

Your Favorite Page - Oh, to be a Travel Agent!

Some actual complaints received by Thomas Cook Vacations

1. "It's lazy of the local shopkeepers in Puerto Vallarta to close in the afternoons. I often needed to buy things during 'siesta' time – this should be banned."
2. "On my holiday to Goa in India, I was disgusted to find that almost every restaurant served curry. I don't like spicy food."
3. "We booked an excursion to a water park but no one told us we had to bring our own swimsuits and towels. We assumed it would be included in the price."
4. "The beach was too sandy. We had to clean everything when we returned to our room."
5. "They should not allow topless sunbathing on the beach. It was very distracting for my husband who just wanted to relax."
6. "No one told us there would be fish in the water. The children were scared."
7. "Although the brochure said that there was a fully equipped kitchen, there was no egg-slicer in the drawers."
8. "We went on holiday to Spain and had a problem with the taxi drivers as they were all Spanish."
9. "The roads were uneven and bumpy, so we could not read the local guide book during the bus ride to the resort. Because of this, we were unaware of many things that would have made our holiday more fun."
10. "I compared the size of our one-bedroom suite to our friends' three-bedroom and ours was significantly smaller."
11. "The brochure stated: 'No hairdressers at the resort.' We're trainee hairdressers and we think they knew and made us wait longer for service."
12. "When we were in Spain there were too many Spanish people there. The receptionist spoke Spanish, the food was Spanish. No one told us that there would be so many foreigners."
13. "We had to line up outside to catch the boat and there was no air-conditioning."
14. "It is your duty as a tour operator to advise us of noisy or unruly guests before we travel."
15. "I was bitten by a mosquito. The brochure did not mention mosquitoes."
16. "My fiancé and I requested twin-beds when we booked, but instead we were placed in a room with a king bed. We now hold you responsible and want to be re-reimbursed for the fact that I became pregnant. This would not have happened if you had put us in the room that we booked."
17. "I was upset that you did not tell us which beach was closest to the ocean."
18. "I would have appreciated information on why they built so many ruined castles and abbeys in England."
19. "The water was so blue where we went snorkeling. We were upset that the guide could not tell us what color the water was on the other side of the island."
20. "Escalators would help on steep uphill sections."

CREDIT CARD INFORMATION	
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Amount you wish to give:	_____
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<input type="checkbox"/> If you wish us to keep this credit card info. on file, check the box.	

CROSS LINKS

CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS, UNITED STATES PROVINCE OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS
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May 2014

Dear Hearts and Gentle Souls ...

I open with a verse from the Song of Songs (2:11-12): "See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land."

That was the conclusion of my homily on Easter Sunday. I had opened with a comment on the winter now past and how deeply it affected so many people across the country. From there I went into the winters of our lives and how the Resurrection of Jesus makes all the difference because it gives us hope that "This too will pass."

One of the most amazing things for me about this past winter is that despite it's harshness, the time has really flown by. It's hard to believe it's already May. That means graduations, confirmations, weddings ... all transitions to a new life and new responsibilities.

In Holy Cross, such a transition took place on the Saturday after Easter when **Adam D.P. Booth, C.S.C.**, and **Patrick E. Reidy, C.S.C.**, were ordained to the priesthood.

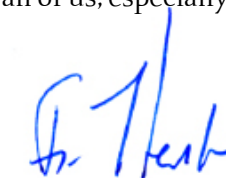
At summer's end, six men will make their Final Profession of Vows in Holy Cross and be ordained deacons the next day. This is the largest class we've had in awhile, thanks be to God. The men (and their assignments in parentheses) are: **Matthew Fase, C.S.C.** (Holy Redeemer Parish, Portland, Ore.), **David Halm, C.S.C.** (St. John Vianney Parish, Goodyear, Ariz.), **Timothy Mouton, C.S.C.** (Stonehill College, North Easton, Mass.), **Chase Pepper, C.S.C.** (King's College, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.), **Daniel Ponisciak, C.S.C.** (St. Ignatius Martyr Parish, Austin, Texas) and **Christopher Rehagen, C.S.C.** (Christ the King Parish, South Bend, Ind.). These men, plus the two new priests, were supported by you during their years of formation. You should take great pride in the gift your support has been not just to Holy Cross, but ultimately to the Church.

