



EUROPE IN ROME

Basilica of Santa Maria
in Ara Coeli
EUROPEAN UNION





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**MINISTERO
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REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

EUROPE IN ROME

Jubilee journeys

Basilica of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli

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Section for Fundamental Questions
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4 themed routes to follow

The Jubilee is a great event for all peoples during which each and every pilgrim can immerse themselves in the endless mercy of God.

It's the Year of return to the essence of fraternity, mending the relationship between ourselves and the Father.

It's the Year that calls us to conversion, an opportunity to take stock of our lives and ask the Lord to direct them towards holiness. It's the Year of solidarity, of hope, of justice, and of commitment to the service of God, living in joy and peace with our brothers and sisters.

But, above all, the Jubilee year has at its center the encounter with Christ.

For this reason, the Jubilee asks us to get moving and to overcome the confines in our lives. When we move we don't just change place physically, but we transform ourselves too. For this reason, it's important to prepare well, to plan the route and



have a clear sight of our destination. In a sense the Holy Year pilgrimage begins before the journey itself: its starting point is the decision to do set out on the path.

To fully experience the 2025 Jubilee, through walking and prayer, four routes have been prepared for pilgrims within the city of Rome, each with its own theme.

Europe in Rome

The Pilgrim Path of the Churches of the European Union, includes visits to 28 churches and basilicas, historically linked to EU member countries for cultural or artistic reasons or because they served as places of welcome for pilgrims from individual member states of the European community.

Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches

Originally the idea of Saint Philip Neri in the 16th century, the pilgrimage of the Seven Churches is one of the most ancient Roman traditions. It's a 25 km route winding through the streets of Rome.

Jubilee Churches

This is one of the churches designated as a meeting place for pilgrims. Catecheses will be held in these churches in different languages to rediscover the meaning of the Holy Year. They will also offer the sacrament of Reconciliation and host events aimed at nourishing the faith with experiences of prayer.

Women Patrons of Europe and Doctors of the Church

This is a pilgrimage that involves stopping in prayer in those Roman Churches linked to Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Saint Brigid of Sweden, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, and Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

The Basilica of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli

Reasons for a pilgrimage

The Campidoglio with its great buildings, and the Ara Coeli church which stands on the Capitoline hill, is an ideal place to recall the European Union, first and foremost because it had its historical and political origins here. (fig.1)

It was on 25 March 1957, in the *Sala degli Orazi e Curiazi* in the Campidoglio, that six European nations – France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg – signed the treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Community of Atomic Energy (CEE, or EURATOM). Those agreements – known as the ‘Treaties of Rome’ – adding to the European Coal and Steel Commu-

nity (CECA), already established in 1951 – marked the birth of the European Community, which was later transformed into today’s European Union. The dream of a united Europe, which matured in people’s minds after World War II, took shape with the creation of community institutions aimed at the integration of national economies and the pooling of research into defense, with the aim of making unthinkable the idea of a new war between European countries. In 2004, in the same room in Rome’s Capitol, the plans for a Constitution for Europe were signed, though it was later abandoned after ‘no’ votes in referendums in France and the Netherlands. And it was here in 2017, 60 years after the Treaties of Rome, that no longer just six,



fig.1

but 27 member states of the European Union, now with their own Parliament, met again to affirm that that the “dream of the few has become the hope of the many”. The *Joint Declaration* stated that “standing together is the best way we have to influence global dynamics and defend our common interests and values”. Even without defining the characteristic values of European history and without naming their specific roots, the existence of Europe was nevertheless affirmed as a unique reality in the world. It was stated that it is good that young people can now study and find work throughout the continent, so that “the Union can preserve our cultural heritage and promote cultural diversity” - yet another reminder of that heritage which is unique in the world and respects every culture. The *Declaration* ended by stating that future progress must take place “in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity”. This principle, which is common in European history, states that, if a lower body is capable of carrying out a task well, the higher body should not intervene, but rather should support its actions. It affirms both the importance of the family which must be respected and supported in its free choices, and the importance of civil society and the freedom of its organizations, including religious ones, which should be protected from state interference: it is this same principle which ensures that each nation, as a “smaller” entity compared to the whole of Europe, must never be simply absorbed

and dissolved in it, but rather supported in the richness of its unique history.

