



The Gravino Family

Aurora Mission
P.O. Box 1549
Bradenton, FL 34206
(941)748-4100 Tel
(941)748-2625 Fax
(941)527-6806 Cell
www.auroramission.org
jagravino@gmail.com



The things which you have heard in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim. 2:2

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Dear Friends,

Some first impressions of Italy . . .

How do you live out your faith amidst a hostile and menacing world? How do you pursue the Lord in an environment filled with unexpected threats and uncertainties that severely test your faith? I recently had the privilege of preaching my first sermon since being back in Italy. In Psalm 121 the psalmist cries out, “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come?” In studying the Psalm, I was struck with the realization that the psalmist himself lived in a hostile world surrounded by a wide array of threats and uncertainties.

One of my very first impressions of Italy, following our recent arrival after being away for four and a half years, is that much like the psalmist in Psalm 121 the Italian believer lives in a hostile environment surrounded by a wide array of threats and uncertainties that challenge his faith. Perhaps most striking is an apparent culture of dishonesty that pervades among the population in general. Whether one deals with an employer or a landlord, to cite just a few common examples, legality and ethics are transgressed often in a rather casual “matter of fact” manner. The believer must in this environment strive several times harder to resist the encroaching deceit around him and remain upright.

Family and Ministry life, thus far . . .

We have all aged since returning to Italy. Baby Maddalena led the way celebrating her very first birthday on the 18th of January just days after our arrival on the 15th. She seemed quite emotional during her party shedding many tears (and a few screams) while those present from our church family gathered around her commemorating this grand event. Dad was next. He turned the ripe old age of 35. Samuel followed. On the 10th of February he turned the big “3”. We invited some children from church and two siblings who live next door to celebrate his birthday party at our



home. The party made Samuel's day even if he barely knew most of the children. Up and coming is mommy's birthday! Alexandra (who will age in March) is rediscovering her passion for cooking trying new recipes with the fresh vegetables she brings home from the market. We get the benefit of enjoying the result (Fine Cuisine a la “*Made in Italy*”)!

Your support has allowed us to rent an apartment which is just perfect for us and for our necessities. We have rented it fully furnished allowing us to keep our own furniture and other belongings in storage in Austria until the move to Sicily. We also have our very own backyard! (*unheard of in Rome*).



We have even purchased a vehicle. It is a 2006 Opel Zaffira and it seats 7, which is just great for a growing family with a not too distant additional move ahead. I am even getting re-acclimated to Rome's disorganized traffic. That in itself is worth writing home about! We are truly humbled and thankful for your continued financial commitment to us.

We are enjoying being back with our home church once again. We thank the Lord for this faithful body of believers. I am meeting regularly with the elders on Monday evenings. I have the privilege of participating in their discussions concerning the leadership and

life of the church. These sessions are very rich for me. I find myself growing in my understanding of what biblical ministry looks like in this part of the world. The elders have given me several teaching responsibilities. They desire that the church be exposed and blessed by my own preaching ministry throughout our time here. I will be preaching again in March right after I return from the Shepherd's Conference in Southern California. In May I have been asked to teach the whole month during the Sunday morning service. I will be preaching out of James and then leading the adult Sunday school class afterwards in a discussion time on topics raised during the sermon. I am no doubt excited and grateful for these opportunities.

As the psalmist in Psalm 121 affirms that his help comes from the Lord, we too continue to move forward placing our complete trust and confidence in our sovereign God and His good plans for us in Christ.



Items for prayer . . .

1. I will be traveling to California on the 24th of February and returning to Rome on the 9th of March. I will be attending an extended meeting of the TMAI training academies followed by the Shepherd's Conference. Please pray for safe travels and that my time there will be profitable. Also pray for Alex and the kids who will remain in Rome.
2. I have to prepare my first course for the Academy. I am expected in early June. I really need wisdom on how to approach and prepare for the course. It is called "Theological English" and it is designed to help Italian church leaders acquire a working knowledge of English in order to read English commentaries and understand English theological vocabulary.
3. We have to begin seriously planning our move to Sicily (meaning getting a home, shipping our goods from Austria down to Sicily all the fun stuff again). Pray for wisdom as we plan and organize the various steps.
4. Please pray for our continued integration into the church in Rome.
5. Pray for our family. I need the Lord's help in shepherding Alex and the kids in this continued "transition" period.
6. We are befriending our next-door neighbors Fabio & Laura and their children Elisa (5) and Lorenzo (3). Our children enjoy playing together and Fabio is very inquisitive about our faith. Please pray for our testimony and their salvation.
7. Pray for my own devotional and spiritual life (I always need it).

Compelled by the Master's Love,

Johnny and Alexandra Gravino, Samuele & Maddalena

2 Cor. 5:9