On Feb. 22, **Rev. Albert A. Croce C.S.C.**, was called from earthly life into the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. Al was a member of the former Eastern Province, and was very much involved in the media apostolate. His ministry took him to Bangladesh, Italy, Peru, Chile, England, as well as Massachusetts and Vermont. May he rest in peace.

A word on the reflection inside: To some, it may seem overtly political, and thus cause for grinding and gnashing of teeth, to use a Biblical reference. The issue of income equality and minimum wage is indeed political. But long before it became a matter of politics, it was a moral issue dating back to newly sainted Pope John XXIII and before. By using some real stories about real people, it might give you a different perspective on the issue. You never hear these stories on the media, since they focus rather on the politics of the situation and the conflict that arises accordingly. But trust me: a huge number of people in our country are affected by this issue.

And with that, I beg God's blessings on you for a safe and good summer. Please say a prayer for my family: By the time you get the August Cross Links, my Dad will probably have died ... as of this writing (April 24) he's not long for this world. That will indeed be a big transition for all of us, especially Mom after 67 years of marriage.

Much love ... many prayers!



POVERTY AND EMPATHY

This is my second attempt at writing this reflection. I was almost finished with the first one when I must have pressed the wrong buttons – the whole thing disappeared into the void. Grrr – don't you hate it when that happens? Bless me, Father, because I said a bad word. Well, more that one bad word. Can't fib in a confession.

Pope Francis is over a year into his pontificate. It's been a remarkable year and the winds of change are blowing. The one thing that is not new is how the Pope is dealing with the world economic situation. His words reflect many decades of Church teaching, but because of the likability factor, they seem to carry more weight and are coming across as “new.”

Pope Francis has spoken repeatedly about economic inequality and the right to a just wage for one's work, what we in this country call “minimum wage.” Both are moral issues, but in this reflection, I'm only going to deal with minimum wage. Why? Both issues are highly partisan and political, but “economic inequality” tends to raise more hackles and bring forth accusations of “class warfare.”

My inspiration for this reflection came from reading an article on the Internet: “An Open Letter to Paul Ryan about Poverty and Empathy.” The writer, Karen Weese, had been a volunteer financial advisor for low-income families, so she speaks from experience.

The first thing we must come to grips with is that minimum wage does not apply solely to the poor. Minimum wage is not another form of welfare. It is not about people who want something for nothing. It is not about lazy people. We are talking about real working people who barely make ends meet on what they earn, even though they may work more than one job. As Ms. Weese points out, “Fifty-seven percent of the families below the poverty line in the U.S. are working families, working at jobs that just don't pay enough. ... These folks are childcare workers, janitors, house cleaners, lawn-service workers, bus drivers, hospital aides, waitresses, nursing home employees, security guards, cafeteria workers and cashiers – and they're the people who keep the rest of society humming along for everybody else.”

Here are two stories and a comment ... only two out of the countless stories that could be told by any struggling family.

Story 1: “Nicole Larson was the kind of person whose smile always made you want to smile back. It was only after a while that it struck you: She always smiled with her mouth closed.

“It had been six years since Nicole last sat in a dentist's chair, seven since her last full exam or X-rays ... As an adult, she worked long hours as a waitress and hotel housekeeper, but those jobs lacked insurance, too, and the meager pay always ran out before the month did.

“So Nicole learned to white-knuckle it through toothaches, popping handfuls of ibuprofen. She brushed constantly, rinsing with every oral rinse the drugstore sold. And she perfected a dimpled, twinkle-in-the-eye smile that always got a smile in return ... but didn't require her to open her mouth.

“But today all that was about to change. She had landed a new job – still minimum wage, but this time with dental coverage. She sat in the waiting room, praying that today would be the day the pain finally stopped for good.

“The dentist called Nicole into the exam room, poked and prodded a bit and listed some treatment options. Nicole crossed her fingers.

