

Pope

From Page 1

The Kronaizls learned the Pope generally holds a Wednesday audience when he is at the Vatican. The Holy Father will bless newlyweds for a happy wedded life when he gives his general blessing at the conclusion of the papal audience.

The newlywed couples receive "sposi novella" tickets and may sometimes sit in the "reparto special" section of the audience. After the audience, the couple is invited to the Bronze Door to receive rosaries blessed by the Holy Father.

Morgan learned of the need to contact church officials ahead of time to make arrangements and to follow a time frame for receiving the papal blessing.

"There is the opportunity (for a blessing) if you are within two months of your sacramental marriage in the church," she said. "The (Pontifical) North American College of Cardinals arranges the tickets for the papal audience. You sit in the front and get to greet the Pope."

The Kronaizls learned they didn't need tickets for the Wednesday papal audiences in August. However, they needed to submit information for the newlyweds' blessing. In addition, the couples needed to wear their wedding attire or something similar.

Morgan decided she wanted to wear her wedding dress for the papal blessing.

"How many times do you get to wear your wedding dress? Not many," she said.

Morgan brought her wedding dress as a carry-on item rather than check it as luggage. Airlines can offer, if available, a special closet or storage space for the dress. The process became a bit cumbersome with the changes of flights but carried one advantage.

"It was beneficial because we got to pre-board every single flight," Kraig said. "All we had to do was tell them that Morgan was carrying her wedding dress."

ARRIVING IN ROME

The Kronaizls didn't need regular tickets for the Wednesday papal audience. However, the couple received two "bigletti" (ticket invitations) which could be picked up the Tuesday afternoon prior to the audience.

Many Romans take vacations during August, but the large number of tourists usually ensures a large papal audience on Wednesdays, Morgan said. As a result, the Kronaizls arrived at the Paul VI Audience Hall at 7 a.m. and waited 1 1/2 hours just to get inside.

Kraig estimated 25 to 50 newlywed couples were among the crowd and waiting to receive the papal blessing.

"There were quite a few people in line," he said. "Because we were newlyweds, they had a special section set aside. We just got in line and went through security."

However, security was tight with large numbers of the Swiss Guard and plain clothes officers protecting the pontiff and standing watch around the Vatican, Kraig said.

Morgan found the sur-



Kraig and Morgan (Peck) Kronaizl are shown at one of the historic sites in Rome during their recent honeymoon, which included Pope Francis' blessing for newlyweds. The Kronaizls both graduated from the University of South Dakota Law School in Vermillion and now reside in Sioux Falls.

roundings a bit stressful even with their special seating. "In a way, it was more nerve-racking than if you were part of the general audience," she said.

In many ways, Morgan said the atmosphere reminded her of attending World Youth Day and awaiting the Holy Father's arrival with a huge group of people.

"It's really fun to go to these large Catholic gatherings. I was at World Youth Day in 2005 when Pope Benedict was there. We were pretty close (to him), but he was in his Popemobile," she said of the pontiff's enclosed vehicle. "It was amazing, camping in the field with 2 million other Catholics and singing. It was a fun celebration."

THE PAPAL BLESSING

The Kronaizls and other audience members felt the same anticipation last month while waiting for Pope Francis' arrival at the Vatican, Morgan said.

"Everybody was cheering when the Pope started coming (into the Vatican audience hall)," she said. "They could see him on a big screen when he was arriving at the hallway to go to the audience."

Pope Francis spoke from an elevated area, Morgan said. The pope greeted the audience and delivered a short homily, or sermon, she added.

"It was a message he wanted the faithful to think about. Then, he continued with prayers," she said. "There were (translators who) did a summary of what the pope just said."

Kraig estimated the pope's message was translated into at least a dozen languages, representing the "catholic" — or universal — nature of the church.

The audience received a blessing, with many people holding items — notably rosaries — they wanted blessed, Morgan said. In addition, the pope came down for a blessing of the first three rows filled with people who were ill or with disabilities.

Then, the time arrived for the newlyweds' blessing, with Pope Francis moving from couple to couple.

"I just couldn't believe that we would meet the pope in person," Kraig said. "I was just dumbfounded that this was actually happening."

Morgan said the moment finally became real for both Kraig and her.

"When we were planning our honeymoon, I needed to convince Kraig that they allowed us to do this (papal blessing)," she said. "We knew we were allowed to see (the pope), but we ended up meeting him."

The brief meeting with Pope Francis became a blur, Morgan said.

"Kraig tried to speak (to the pope), but I told him, 'Kraig, he doesn't speak English.' So Kraig just kept grinning," she said. "Afterwards, the cab driver said Kraig didn't stop smiling even after we pulled up to the hotel."

"It was surreal," Kraig said. "I was awestruck by the whole situation."

The official Vatican photographer took pictures of the Kronaizls during the blessing. The couple went to a designated area to pick up the photos.

"The Swiss Guard asked our purpose. If you weren't able to tell them, you weren't allowed in," Kraig said. "We were shown where we had to go for the photos. When we walked into that area of the Vatican, we didn't see anybody. There were Morgan and me, and there was nobody else back there."

The Kronaizls picked up their photos and departed, enjoying the rest of Rome's rich history, culture and food during their honeymoon.

"We were there for 10 or 11 days," Kraig said. "Ordinarily, you would only go once (for a newlywed blessing). We had the chance to go back a second time, but it wouldn't have felt right."

Morgan wanted to receive a second papal blessing, but a sign from above convinced her otherwise.

"It was God's sign (not to go back a second time) when, Wednesday of the next week, it was raining cats and dogs," she said. "And I didn't want to go out in the rain with my wedding dress."

POPE FRANCIS IN THE USA

electrifying in his approach to the papacy," she said. "It's what the church needed. He's showing us how we should practice our faith."

Morgan plans to take her wedding dress to a specialist for preservation. However, the pope's blessing will remain the true symbol of the Kronaizls' visit to the Vatican and a holy start to their married life together.

"Most marriages need all the help they can get," she said. "Having the pope bless your marriage can't hurt."

Kraig said he realizes few couples in the world can have their marriages blessed by the Holy Father. However, he would encourage anyone to see the pontiff wherever possible.

"It would be my wish for everybody to do it," he said.

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