

# The Shrines of Italy

11 days / 9 nights

O Beauty ever ancient and ever new! Behold, you were within me... and there I searched for you (St. Augustine, Confessions, X, 27). Far more than just experiencing a new land or seeing new sights, our Pilgrimage to Italy takes us to the modern center of Roman Catholicism. And then to venture forth through the spiritually rich and beautiful countryside of Italy, we will reflect, become closer to God, and gratefully consider the sacrifices and dedication of those who have gone before. As we behold the many sacred shrines of Italy, stand in holy places, and experience timeless works of art regarded as the most awe-inspiring and important of the world – we will renew our commitment to the roots of our Catholic faith. The masses and meditations we celebrate along the way will draw us together as a community. They will remind us of our blessings and the call to stewardship as followers of Jesus Christ.

## **Day 1: Departure from the USA**

*O Rome! My country! City of the soul!* (Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, st. 78)

Our pilgrimage begins with an overnight flight to Rome, Italy.

## **Day 2: Arrival to Rome**

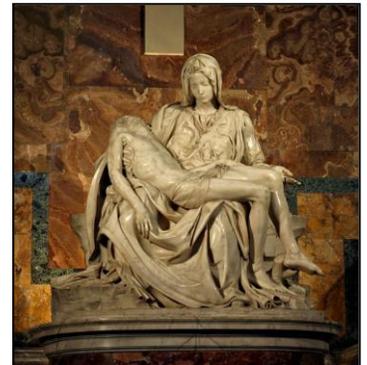
*Rome has spoken; the case is closed* (St. Augustine, Sermones, 131)

Welcome to Rome! After arriving at our hotel, a little rest and relaxation might be in order. Or, for the more adventurous and energetic, suggested sights and walking trails can be provided upon request.

## **Day 3: (Wednesday) Papal Audience, Vatican Museum & St. Peter's Basilica**

*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee* (Peter in Acts 3: 6).

We greet the new day in a city nicknamed Caput Mundi (Capital of the World) and The Eternal City, not only because Rome has always been the hub of art, education, high culture and politics in the western world, but because it is also a spiritual capital and a powerful center of pilgrimage. We will first visit Vatican City to attend an Audience/Blessing with our Holy Father (if available), then we will tour the Vatican Museums which house what can be described as the most important collections of art in the world. The history and awe surrounding the galleries and all the treasures they contain will truly transfix us. Highlights include The Tapestry Gallery, The Raphael Rooms, and The Sistine Chapel where we will gaze on Michelangelo's incredible masterpiece. We will also enter St. Peter's Basilica which has the largest interior of any Christian church in the world and which has been described as the reason Rome is still the center of the civilized world. Tradition and historical evidence hold that St. Peter's tomb is directly below the altar of this basilica, which American Ralph Waldo Emerson described as an ornament of the earth... the sublime of the beautiful. Next we will have the chance to marvel at Bernini's beautiful bronze canopy and Michelangelo's Blessed Mother holding her crucified son, known as the Pietà. We will also see St. John Paul II's grave at the San Sebastiano chapel. Up until April 29th, 2011 the tomb of St. John Paul II was in the Vatican's crypt. With his beatification, his remains were transferred from the crypt to the basilica, as is tradition with popes, saints and the blessed and taken to the San Sebastiano chapel, next to Michaelangelo's Pietà. The remains of St. John Paul II are under this altar, covered with a gravestone and just four words: "Beatus Ioannes Paulus II." We will also have opportunity before dinner for individual exploration. Some might want to sit quietly at an outside café to take it all in while others will want to shop and savor the flavor of the "Eternal City."



