

Dear Friends,

It has already been over two weeks since I came back from my vacation. I went to Death Valley, Yosemite National Park and a few other places out West with three other priest friends. We've traveled together before. In 2001, we went to Rome together. There we were privileged to concelebrate Mass with Pope John Paul II in his private chapel and then, we got to meet him in person. I will never forget that moment. In 2005, we went to Ireland for ten days. I still keep the pictures on my computer from that trip. Every time I walk away from the computer the screen saver does a slide show of some of my favorite spots from Ireland.

We had a great time on this trip, too. Death Valley in July doesn't sound like the most enjoyable spot on the planet, but it was truly beautiful. The second day we were there, we drove up to Dante's View and saw the valley floor below and all the other mountains in the distance. It was a cool 75 degrees with a marvelous breeze and a crisp blue sky. Then we drove down to the salt flat on the valley floor where it was about 110 degrees. The contrast was amazing.

Any words at all used to describe the beauty of Yosemite National Park are woefully inadequate. We took lots of pictures, but they can't even begin to reveal the depth of splendor and pageantry of all the different sights available. We spent five days at Yosemite and didn't even scratch the surface. If you've never had the chance to see it, I highly recommend Yosemite as a vacation destination.

Traveling with friends, however, is what has had the greatest impact regarding this trip. We are all so different, but we share our brotherhood as priests and the value of this is as indescribable as the beauty of Yosemite. In some ways my traveling companions and I are as different as Dante's View is from the Death Valley salt flats. However, we were together on one journey that took us away from our natural habitat and back home again. Through it all, our friendship, our traveling together revealed a unity that we would never have been able to experience had we not been together. We were together as brother priests. We were together as friends and those relationships are sacred. It was just as important to tap into that experience of traveling together as it was to see all the sights and beauty of God's creation.

All too often I find myself living with the mindset that I am in control of my own destiny and that I have to make it through this life in my own way and on my own terms. I don't suppose I'm all that unique in that regard. But I would be so totally lost without my friends, my family, my faith to guide me through this life.

You are my friends and my family. We've experienced some incredible peaks and valleys over the last four and one half years, and there is still a great deal that we will experience together. I am so grateful that we share this one faith. I am so grateful that we have this one table from which to partake of the heavenly banquet. Like Yosemite National Park, it's hard to take it all in or to describe how beautiful this faith community really is.

I'm so happy we are on this journey together.

In joyful Hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel