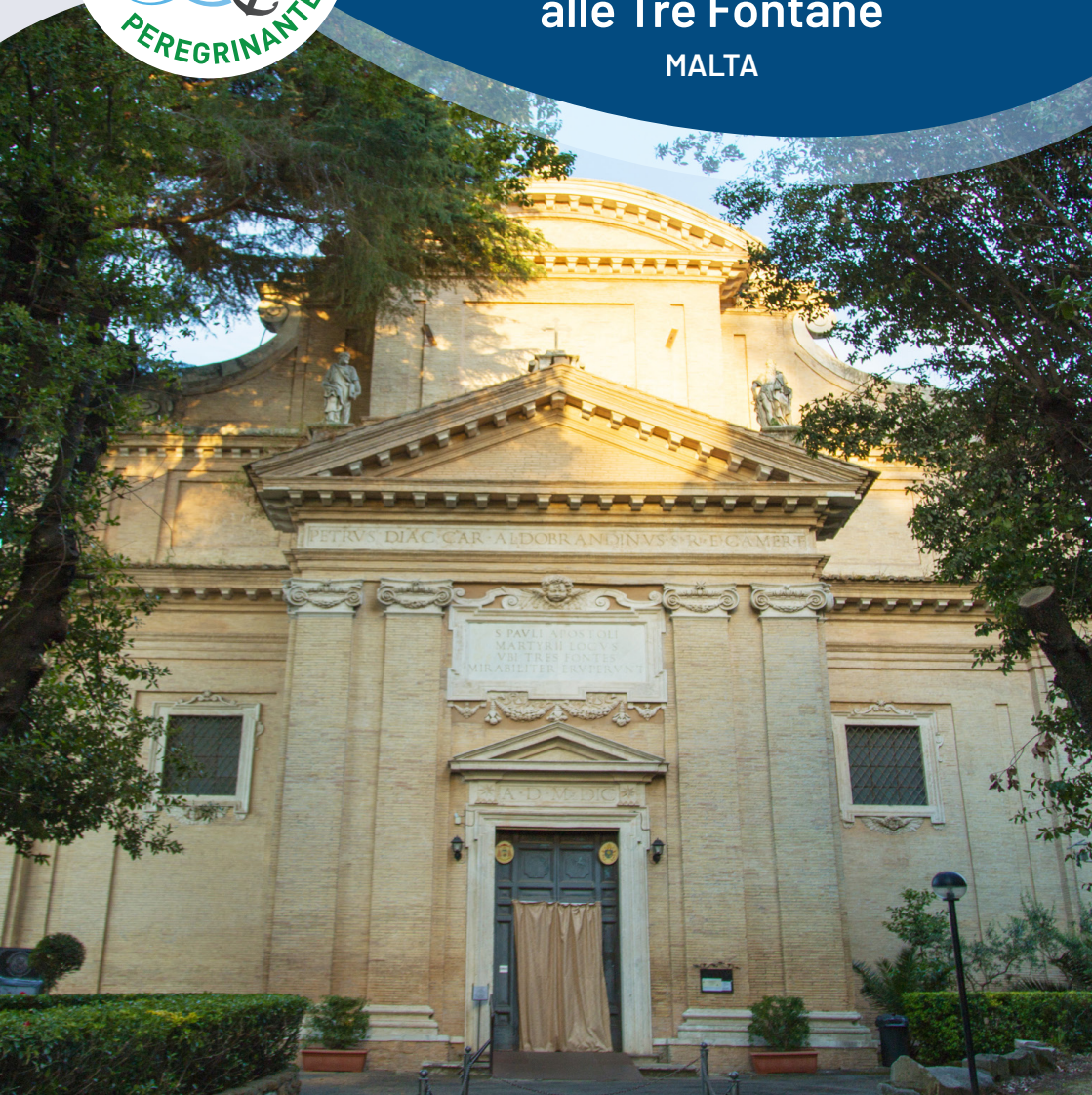




EUROPE IN ROME

Church of San Paolo alle Tre Fontane

MALTA





DICASTERIUM PRO EVANGELIZATIONE

*SECTIO DE QUAESTIONIBUS FUNDAMENTALIBUS
EVANGELIZATIONIS IN MUNDO*



**MINISTERO
DEL TURISMO**
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

EUROPE IN ROME

Jubilee journeys

Church of San Paolo alle Tre Fontane

©Dicastery of Evangelization
Section for Fundamental Questions
regarding Evangelization in the World

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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.

Church of San Paolo alle Tre Fontane

"They beheaded Paul at the bottom of the *Acquae Salviae*, near the pine tree ... (fig.1)" Thus we read in the apocryphal text of the *Acts of Peter and Paul*, written between the 5th and 7th centuries.



fig.1

Acquae Salviae is a place name that recalls the gens *Salvia* (a Roman family whose most famous representative was the emperor Marcus Salvius Otho who reigned for a very short period in the year 69 AD) who may have owned this land. An alternative reading is that it refers to a spring of water considered 'salvific' in Roman times, due to a particular beneficial link to pagan deities. Only later did the place take the name of the *Tre Fontane* or 'Three Fountains', when people wanted to underline the miraculous triple springs of water which

burst forth when the head of the beheaded apostle landed on the ground. Irrespective of the historical accuracy or otherwise of this story, it is worth noting the deeper truth that Tertullian had

enunciated: '*Sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum*', the blood of the martyrs is the seed that gives life to new Christians.

The Christians of Rome - and not only them - owe their faith and are indebted to that font which waters their hearts with the testimony of Saints Peter and Paul.

Martyrdom is the highest expression of bearing witness. The witness is the person who does not point

to himself, but rather to Christ in whom he believes, inviting us to look at Jesus as the Lord of life and history. The martyr's conviction of the truth and beauty of Christ is so great that he does not hesitate to offer his life as a supreme sign of his own certainty and love.

Our own times, precisely because they are rooted in Christianity, are particularly sensitive to the authenticity and transparency of all that is in the human heart. The testimony of martyrdom is, in this sense, one of the highest forms of

interpersonal communication. The martyr allows himself or herself to be known intimately, allows everyone to have access to his or her profound convictions of faith: the love of Christ cannot be denied, and there is nothing, not even life itself, which is more important than faithfulness to the Lord in whom the martyr believes.

Several times Paul uses an expression that disconcerts us, and at the same time strikes us and fascinates us: he talks of “my God”, and “my gospel” several times. His faith is so intimate to him that, although that gospel and that faith belong to the whole church, they are also totally ‘his’, and belong to him fully.

Refusing permission for other people to know the faith we have in our hearts is like denying them the opportunity to get to know us deeply. It is precisely for this reason that it is so difficult but, at the same time, so beautiful, to reach an intimacy with someone which allows the sharing of faith.

Paul, in the nakedness of martyrdom, allows everyone to read his heart, he allows everyone to see his trust and his love for Christ. And he was aware of this. He had repeatedly reminded Christians in his letters that the only worship pleasing to God was that of the heart and of coherence of life, a worship in which one offers one’s own body, one’s own life, thus radically transforming the concept of worship that was typical in antiquity. : “I exhort you, brothers, to offer your bod-

ies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship” (Rm 12,1-2), or again “God is my witness, to whom I worship in my spirit, proclaiming the gospel of his Son” (Rm 1,9).

In martyrdom he experiences this offering most radically, to the point of spilling his own blood. As he had written: “Even if my life is being poured out like a libation on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (Phil 2:17). This gift of self which he makes so as to continue talking about Christ becomes the water that quenches the thirst for God in our life. For this reason, it is significant that the place of Paul’s martyrdom is, in a sense, a hidden place. Indeed, the very fact that it is on the edge of the city - a place of no importance to anyone previously - gives credibility to the tradition that Paul was martyred there, although the tradition only dates back to the beginning of the 7th century, when Pope Gregory the Great linked the site to the Abbey of St Paul Outside the Walls

Paul, who was so well known to the world, who lived for decades in the spotlight of history, who traveled throughout the empire to proclaim the name of Christ, accepted death far from the eyes of men, since what matters in life is not visibility, but authenticity.

Visiting the church

The visitor reaches the church of St Paul, along a short, tree-lined avenue, which begins at the square where the great abbey of Saints Vincent and Anastasius stands (one of the very first churches of the Cistercian reform of St Bernard of Clairvaux. St Bernard himself stayed here several times) and the church of *Santa Maria Scala Caeli*, which dates back to the same period as church of the Martyrdom of Saint Paul. The church of Scala Coeli, originally dedicated to the martyrs Senone and his companions, was re-titled after Saint Bernard of Clairvaux celebrated Mass there and, in a state of ecstasy, saw the dead ascending from Purgatory to Heaven because of the Eu-

ments of Paul's life, before the gates of eternity opened to him ... after the countless travels of the apostle, his shipwreck in Malta and his subsequent departure for the Italian peninsula, his arrival in Rome, his whole life seems to lead to this moment.

The current church was entirely rebuilt for the Jubilee of the year 1600. Indeed, the previous year the former building was demolished, so we have no way of imagining it, though some written information about it exists in various sources. This earlier church must have existed since at least the end of the 7th century, as several recovered funerary inscriptions date back to that period, specifically to the period of Pope Sergius I (687-701).

Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini wanted to replace it with a new church, and he entrusted the project to Giacomo della Porta. In keeping with baroque tradition, an architectural style which was already maturing and filling the city with angels and saints, even outside churches, two statues of Peter and Paul were placed on the façade by Ippolito Buzio. The original layout was, following the norm of the time, much more sober than the current one and the church



fig.2

charist offered for them there. (fig.2)

The quiet of the avenue leading to the church allows us to imagine the last mo-

has undoubtedly been modified over the years with elements which have disturbed its original purity.

From the vestibule you enter the nave (fig.3) itself which is set out horizontally to highlight the *aedicules* with the three springs of water that flowed when the

Martyrdom of Paul and the miracle of the three springs, which was painted in 1604-1605 by Passerotto de' Passerotti is very badly damaged, but we can see its



fig.3

head of the decapitated Saint Paul rolled to the ground. The miracle of the triple spring is an expression of the fruitfulness of martyrdom. The water that once ran near the three altars has now been blocked.

On the left side, high up, is the relic of the column (fig.4) on which Paul would have rested his head at the moment of his execution.

Cardinal Aldobrandini also had two famous canvases painted, now replaced by very damaged copies, depicting the martyrdom of the two apostles Peter and Paul. In the right apse, the one showing the



fig.4

depiction of the flow of milk after the beheading of the apostle, (another tradition related to the event) and the explosion of light that illuminates everything, with images of the good that God grants to the world through the martyrs.



fig.5

At the other end is a copy of Guido Reni's famous *Martyrdom of Peter*, also from 1604–1605. Among the master's first works in Rome, the comparison with Caravaggio is evident: both show Peter not yet crucified, but at the moment in which he is hoisted onto the cross – here by two executioners, while a third is ready to nail his

feet to the wood. Ancient sources (Malvasia and Passeri) say that Caravaggio tried to deface his rival's canvas and even intended to challenge him to a duel for having stolen his commission and copied his style, while Reni insisted that he only wanted to imitate Caravaggio's style as a form of admiration. The work was transferred to the Quirinal Palace at the end of the 18th century, to the Palace of the Popes at the time, to prevent humidity from ruining it. Later it was robbed by the revolutionary French troops who took it to the Louvre, until the work was recovered after the Congress of Vienna and brought back to Rome where it is still located today, in the Vatican Museums. (fig.5)

It was Pope Pius XII in the mid-20th century who added the Roman mosaic with the images of the four seasons brought from the excavations of Ostia Antica, (fig.6) and the two bas-reliefs showing the martyrdom of Saint Paul and that of Saint Peter in the vestibule.

The original baroque simplicity of the church was dramatically changed by the addition of a series of 20th-century paintings, such as that of the *Transfer of the body of Saint Paul to the tomb* in the lunette of the counter-façade, and that of the *Martyrdom of Saint Paul* in the apse – where the dazzling light feature is repeated, this time with the executioner covering his head. Also shown is the pine tree under which Paul would have been martyred and three disciples of the apos-

tle are represented, Lucina, Basilissa and Anastasia who followed him to the place of martyrdom and the three soldiers converted at that moment, Longinus, Aces-



fig.6

tus and Megistus. Another 20th century painting in the apse shows the *Glory of Saint Paul* – represented according to the visions of a medieval mystic Mary of Oigny, who saw Saint Paul presented to the Trinity by Saint Stephen the protomartyr with the three virtues of faith, hope and charity (which Paul speaks of in the first letter to the Thessalonians and in the first letter to the Corinthians) at his side.

Outside the abbey walls, near the houses occupied by the Little Sisters of Jesus, it is possible, on request, to visit the chapel which houses the wooden altar that Charles de Foucauld built for his chapel in Algeria.