

## “Cruising the St. Johns River”

By Faith Libbe, SFO  
Staff Editor  
faithalibbe@juno.com



*“Seas and rivers, bless the Lord;  
praise and exalt Him above all forever.”* Daniel

With summer just around the corner, I recall a morning spent on the St. Johns River just a few weeks ago. The morning mist gave way to the rising of the sun and a gentle cool breeze. I realized this is a memory to be savored, as the heat of summer will soon set in!

The St. Johns River is the longest river in the state of Florida. A Catholic mission by the name of San Juan del Puerto was founded near the mouth of the river on Fort George Island, around 1578. In time, the river became known as Rio de San Juan, which translates to St. Johns River in English. The name has remained to this day.

The St. Johns River stretches 310 miles from Indian River County to the Atlantic Ocean in Jacksonville. We rented a little motor boat not far from Hontoon Island, near De Land, approximately 35 miles from Orlando. As we took off from the dock, the blue sky and gentle breeze made for a delightful morning on the water. A tributary surrounded by lush green woods on either side, welcomed us to get a closer look at the wildlife.

There is an abundance of water fowl along the river. We were blessed to view a variety of herons, which included a Great Blue Heron, a Little Blue Heron, a Tricolored Heron, and a Black-crowned Night Heron. There we also saw plenty of Anhingas (black duck-like birds), diving for breakfast and then flying to a quiet spot to spread their wings to dry.

I have since learned that the Anhinga needs to dry out their wings and feathers, because they are not waterproofed by oils like ducks and they can get waterlogged. It will perch for long periods with its wings spread to allow the drying process. If it attempts



to fly while its wings are wet, it has great difficulty getting off the water and takes off by flapping vigorously while “running” on the water.

In addition to seeing the Herons and Anhingas, we were also blessed to see an Osprey, some wild turkeys and many turtles along the shoreline. Last but not least, we saw many alligators sunning themselves and some swimming across the river!

Almost “jungle-like,” the lush green woods with its palms and Spanish moss beckoned me to share its beauty with you in our TAU-USA! I then began to think of St. Francis. I thought he would probably appreciate the beauty of the woods along the St. Johns very much. For I know Francis loved the beauty of the woods/forest because I have seen where he chose to pray in solitude...in the forests at the Carceri and LaVerna.

As I continued to think of Francis, I mused to myself what he would make of an alligator! All I could come up with was that he would probably smile at his fellow creature and say, “Peace and good Brother Gator!” ☺



*“Peace and good, Brother Gator!”*

May your summer be blessed by the beauty of God’s creation!