as for knowing Jesus – that was really the job of the priest, right?

Anyway, we continued to share our testimonies and scriptures from the Bible like *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom 6:23) and *"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none*

that does good, no, not one." (Rom 3:12) and *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."* (Eph 2:8,9) and *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."* (Rev 3:20)

Maybe it was the part about dining with Him, I don't remember, but there in his living room our friend and his whole family 'got it'. They understood for the first time the simple message of the gospel and embraced it.

The next time we met, we prayed with each of them to receive the Lord. In fact, we probably met with them weekly for a couple of months sharing the Bible and praying with them. Towards the end of that time, we were surprised to learn that our host was the Secretary General of [a major political party] in Italy. If you know much about the history of Italian politics, at that time it was not a particularly safe way to make a living so to speak so I think he had kept his important position under wraps for our own protection.

A few months later, we returned to the States and then were off to Mexico. Sadly, we lost contact with them but are trusting that God has had His way with that precious family. Anyway, what started out with a "Rats!" turned into a real blessing. You just never know – maybe sometime when you're confronted with a bummer, you may see God use it for His own good purposes. That's often His way, isn't it.