

A Blessing in disguise

Dr. Alannah Fernandes, a violinist and researcher from Mumbai, shares with the readers the fascinating story of her participation in an international event, in Italy

He makes all things beautiful...in His time! - Yes, you have heard this a zillion times and so have I. Being a PhD Scholar I submitted my thesis to the University of Mumbai in September 2020, during the pandemic. More than a year went by while I eagerly waited for a date to be fixed for my PhD *viva voce*, the defense by which I could finally

attain my doctorate. But I received no news.

In the meanwhile, around February 2022, I heard about an international seminar called **UNIV INSPIRE 2022** being held in Rome, Italy, for *university students only* from all over the world. The dates coincided with the Holy Week. I was eligible to attend the seminar because being *still* a PhD Scholar (thanks to the delay of more than one year!) I was *still* considered a university student.

A week before the seminar started, we were allotted into groups based on languages of the students, on the category we had chosen and the country of origin. The theme for the seminar was *Rebuilding Together: The Strength of Human Relationships*. I chose a topic in the area of humanities and my team consisted of students from Poland, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, a mentor from

Puerto Rico and myself from India. We worked together as a team via Zoom on a presentation that we shared in person, in Rome, with the other participants of the seminar.

On arrival in Rome, we learned that we could also attend the Palm Sunday Mass celebrated by Pope Francis at St. Peter's Square, if we wanted. I was tremendously grateful for this experience that I am not sure I even dreamt of. In addition, later in the week, we also managed to get seats very close to the stage for another meeting with the Pope, at the usual audience that is held on Wednesdays in the Vatican. The audience hall was filled with people from all over the world and youth of the UNIV 2022.

The academic Sharing Day of seminar, on which each group came up to present their work, was another incredible moment. Hearing

each one's perspectives and distinct viewpoints was a very enriching experience strongly bringing to light that, regardless of the country or background you are from, values, morals and true humanity speak the same language: love.

Sharing of presentations at the seminar, sight-seeing around Rome, meeting students from various parts of the world and learning about their cultures and traditions was another unforgettable experience. Our meals were in a huge dining area wherein each one had to choose a different table daily and dine with students from different continents leaving us with interactions and friends from many other countries – a sheer blessing!

We also had a get-together every evening. In one of them, for instance, a journalist from Poland shared with us some striking life lessons from her

experience of reporting from the Ukraine borders during the time of war.

A month after I got back home, in Mumbai, I got an intimation from my research guide: my PhD defense would finally be scheduled soon, something that I was waiting for nearly two years. This delay was a clear blessing in disguise!

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