Marking that 60th anniversary, Pope Francis declared to the various European heads of state, quoting the founding statesmen of Europe: “At the origin of the idea of Europe there is ‘the figure and responsibility of the human person with his ferment of evangelical brotherhood, and desire for truth and justice sharpened by a thousand-year long experience’ (De Gasperi). Rome, with its vocation to universality, is the symbol of this experience and for this reason it was chosen as the place for the signing of the Treaties, since here lie - as the Dutch Foreign Minister Luns recalled - ‘the political, legal and social foundations of our civilization’”.

Indeed, it was in the Roman Forum that classical culture and the Christian faith met and, together, gave birth to what we now know as Europe. On the Capitol one can easily imagine what happened in Athens, when Paul spoke with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers and referred to Greek poetry and philosophy, to announce the unknown God who had now made himself known.

Starting from the relationship between Christianity and classical culture forged in the apostolic age, over the centuries European culture developed an attitude that was - and is - truly inter-cultural. Much of what was valid in the classical and Hellenistic worlds was preserved ... just think of the value of rationality, dialectics and public debate, law, poetry, and art that Europe

was able to preserve and indeed cultivate, building on the legacy of the past.

At the same time there was a rejection of certain transitory elements, for example the gladiatorial games were forcefully rejected as a disgrace to Latin culture, just as polytheism which no longer warmed people's hearts fell into decay. At the same time, a change of approach and understanding came about to take away the stigma with which slaves or sick children had been regarded.

In short, discernment was born in that relationship between cultures, and it became clear that freedom had to guide this free exchange of ideas: religious freedom, which only slowly asserted itself, led to the desire to seek together, with every human person, the truth about life and about God, a search carried out in love and respect. People began to understand that cultures thrive best when they avoid the temptation to fossilize, but rather show themselves able and willing to push ever forward, in a search that never excludes *a priori* the possibility of reaching God himself.

Love learned to measure itself against that fullness of self-giving which is found in the cross.

That phrase: "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's" - that is, the discovery of secularism and at the same time of what is beyond the realm of politics, such as the sacredness of life - emerged for the first time in history as an insight capable of fertilizing cultures that were previously unaware of this principle.

Rome is a thoroughly modern city, precisely because it shows, in its ruins, that no empire, no power, no ideology, is eternal, and it shows also that time corrodes and ultimately all is forgotten. But it also reminds us of that discernment that is at the basis of every choice and that desire for satisfaction that can never be suppressed in the hearts of mankind.

Visiting the basilica

The temple of Juno Moneta, over which the Aracoeli basilica stands today - (this is also the site of the temple of the di-



fig.2

vinities of Rome, the so-called Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva) - was accessed in ancient times via the Via Sacra, from the side of the Forum which was the heart of pagan Rome, where Paul and Peter preached.

When the Aracoeli basilica was built,

Rome was only a tenth the size of the great imperial city it had once been, due to the barbarian invasions, and the city had shrunk into the a few districts on one side of the Capitoline Hill.

Thus, it was decided to monumentalize the climb to the Capitoline from the other side. It was Cola di Rienzo, in 1348, who had the idea of building the current Araceli staircase, after having made a vow to this effect if Rome had been spared from the plague. Some supporters of Italy's reunification (or *Risorgimento*) wanted a statue of him next to the staircase, because they idealized him as something he wasn't, namely an early hero of an anticlerical city. (fig.2)

In reality, in the Avignon era, when the Pope lived far from the city of Rome, Cola di Rienzo had himself elected tribune, sharing power with the Pope's vicar, and he tried to promote the Jubilee of 1350, to attract pilgrims to Rome. But power went to his head, and he began a campaign to be consecrated emperor, until the nobles, the people and the papacy all condemned him. Having fled to Avignon, he was acquitted by the Pope and accompanied Cardinal Albornoz on his journey to Italy, to regain control of the Papal States. When Cola di Rienzo assumed power again, he once more exacerbated tensions with the people of Rome by taking revenge for his previous exile and increasing taxes, until the people rebelled and killed him in 1354, right at the foot of the steps, before handing his body over to the Colonna family.