#### **Day 4: Christian Rome & the Catacombs**

*"Roma, Roma, non basta una vita!" (Rome, Rome, one lifetime is not enough!)*

Today we visit the Colosseum (70-80 AD), one of the most well-known symbols of Rome which has long been considered sacred because of its association with early Christian martyrs. The largest amphitheater ever built in the Roman Empire, the Flavian Amphitheater, as the Colosseum is also called, originally seated 60,000 and was used for gladiatorial combat. Its name refers to the 'colossal' statue of Nero that at one time stood at the entrance. Nearby, we will see the Mamertine Prison, an ancient prison is where St. Peter and Paul are said to have been held before their execution in Rome, and Pietro in Vincoli (the Church of St. Peter in Chains), a minor basilica in Rome that houses St. Peter's chains and Michelangelo's famous Moses statue. In the afternoon we will have the opportunity to visit the Catacombs of St. Calixtus, an underground burial site of many early Christians and popes, and to get a rare glimpse into ancient Christianity and early examples of Christian art. Our day's journey concludes at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls which was founded by the Roman Emperor Constantine I over the burial place of Saint Paul. The evening finds us enjoying dinner and another overnight stay in Rome.



#### **Day 5: Excursion to Montecassino & Pompeii**

*We are therefore about to establish a school of the Lord's service in which we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome (Rule of Saint Benedict, prologue).*

Today we will travel about 80 miles southeast of Rome through the Italian countryside to the Abbey of Monte Cassino where St. Benedict established his first monastery, the source of the Benedictine Order, around 529. During the battle of Monte Cassino (January-May, 1944), the Abbey was almost completely destroyed when it was mistaken for a German stronghold (the Abbey was instead a refuge for women and children). It was rebuilt after the war and re-consecrated in 1964. It was very fortunate that some 1400 irreplaceable manuscripts were all transferred to the Vatican at the beginning of this siege and thus were saved from destruction. We will continue by bus, enjoying a brief panoramic tour of Naples, before going on to Pompeii to witness the ruins of one of the most devastating volcanic eruptions in the history of the region. The eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 A.D. covered the city of Pompeii with ashes. What is left of this ancient city, including some beautiful frescoes and mosaic floors, will give us a glimpse into that era and an idea of what was going on in the lives of the inhabitants of Pompeii moments before that catastrophic eruption. As the day draws to a close, St. Benedict's Rule "Let all be received as Christ" lingers in our hearts. We return to Rome for dinner and another overnight stay.



#### **Day 6: St. Francis of Assisi**

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace (attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi).*

We leave Rome today for an excursion to Assisi, the site of many a pilgrimage. Assisi lies in the Umbria region of Italy on the eastern flank of Monte Subasio and is regarded as a very special spot on earth linked in legend with its native son, St. Francis, a gentle saint who founded the Franciscan order and is remembered as a great lover of nature (his sermon to an audience of birds is one of the best-loved sermons of his life). While in Assisi, we will explore the huge 13th-century basilica which contains many of the possessions of St. Francis and a series of frescoes depicting his life. You will have a chance to see where St. Francis knelt before the crucifix and heard Jesus ask him to rebuild His church. We will also visit the Santa Maria Maggiore, the earliest extant church in Assisi, as well as the Basilica of Santa Chiara (St. Clare), where St. Clare who founded the Order of Poor Clares, followed in the humble ways of St. Francis. We end our tour of Assisi by visiting the tombs of St. Francis and St. Clare before continuing on to Florence for our evening meal and night's stay.



## **Day 7: Florence**

*A great flame follows a little spark (Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy. Paradiso. I, l. 34).*

Today's destination is regarded as the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance and is one of the most beautiful and inspiring cities of the world with its rich artistic, historic and spiritual heritage. Florence is birthplace or chosen home of Dante, Boccaccio, Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Donatello, Galileo, Catherine de' Medici, Cavalli, Florence Nightingale and Emilio Pucci. We will be treated to a wonderful tour of this Cradle of Renaissance, allowing us to see many unforgettable sights such as the domed cathedral of the city, Santa Maria del Fiore, also known as The Duomo, the Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge), Piazza della Signoria, Giotto's Bell Tower, the bronze "gate of Paradise, and the Academy of Fine Arts which contains many masterpieces of some of the artists mentioned above. We'll find that great monuments are the landmarks of Florence! There will be time to explore many other treasures in this beautiful city before our dinner and overnight stay here.