“But then he stood up and shut her file abruptly, not even trying to hide his disdain. ‘Look, there are plenty of things we could do,’ he said frostily, hand on the doorknob. ‘But if you're just going to let everything go to hell like this, there's really no point.’

“And the door clicked shut behind him.”

Story 2: “I'll never forget the first time I sat down with a nurse's aide who was struggling financially, confident that with some commonsense “belt-tightening,” I could get her budget back on track. Just few minutes in, I started to sweat. She already shopped at Aldi and the Salvation Army. She had a pay-as-you-go cellphone, just for emergencies. She set her thermostat at 63 degrees. There was nothing to trim.

“And when I added up her expenses and subtracted them from income, the resulting figure was \$3. \$3. The entire

financial cushion of a woman working full-time at a societally useful job in the richest country in the world was less than the cost of a gallon of milk.

“I was speechless.

“She read my expression and smiled wryly, forgoing the ‘I told you so’ I so clearly deserved. ‘I can't ‘tighten my belt,’ she said quietly. ‘There is nothing left to tighten.’”

Comment by Ms. Weese: “Poverty is utterly, totally exhausting. There's no give in the finances of a low-wage family: no margin for error, no wiggle room to account for the inevitable vagaries of life. Each day is spent tiptoeing along the edge of a canyon, knowing that the slightest breeze could push you right in.

Things that seem fairly minor to middle-income families – an unexpected car repair, a high heating bill during a cold snap, a trip to the E.R. when little Connor breaks his arm – are cause for total panic, because there's no cushion to absorb them. Pay for that car repair and now there's not enough for the light bill; forgo the light bill and now there's a late fee; pay for all that and now there's not enough for the rent.

It takes almost nothing to start a real avalanche. The working poor have no cushion. There can be no surprises. They cannot make mistakes. They lead their lives on the edge of a cliff, holding their breath, trying not to panic, calculating tradeoffs about even the smallest expenditure – every single day.”

Now back to my own reflections. I repeat that: Every - Single - Day. These are the stories that the media never tell. All they focus on is how the minimum wage issue is playing in Congress or how big business is bemoaning the fact that minimum wage will hurt their profit line. And make no mistake about it: These days, profit is the end-all and be-all.

How about some cold, hard math. This year, the Social Security cost of living will go up by 1 percent. In many firms, the average pay raise is 1-1.5 percent. The Consumer Price Index for February 2014 indicates that

meat, poultry, fish and eggs rose 1.2 percent. Dairy and vegetables rose 0.7 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively. Natural gas was up (3.6 percent), as were heating oil (4.1 percent), gasoline (1.1 percent), medical care (0.06 percent), rent (0.02 percent), home needs (0.02 percent). All these figures are just for one month. I'm not good at math – heck, I nearly flunked Jake Kline's math course in freshman year at ND – something supposedly impossible to do. But it's pretty obvious: How in the name of God can a minimum wage earner or family get ahead?

The thing I have most difficulty understanding is this: In the USA, the whole economic basis is consumption; if consumers consume, the economy flourishes and everyone benefits. It seems to me that the more money we can place in folks' pockets as a result of their productive labor, the more there would be to spend. In addition, the less need there would be for spending programs such as food stamps, housing assistance, etc.

Let's bring in the spiritual and religious dimension. Why is the Church so adamant about these financial issues? Simply put, the Gospel is the foundation. Jesus is not like the poor. Jesus *is* the poor. Jesus is not like the unemployed father who cannot find work and for whom food stamps are the only thing preventing his children from going to bed hungry. Jesus Christ *is* that father. Christ is not like single mother working two, low-paying, part-time jobs surviving only through access to housing and child care subsidies. Jesus Christ *is* that mother.

Put it another way. Would you deny Jesus a living wage so he can life his life with dignity and a lot less stress? Would you deny him food stamps as a supplement to a low income to help put a decent meal on the table? Housing assistance to keep a roof over his family's head? Would you mock him if he went to a food pantry? For making “poor decisions” when they were the only decisions and options available? These are all daily realities in the daily life of a working-class family trying to exist on minimum wage. As I said above, poverty is utterly exhausting.

“Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto me.”

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