To the left of the basilica was the convent and the Tower of Paul III which were demolished when the new Kingdom of Italy decided to build the huge white Victor Emmanuel Monument (the 'Vittoriano'). This huge cold structure to the left side of the basilica is dedicated to the King of Italy Vittorio Emanuele II as "father of the country". To create even more patriotic sentiment, the body of the Unknown Sol-



fig.3

dier was placed in the monument in 1921, in memory of all the Italian soldiers who had fallen in World War I. The Vittoriano is widely regarded as an unsuccessful work, since it was conceived to represent Italy, but using symbols that did not, in reality, come from the richness of the country's traditions. (fig.3)

Six sculptural groups represent *Strength, Concord, Thought, Action, Sacrifice* and *Law*, while higher up they are representations of *Politics* and *Philosophy* on one side and *Revolution* and *War* on the other and even higher there are representations of

Architecture, Music, Painting and Sculpture. However, if you look at the coats of arms of the various Italian cities, which are at the base of the sovereign's horse, the symbols of the Christian faith are there too, because the history of Italian cities are imbued with Christianity: you can see, for example, the Lion of St Mark in Venice or the symbol of the Cross in the depictions of Genoa and Milan.

and the Palazzo Nuovo and the erection of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in the center, the aim being to create a bridge between classical civilization and subsequent periods, thus showing that the Renaissance is the heir not only of Christianity, but also of Greco-Roman culture.

The façade is unfinished and dates back to the years 1285-1287, a period in which

the Franciscans were invited to rebuild the church: they rebuilt it with larger dimensions than the previous one, the former church became a Benedictine monastery, which must have been about the size of the current transept.

(fig.4) Inside it is clear that the basilica was built with 'recovered' material, as often happened in the 13th century - this is the reason why Renaissance artists wanted



fig.4

On the right of the basilica, however, the magnificent Piazza del Campidoglio is flanked by the Palazzo Senatorio which is, perhaps, the oldest municipality in Italy, and has served as the seat of municipal governance since 1144. It was built on the ancient Tabularium which collected data on citizens from every corner of the Roman Empire. The piazza was redesigned in Renaissance style by Michelangelo and then by Giacomo Della Porta with the construction of the Palazzo dei Conservatori

to erase medieval buildings due to their non-uniformity and lack of "classicism".

The third column on the left has a hole in it that was produced, according to legend, by the very bright sun ray that struck Augustus during a vision when the Virgin appeared to him to announce the birth of the Child Jesus. This is why the medievals believed that the site where the basilica now stands was the emperor's *cubiculum*, or private chamber, and, in fact, they carved the words "a cubiculo

Augustorum" ("from the bedroom of the Augusti") on the column. It was due to this tradition that the name of the church, which was previously that of *Santa Maria in Campidoglio*, was changed to that of *Santa Maria in Aracoeli*.

On the central altar is the icon of the Madonna to whom salvation from the plague was attributed in 1348, the same plague for which Cola di Rienzo climbed the Capitoline Hill with the people following him, to thank the Virgin, when the steps were erected. (fig. 5)

The ancient icon is from the mid-11th century and is a copy of a previous image known as the *Madonna di San Sisto*, which was probably from the 6th century. Legend attributes both images to the evangelist Luke, who has always been considered a

painter of the Virgin due to the fact that he recorded stories of Mary and her Child in the first two chapters of his gospel. This icon was originally placed in the left transept because for the central altar Raphael painted the so-called *Madonna of Foligno*, which is now in the Vatican Museums, commissioned by the Conti family, in thanksgiving for a grace received. It was Pius IV (1559-1565) who wanted this older venerated image returned to the main altar.

