Faith through the Argentine Streets

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Faith through the Argentine Streets

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph:

My first exposure to the Argentine culture was one evening that I will never forget. As a sophomore at St. John Fisher College, I was blessed with the opportunity to spend a semester in Buenos Aires, Argentina with a host family. After two days of traveling, I finally made it to my destination, and moved everything into my new home. It was extremely overwhelming at first, but I quickly found my way. The second night I was in Argentina, I was invited to the house of my advisor along with the rest of my group for a typical Argentine Barbecue known as ‘asado’. Here, we were able to try Argentina's famous beef cuts as well as the red wine. It was an incredible first experience because I was immediately introduced right into the culture. That night is when my relationship with my advisor began. Her name is Barbara, and she is a young Argentine woman who was born and raised in the city of Buenos Aires. Her energy and love for her country was evident and she used her knowledge and experience to introduce us to many parts of the culture that were both common, and underground.
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The first night we had the asado, I had a conversation with Barbara that at the time, I thought was rare. I had only known her for a couple hours, and we already jumped into these in-depth life discussions about family, education, and faith. Although I enjoy higher level thinking discussions, I was surprised at how willing she was to converse with me about such heavy topics. As we sat back sipping mate (the local Argentine tea), I was quickly introduced to ideas I had n't been exposed to yet. As the semester went on, I grew to learn more from Barbara and the rest of my Argentine friends about their culture, and I quickly learned how their faith plays a huge part in their daily lives.
Barbara - like the rest of the majority of Argentina - grew up in a Catholic-based home. Throughout the city of Buenos Aires, one can truly see how the European influence in many ways infiltrated the culture. One primary way is through their faith, a huge part of the culture. Walking through the streets of downtown Buenos Aires, and through each barrio (neighborhood), one will come to find multiple elaborate Catholic churches. It is a very similar experience to walking through the streets of Italy. I was surprised and delighted to have so much history, beauty, and evidence of a prominent faith right at my fingertips. Within my first couple weeks, I tried to visit as many churches as possible, just to examine the interior and exterior of the buildings, and really appreciate the architecture. Throughout the rest of my five months, through my relationships with friends, I learned not only of the impact it had on the physical landscape of the city, but the cultural values that the majority of Argentines shared.

One day, Barbara and I were taking a trip downtown with one of our other girlfriends to go have lunch together and take a boat ride. It was a beautiful day and we thought to take advantage of it with some nice Argentine practices. We took the subway downtown which, like most other big cities, is filled with people of the streets begging or trying to sell useless items to make some money. Still thinking with my United States mind, I usually just ignored said beggars and kept going on my daily life. After all, you can't help everyone. However, Barbara had a different approach to the poor. When a person asked for money - young or old - Barbara typically gave them a couple pesos. Looking around, I was surprised by how many people did give some money to these beggars. I was accustomed to the New York attitude of ignoring the poor people begging on the side of streets. Why should I give them the money I worked so hard for? They’ll probably just buy drugs anyways. This was always my excuse as I consistently drove past people on the streets of Rochester. However when I asked Barbara, her response was refreshing. She explained to me that she understood that the system had failed these people. Barbara pushed me to open my mind and expand on my ‘Americanized’ way of thinking. She helped me see how here in the United States, we have a common idea - that if one were to just work hard enough, life will get easier. However, in reality, sometimes the cards just are not in your favor. I believe the Latin American way of thinking is heavily influenced by their prominent faith-based religion. Barbara, like most Argentines, proved to be a Christ-like Catholic. Whether that was her specific intention or not, the influence of faith is evident in their daily lives.
The Argentine culture is one that I fell in love with the more time I spent there. Their passion caused for a daily life of family and fun. Because of my relationship with the locals, I truly experienced the cultural norms: coming from a religious background, it is evident it plays such a strong role in their lives. Coming back to the United States, our separation of church and state is so strong, I would argue that other than some holidays, there isn't much of a religious influence in our modern day culture. It was refreshing and an eye-opening experience to see a culture so packed with religious influence.

Olivia Lopez at the Iguazu Falls in Argentina