



# THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Basilica of San Lorenzo  
Fuori le Mura





DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION  
SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS  
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD



MINISTERO  
DEL TURISMO  
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

# THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Jubilee journeys

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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 San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura

## *Reasons for a pilgrimage*

Lawrence was a deacon of the church of Rome. A letter from Pope Cornelius to Fabius, Bishop of Antioch, written between 251 and 253, states that at that time there were in Rome "forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven subdeacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two exorcists, readers and sacristans, and more than fifteen hundred widows and poor». This is one of the very rare documents of antiquity which allows us to know precisely the makeup and numbers of the Christian community of Rome.

The name «deacon» derives from the Greek verb «diaconeo», which means «to serve», and indicates the ministry willed by the Lord, whose special role as can be seen from the Acts of the Apostles, is to serve orphans, widows and more generally the poor, but also to proclaim the word of God and provide liturgical service.

The persecution that led to Lawrence's death began with the emperor Decius who, in the year 250, began a global campaign against Christians: every citizen of the empire had to sacrifice to pagan idols to obtain a certificate of loyalty to the official religion and anyone who refused to do so was deemed to be Christian and was thus liable to prosecution.

A year later Decius died, and Valerian suc-

ceeded him as Emperor. He intensified the persecution. In 258 a new law was passed which decreed the immediate execution of bishops, priests and deacons, together with senators and knights who were found to be Christians. It also decreed the exile of Christian women, and deportation to the mines or forced labor for others found to be loyal to the gospel. The emperor, in this way, intended to completely eliminate the Church hierarchy and all those high-ranking lay people who were supportive of the church.

Because of this provision, the martyrdom of Pope Sixtus II (257-258) occurred first, together with four deacons, on 6 August 258, and then the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence followed four days later, on 10 August. **(fig.1)**

The persecution only stopped in 260, when the emperor Valerian himself was taken a prisoner of war. Gallienus, his successor, radically changed religious policy through the so-called «Restitution edict», which provided for property and churches to be returned to Christians.

The fact that twice, within a space of just four days, the imperial police arrested the pontiff and his deacons in the catacombs, proves that it was a well-known

fact that these cemeteries were owned by the church. It is clear therefore that the Christian community in Rome had buildings and churches well before the time of Constantine to allow them to celebrate their liturgy. However, the idea that the catacombs served as a refuge

ing the maternal and provident spirit of the Christian community - became one of the best-known characters of early Roman Christianity and was one of the most loved and venerated of the martyrs. He has been remembered in the city by many churches and chapels built



fig.1

for Christians is now known to be false. Lawrence, because he had supervised the administration of ecclesiastical goods - accepting the offerings and guarding them, distributing them to needy orphans and widows, thus show-

in his honor over the centuries.

His body was placed after his martyrdom outside the city in crypta in the cemetery which once existed on the Via Tiburtina where the basilica dedicated to St Lawrence stands today.

Constantine was the first to build a church - later enlarged with a circular plan and later destroyed - next to the cemetery.

Pope Pelagius II (579-590) excavated the hill on which the cemetery was located in order to build a basilica right over the spot of the martyr's tomb.

Pope Honorius III (1216-1227) added another building to that of Pelagius, but linked to it, so that when entering

today, you first cross the medieval basilica and then reach the older Pelagian one which has become the sanctuary area of the current church. Honorius also reversed the orientation of the basilica.

### *Visiting the basilica*

The basilica is accessed through a portico (fig.2), which is the work of the Vasalletto family, one of the most important families of Roman marble workers, also known as the Cosmati, who were active

Saint Lawrence. The bodies of the holy deacons would thus rest next to each other. (fig. 3)

The frescoes tell, in parallel displays, the stories of the two martyrs, on the right that of Lawrence and, on the left, that of Stephen.



fig.2

in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Above the architrave runs a Cosmati frieze with mosaics which were largely destroyed by the bombing raids which damaged the basilica in 1943. Only the Lamb within a disc, a symbol of Christ's offering of himself, and the scene of the arrival at Saint Lawrence's of Peter II of Courtenay have survived. Peter was crowned Latin emperor of Constantinople in the basilica by Pope Honorius III in 1217.

The narthex, which is known for the serene atmosphere created by its columns, is decorated with 13th-century frescoes. Tradition has it that, when Justinian I was emperor, the relics of Saint Stephen, found in Jerusalem in 415, were moved to Rome and placed alongside those of

According to tradition, Lawrence was captured in the catacombs of San Calisto. While the Pope and the other deacons immediately suffered martyrdom, Lawrence was temporarily spared, with the aim of having the treasures of the church, of which he was the custodian, handed over to the authorities. It is said that Lawrence brought the poor and sick placed under his care to the magistrate, who ordered him to hand over the treasures, and said: "Here are the treasures of the Church".