The coffered ceiling (1572.1575) was created at the time of Pius V at the behest of the Senate, in thanksgiving for the victory of Lepanto in 1571 attributed to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who, according to tradition, brought news of it to the pontiff himself in the villa known as *Casale San Pio V*, now part of a university campus. Admiral Marcantonio Colonna,



fig.5



fig.6

leader of that important battle for Europe, celebrated his triumph here. (fig.6) Next to the icon you can see a lamp with the inscription of the Municipality of Rome, SPQR, because, due to the presence of the Senatorial Palace in the Capitol, the basilica became the church of the Senate and the Roman People. Throughout the Middle Ages it served as the meeting hall of City Councils, it was here that were held discussions and promulgations of the laws of the city and, even today, it is

often the church where liturgies involving famous personalities from Rome and its Municipality are held.

The first chapel on the right is the most beautiful in the basilica: it is the Bufalini chapel, frescoed by Pinturicchio (Bernardino di Betto) with the stories of Saint Bernardine of Siena. (fig.7)

The frescoes date from around 1485 and were completed at the height of the Renaissance.

St Bernardine lived in the early 1400s and was a friar in the Aracoeli convent. The IHS image - which he made famous through his preaching - can be seen on the vault. It means *Iesus Hominum Salvator* (Jesus Savior of mankind). It came to be used countless times, and also became a symbol for St Ignatius of Loyola

who had it placed in Jesuit churches and it was used again in our own times, by Antoni Gaudí, for example in the Casa Batlló in Barcelona. The great architect always wanted signs of the Christian faith even in his civic buildings. St Bernardine always preached with a tablet bearing the image in his hand, almost a “logo” that highlighted that Christ is indeed the Savior.

Pinturicchio painted a scene on the back wall with St Bernardine in the center, with his finger pointing upwards to Christ who is above, a sign of eternity. In the book shown in the painting is the inscription: *Pater manifestavi Nomen Tuum Omnibus*, “Father, I have shown your name to all”. Two angels crown him. At his side are two Franciscan saints, Saint Louis of Toulouse and Saint Anthony of Padua.



fig.7

Bernardine not only announced the name of Christ but was also careful to remind people of their civic duties. As an example of this, the Bufalini wanted Pinturicchio to paint, together with the figure of the saint, the struggle between their family, which was from Città di Castello, and that of the Baglioni family, which was from Perugia. The warring factions can be seen fighting in the small figures painted on the mountain, to the left of the three saints. Only Saint Bernardine managed to pacify the two rival families. The scene is represented here because it was the Bufalini family who commissioned the frescoes of the chapel – it is incredible to think that Pinturicchio also painted the frescoes of the famous Baglioni Chapel in Spello, for the rival family! Europe is the heir of this search for civic peace, which was so greatly desired by the saints throughout history.

On the right wall there are three scenes. In the first we see Bernardine again, who, like Saint Francis, strips himself, and receives new clothes, while above is God the Father and, below the cornice, the Madonna and Child.

In the center of the wall, it is as if a window opens, allowing us to glimpse figures observing visitors to the chapel, thus involving *them* in the scene.

On the right of the wall, is the depiction of

the stigmata of Saint Francis.

On the left wall is the most famous scene, that of the death and burial of Bernardine.

The first character on the left, with the



fig.8

candle in his hand, is Bufalini. Around him are characters of the time and in the background, near the painted porticoes, we can see depicted various miracles of the Saint. In the lunette, however, it is the youthful version of the saint who is seen, praying in solitude, near Porta Tufi in Siena, while the crowd points to him from a distance.

In the left nave, the fifth chapel on the left is well worth a visit. (fig.8)

It is dedicated to the Della Valle family and Philip Della Valle is represented there, in the tomb on the left hand side, with books at the foot and at the head of his bed – a way of underlining the combination of faith and culture which is so typical of the Renaissance and, more generally, of Europe itself. The chapel contains the frescoes on the

life of Saint Paul by Pomarancio (Cristoforo Roncalli), completed by 1586, in the artistic transition period between mannerism and baroque.

Above, Pomarancio has painted Christ the Savior revealing himself.

