

Italy - Rome

Day 13

Wednesday, March 15 2023

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### **Vatican Museum**

The Vatican Museums are the public museums of the Vatican City. They display works from the immense collection amassed by the Catholic Church and the papacy throughout the centuries, including several of the most renowned Roman sculptures and most important masterpieces of Renaissance art in the world.

Pope Julius II founded the museums in the early 16th century. The Sistine Chapel, with its ceiling and altar wall decorated by Michelangelo, and the Stanze di Raffaello (decorated by Raphael) are on the visitor route through the Vatican Museums. There are 24 galleries, or rooms, in total, with the Sistine Chapel, notably, being the last room visited within the Museum.

### **St. Peters Square**

Saint Peter's Square (Italian: Piazza San Pietro) is a large plaza located directly in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, the papal enclave inside Rome, directly west of the neighborhood (rione) of Borgo. Both the square and the basilica are named after Saint Peter, an apostle of Jesus considered by Catholics to be the first Pope.

At the centre of the square is an ancient Egyptian obelisk, erected at the current site in 1586. Gian Lorenzo Bernini designed the square almost 100 years later, including the massive Doric colonnades, [1][2] four columns deep, which embrace visitors in "the maternal arms of Mother Church". A granite fountain constructed by Bernini in 1675 matches another fountain designed by Carlo Maderno in 1613.

## **Scala Santa**

The Scala Sancta are a set of 28 white marble steps that are Roman Catholic relics located in an edifice on extraterritorial property of the Holy See in Rome, Italy proximate to the Archbasilica of Saint John in Laterano.

Officially, the edifice is titled the Pontifical Sanctuary of the Holy Stairs (Pontificio Santuario della Scala Santa), and incorporates part of the old Papal Lateran Palace. Replica stairs flank the original staircase, which may only be climbed on one's knees. The Holy Stairs lead to the Church of Saint Lawrence in Palatio ad Sancta Sanctorum (Chiesa di San Lorenzo in Palatio ad Sancta Sanctorum) or simply the "Sancta Sanctorum" (English: Holy of Holies), which was the personal chapel of the early Popes.

According to Roman Catholic tradition, the Holy Stairs were the steps leading up to the praetorium of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem on which Jesus Christ stepped on his way to trial during his Passion. The Stairs reputedly were brought to Rome by Saint Helena in the fourth century. For centuries, the Scala Sancta has attracted Christian pilgrims who wish to honour the Passion of Jesus Christ. Since the early 1700s, the Holy Stairs have been encased in wood for protection, but were briefly exposed in 2019 following restoration work.

## **Abbey of Three Fountains**

Tre Fontane Abbey, or the Abbey of Saints Vincent and Anastasius, is a Roman Catholic abbey in Rome, held by monks of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, better known as Trappists. It is known for raising the lambs whose wool is used to weave the pallia of new metropolitan archbishops. The Pope blesses the lambs on the Feast of Saint Agnes on January 21. The wool is prepared, and he gives the pallia to the new archbishops on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the Holy Apostles.

Belonging to the monastery are three separate churches. The first, the Church of St. Paul of Three Fountains, was raised on the spot where St. Paul was beheaded by order of the Emperor Nero. Legend accounts for the three springs (fontane) with the assertion that, when severed from Paul's body, his head bounced and struck the earth in three different places, from which fountains sprang up. These still flow and are located in the sanctuary.

The second church, Santa Maria Scala Coeli, dedicated to Mary under the title "Our Lady of Martyrs", is built over the relics of Saint Zeno and his 10,203 legionaries, who were martyred at the order of Diocletian in 299. In this church is the altar of the scala coeli ("ladder to heaven"), from which the church receives its present name.

Third are the church and monastery dedicated to Saints Vincent and Anastasius, built by Pope Honorius I in 626 and given to the Benedictines. They were to care for the two older sanctuaries, as well as their own church.

### **St. Paul Outside the Wall**

The Papal Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, commonly known as Saint Paul's Outside the Walls, is one of Rome's four major papal basilicas, along with the basilicas of Saint John in the Lateran, Saint Peter's, and Saint Mary Major, as well as one of the Seven Pilgrim Churches of Rome. The Basilica is within Italian territory, but the Holy See owns the Basilica in a regime of extraterritoriality, with Italy recognizing its full ownership and conceding it "the immunity granted by international law to the headquarters of the diplomatic agents of foreign States"

On 6 December 2006, it was announced that Vatican archaeologists had confirmed the presence of a white marble sarcophagus beneath the altar, perhaps containing the remains of the Apostle. A press conference held on 11 December 2006<sup>[14]</sup> gave more details of the work of excavation, which lasted from 2002 to 22 September 2006, and which had been initiated after pilgrims to the basilica expressed disappointment that the Apostle's tomb could not be visited or touched during the Jubilee year of 2000.<sup>[15]</sup> The sarcophagus was not extracted from its position, so that only one of its two longer sides is visible.<sup>[16]</sup> In 2009 the Pope announced that radiocarbon dating confirmed that the bones in the tomb date from the 1st or 2nd century suggesting that they are indeed Paul's.

A curved line of bricks indicating the outline of the apse of the Constantinian basilica was discovered immediately to the west of the sarcophagus, showing that the original basilica had its entrance to the east, like Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. The larger 386 basilica that replaced it had the Via Ostiense (the road to Ostia) to the east and so was extended westward, towards the river Tiber, changing the orientation diametrically.