Lawrence was then handed over to a centurion named Hippolytus, who imprisoned him in the basement of his palace. In this dark, cramped space, a blind man called Lucillus was also a prisoner. Law-

rence comforted his fellow prisoner, encouraged him, catechized him about the doctrine of Christ and, using a spring of water that flowed from the ground, baptized him. After his baptism, Lucillus regained his sight. Hippolytus, having witnessed the miracle, and being struck by the serenity and gentleness of the prisoners, was himself enlightened by the grace of God, became a Christian, and he also received baptism from Lawrence. Later Hippolytus, by now a recognized Christian, was tied to a horse and dragged over rocks and brambles until he died by way of punishment. Lawrence was instead roasted alive on a grill, in a place not far from the prison; his body was then taken to Campo Verano, in the catacombs later known as Santa Ciriaca. This story is told in three painted rows, each with six frames.

In the first row we can see the following episodes: Lawrence receives the order from Sixtus II to distribute the goods of the Church to the poor; Lawrence washes the feet of the poor in Narcissus' house; Lawrence heals a blind woman; Lawrence distributes the treasures of the Church to the poor; Sixtus II

predicts martyrdom for Lawrence; Emperor Valerian orders Lawrence to hand over the Church's assets to him. In the second, central, row we can see the following: Lawrence heals Saint Ciriaca;



fig.3

Lawrence is scourged on Valerian's orders; Lawrence baptizes Romanus, a soldier convert; the emperor has Romanus beheaded; Valerian orders Lawrence's death; Lawrence is roasted alive on the gridiron.

In the bottom row we see the depiction of the following scenes: Hippolytus has Lawrence's body transported (three paintings); Hippolytus buries Lawrence; Hippolytus exchanges a sign of peace with the servants of his house; Hippolytus receives the Eucharist.



fig.4

On the two side walls we can see miracles depicted which were granted to Emperor Henry II (1002-1024) and Pope Alexander II (1061-1073) through the intercession of the saintly deacons

In the narthex, on the left, (fig.4) is the tomb of Alcide De Gasperi (the work of the 20th century sculptor Giacomo

Manzù). De Gasperi was a great Italian statesman who made a decisive contribution in getting the Catholic electorate to choose democracy over monarchy in the referendum on the new Italian constitution. He then played a leading role in guiding Italy on the difficult path of physical

and moral reconstruction after the Second World War.

(fig.5) In the nave we find two ambos (a kind of pulpit), which are among the most beautiful of those preserved in Rome. They are the work of the Cosmati masters in the first half of the 13th century. The one on the left, called the Epistle ambo because it was used for reading non-Gospel texts, is simpler. The one facing it, used for the proclamation of the Gospel - a task which, then and now, was entrusted, where possible, to the deacon - appears richer and is adorned with colored marble. Next to the ambo and supported by two roaring lions is the

beautiful candelabra used to hold and display the Easter candle, adorned with a spiral mosaic. By the light of the Paschal candle, lit from the new blessed fire on the night of the Easter Vigil, the deacon sings the Exultet, the announcement of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

After passing the ambos, some steps lead



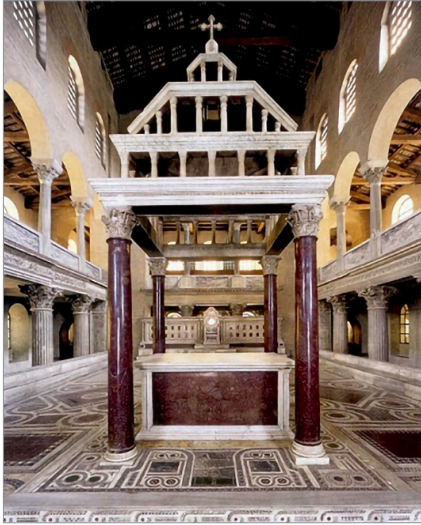


fig.5

us to the sanctuary area. In the crypt below we find a central altar, behind which is the tomb of Saints Lawrence, Stephen and Giustino. This is the center of the basilica, seen as the joining point of the two churches, the Honorian one and the Pelagian one, which together form the current basilica

In the sanctuary behind the arch (towards the interior) you can see the mosaic of the triumphal arch, created at the time

of Pope Pelagius II at the end of the 6th century. The surviving part of the ancient mosaic shows the *Maiestas*: Christ imparting his blessing and with the cross, depicted in the center on a blue globe representing the entire universe. On his right, Saint Paul introduces Saint Stephen with an open book, and Saint Hippolytus, offering the crown of martyrdom. To the left of Christ, Saint Peter introduces Saint Lawrence with the gospel opened at the words of the Magnificat, "he cast down the proud of heart and exulted the lowly" and Pope Pelagius offering a model of the basilica. Below, on the sides, can be seen Jerusalem and Bethlehem surrounded by jeweled walls.

At the end of the right nave is the Chapel of Saint Tarcisius, where Blessed Pius IX is buried, in accordance with his express wish. The cloister, dating back to the 11th century, stands on the right-hand side of the current basilica. It is, together with the bell tower and another tower behind it, the last remnant of the medieval Laurentiopolis, built to defend the complex from the Arab attacks of the 9th century.