In the lunette on the left, above, is the scene of Saul's conversion, represented as in all Pauline iconography, with the scene of his fall from his horse. Paul, dressed as a Roman citizen, is thrown from his horse and falls painfully with his legs twisted; in this dramatic iconography the great power and novelty of the encounter with Christ is expressed.

In the other lunette, on the right, is the baptism of Saint Paul. It is not enough for Saint Paul to convert, but he must sacramentally welcome grace.

In the fresco under the left lunette the scene of the Areopagus is represented: Paul is in the center, surrounded by pagan philosophers. The apostle is depicted pointing upwards towards God, revealing the unknown God, now made manifest in Christ. Again, it is a symbol of the encounter between Christian faith and classical culture.

In the fresco under the lunette on the right is the martyrdom of St Paul.

Further ahead, in the left transept, is the chapel which houses the relics of the Empress Saint Helen, the mother of Constantine: her original burial place was in the imperial mausoleum, now known as Tor Pignattara, on Rome's Via Casilina, but her remains were brought to the ba-

silica in the 12th century.

The medieval layout of Helen's tomb was modified in 1605, but everything was then destroyed by the revolutionary French forces invading Rome in 1798, when they transformed the church into a stable for military horses. It was then rebuilt in 1833, in the form of an aedicula with eight columns and a dome. An urn containing the remains of the saint serves as an altar. Below you can glimpse the ancient medieval altar known as the Altar of Augustus or the Ara Coeli, from the second half of the 12th century, with the vision of the Madonna and Child appearing to the emperor and with the Agnus Dei.

From the left transept you can enter the Baby Jesus Chapel. **(fig.9)** Here is to be found the highly venerated statuette of Baby Jesus also known as the '*Santo Bambino*', which dates back to the end of the 15th century. According to tradition, it was sculpted by an anonymous Franciscan friar in Jerusalem, using olive wood from Gethsemane, and was then immersed in the Jordan. It is considered miraculous and is covered in numerous votive offerings. The chapel also houses letters that children from all over the world write to Baby Jesus. The original statue was stolen in 1994 and today a copy is venerated.

Behind the pillar of the ambo is another reminder of the unity of Europe, the tomb of the last queen of Bosnia: Blessed Catherine, a Franciscan tertiary. Born in Herzegovina in 1424, she married the penultimate king of Bosnia and called in the Franciscans

to the capital to counter the Manichaean heretics. When the Turks conquered her kingdom, Catherine was exiled to Rome where Pope Pius II welcomed her, and she became a Franciscan tertiary. In her will she ordered that her kingdom be left to the Church, with the clause that if her son Sigismund, were to be taken prisoner by the Turks and forced to convert, when he was



fig.9

freed and returned to Christianity, he would become the new king of Bosnia.

In the right transept,, the relics of one of St Francis' companions, Saint Juniper, in Latin *Juniperus*, are preserved. Brother Juniper was present at the death of Saint Clare: Clare and Francis both called Juniper "God's jester", since he was will-

ing to do anything for the glory of God, as was evidenced when he stripped himself naked as a sign of penance and walked naked through the streets of Viterbo , or the occasion when he cut off a pig's leg because a sick and hungry brother at the Portiuncola had asked for it, or the time he stripped an altar to help a person in difficulty.

The seventh chapel on the right is today dedicated to Saint Paschal Baylon, but was once dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. The current decoration has erased the original artwork from the time of the church's construction. In the year 2000, restorations brought to light on the main altar a marvelous *Madonna between Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist*, dated around 1290 and perhaps the work of Cavallini, or certainly a Roman painter who already had a developed a taste for a more humanistic form of painting. At the sides, above, some fragments by the same artist can be spotted. Only the tops of the paintings have been preserved, but it is clear that Herod's banquet must have been depicted on the left, at the moment in which the head of the Baptist was brought to him on a plate, while on the right hand side the scene of the death of John the Evangelist was probably represented. The frescoes provide supporting evidence to those who believe that the 14th-century renewal of painting did not begin with Giotto and the Tuscans, but rather in Rome, with painters linked to the papacy, who then went on to fresco the Basilica of Assisi.