## **Day 8: St. Anthony of Padova**

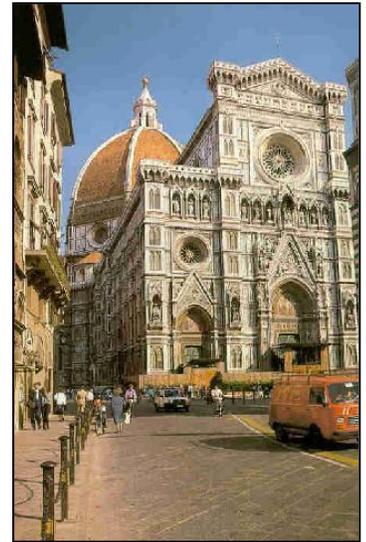
*Sits as one new-risen from a dream (Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew, IV, I, 189 and V, ii, 20)*

We travel 40 km west of Venice this morning to Padua (Padova), picturesque and renowned as the site of the 800-year old Universita' di Padova (Galileo Galilei was among its lecturers) and setting for Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew. We come to pay homage to St. Anthony and visit the Basilica of St. Anthony known locally as "Il Santo" where the bones of the saint rest in a richly ornamented chapel. Saint Anthony, a much loved and admired saint, was canonized less than one year after his death. Initially a member of the Augustinian Order, St. Anthony joined the Franciscan Order in 1221 because of the death of the five Franciscan martyrs: St. Bernard, St. Peter, St. Otho, St. Accursius, and St. Adjutus, whose headless and mutilated bodies were brought to St. Anthony's monastery on their way back for burial. Although St. Anthony lived only ten years after joining the Franciscan Order (and was only 36-years old when he died), his teachings were so simple and powerful that even the most uneducated and innocent understood them. We will have much to gratefully consider as we continue on to Venice for dinner and overnight.

## **Day 9: Venice**

*A fair city of the heart (Lord Byron describing Venice).*

With its unique heritage of art, architecture, spirit, and culture, the city of Venice has earned the nickname La Serenissima, "The Most Serene." Today we'll be treated to a guided tour of this inspiring city, including a visit to the Basilica of St. Mark which architecturally is a Byzantine wonder covered in golden mosaics and art treasures. Legend has it that Venetian merchants stole the relics of Saint Mark the Evangelist (originally in Alexandria, Egypt) and hid them in a pork barrel to get them past the guards. The escapade is depicted in the 13th-century mosaic above the door farthest left of the front entrance of the Basilica. The 12th and 13th century interior mosaics, all with a message of Christian salvation, depict scenes and events from both the Old and New Testaments. St. John XXIII and Pope John Paul I were both Patriarchs of Venice. After Mass, in this magnificent, gleaming Basilica, we will visit other sites in and around the Piazza San Marco (St. Mark's Square) including the Doge's Palace, home to the political leader of the Republic of Venice. We will enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure in this "fair city of the heart" and look forward to another overnight and dinner here.



## Day 10: Milan & The Last Supper

*What a wonder it is! So grand, so solemn, so vast! And yet so delicate, so airy, so graceful! (Mark Twain describing the Milan Duomo from Innocents Abroad).*

Our morning's drive takes us through northern Italy to Milan, Italy's business hub and a great draw to many throughout history, from St. Ambrose and Leonardo da Vinci to the waves of immigrants who fueled its growth in the second half of the 20th century. Here we will visit one of the most famous paintings in the world, Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper which is still located in its original location: the refectory wall of the former Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The last meal shared by Jesus and his disciples was a common theme used to decorate convent refectories but Leonardo made drastic modifications by presenting the scene with astounding realism. Across from The Last Supper on the southern wall is the large Crucifixion, painted by Donato Montorfano. The two scenes are linked by a painted frieze of garlands containing Bible quotations supportive of monastic life. Afterwards, we visit the largest Gothic cathedral and second largest Catholic cathedral in the world: the Duomo di Milano. We know the Duomo occupied a central place in this ancient city because the street plan has its streets either radiating from the Duomo or circling it. We will enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure in Milan before coming together for a memorable and sumptuous farewell dinner after which we'll spend our last night in Italy.

## Day 11: Depart for Home

*We will let the power of the holy shrines and priceless relics settle over us, then like other pilgrims of other times, go back to our lives with renewed faith and readiness.*

We leave our hotel and head for the airport to return to the US.

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