

Pre-Visit to Convention Venue in Nanaimo

Last week Christa Grillmair, the CWL's Victoria Diocesan President, Fr. Alfie Monacelli, the CWL's Victoria Diocesan Spiritual Advisor, and myself did a "pre-visit" to Nanaimo where our Provincial Convention will be held in just over a month. This is my memories of a wonderful day!

Early Start to the Ferry

To get to the Vancouver Island ferry I had to drive across Vancouver, so I decided on an early start to get ahead of the rush-hour. I succeeded and had a really easy drive and found a parking space within a stones throw of the terminal doors. As I sat in the departure lounge I looked out on a perfect day (*above*).

My desire to get ahead of the crowds in Vancouver put me at the ferry port with an hour-and-a-half to spare, but I had my prayer book, my iPad and a surprisingly good cup of coffee considering it had come from a machine. After Morning Prayer I then caught up on my e-mails and did a bit of 'people watching'. In the waiting area there were people obviously going to work on one of the islands, some tourists, a mother seeing off her daughter, some students talking about their boyfriends (*and not giving away any of their conversations, but perhaps by now they are their ex-boy friends!*) Indeed a real cross section of people.

On the ferry I opted to find a comfortable seat and take this precious gift of uninterrupted time to do some serious reading for Sunday's sermon. John's gospel always frightens me so I like to be ahead of the game when John comes up. The text was John 21 – the risen Jesus meeting his disciples on the shore waiting for them with breakfast prepared.

All these thoughts about a cross section of society and the risen Jesus were swirling about in my head as I got off the ferry, and there was Christa waiting in her orange coloured car.

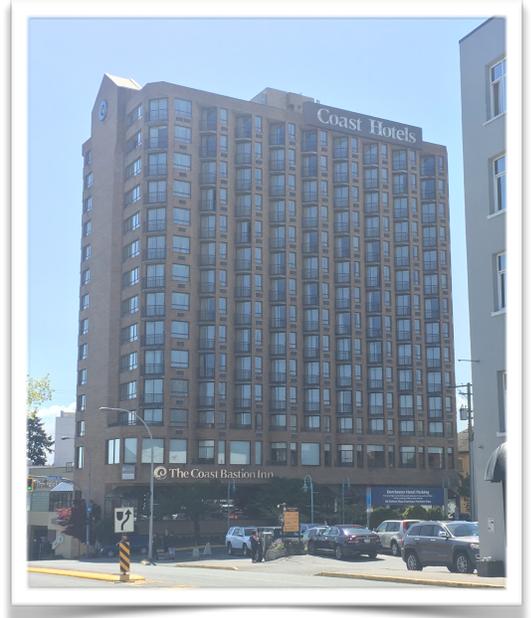
First we went up to the church we will be using for our opening and closing Masses. I am used to small rural churches and I hadn't realised that Nanaimo was a larger community and thus the church would be a good size. St. Peter's (*left*) is a beautiful church. As I stood there I tried to imagine the front half of the church full of CWL ladies joyfully gathering for Mass.



All I could think of was Luke 19:40 where Jesus was entering into Jerusalem and the crowds were shouting praise; when the authorities complained Jesus replied, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” All I could think of was the stones of this holy building, how they were in their own way shouting out the praise of God. And I am sure that if these stones could smile, they would have a really broad grin on their faces at the thought of the church being full of the CWL convening here to give praise to God.

Then to the hotel, a modern building overlooking so much of Nanaimo and the harbour (*right*). We were greeted by the really nice manager of the hotel, Amanda, and then joined by Fr. Alfie. Although that day the hotel was being used for an agricultural conference of some kind, we still had a little peep into all the rooms that we would be using, and we saw some of the wonderful food they were providing for that days conference.

One of the issues I wanted to bring to the hotel management was that the CWL is not like other groups and it has a particular personality. As a priest I have been to conferences where the hotel has seen us as “the group who are in from Wednesday to Sunday”, and who we were didn’t seem to be significant for them; I so much wanted this hotel to know who the CWL are. In the end I don’t think I needed to worry, Amanda seemed to know about the CWL and assured us that the hotel would give a very personal welcome to our group. We then discussed how many stalls there were in the ladies toilets to see if there were enough for a large group that would be 98% female!



Then to lunch, and the really good news is that there are two different versions of poutine on their menu (*one shown left*). So that is two days meals covered. From our table we looked out over the harbour and the Strait of Georgia. I really wanted to take a room there and then and stay! But the ferry home was bidding.

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But before my trek home I did wander along the older streets of Nanaimo; I have to say, it did have a bit of a British feel about it! I was looking for a coffee shop so I could sit for a bit and reflect on all that we had discussed. The town centre was full of them, all little privately owned shops doing coffee and snacks in their own personalised way; it was charming.



But I didn't stop here; instead I wandered across the road from the hotel to a platform that overlooks the whole harbour. From this platform there are steps down and again, hidden away, were a series of coffee shops doing all sorts of interesting items. But here you could sit out on the board-walk along the harbour's edge, enjoy the sun and watch the world go by (*above*).

From the centre of Nanaimo one can walk to the ferry along sidewalks that follow the waterfront. It took me about fifty minutes at a gentle pace. And on this sunny day, and after a full lunch, this was a perfect way to end my visit.

On the ferry ride back I reflected on all that had been. I thought that all the preparations the Christa and others are doing are a bit like Jesus on the shore cooking breakfast and making sure everything is ready to greet the disciples as they get off the boat. Then I thought how the CWL members attending the

convention were there to try to improve the society we live in. And all these people who surrounded me on the ferry probably knew little of us as a group, but we were working for their welfare too. And then, just as in John 6:21, "immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going" and I was back at the mainland; the ferry ride seemed to fly by, I can't think why, I only shut my eyes for a minute!

I so much look forward to June and our next visit to this gem of a place. See you there.

*Fr. David
7th May 2019*

P.S.

Oh yes, and as I didn't have my dog, Ranga, with me, I was somewhat envious of this fellow!

