

Station Church Pilgrimage - St. Paul Outside the Walls Basilica

Each year in Rome during the 40 days of Lent the faithful are invited to take a pilgrimage to a designated station church and meditate on the historical significance of the Church and its connection to our Catholic faith. The Spiritual Life Commission will highlight a station church on Sundays during Lent. Join us in a mental pilgrimage to St. Paul Outside the Walls Basilica in Ostia, outside of Rome.



Saul of Tarsus studied Jewish law in Jerusalem. He persecuted and imprisoned Jewish followers of Jesus. *“But Saul made havock of the church, entering in from house to house, and dragging away men and women, committing them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)* He witnessed the death of Stephen, 1st Christian martyr. *“Thus they stoned Stephen; he, meanwhile, was praying; Lord Jesus, he said, receive my spirit; and then, kneeling down, he cried aloud, Lord, do not count this sin against them.” (Acts 7:58-59)*

Saul, on the road to Damascus to seek out more of Christ’s disciples, experienced a supernatural conversion. *“And falling on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Who said: Who art thou, Lord? And He: I AM Jesus whom thou persecutest.” (Acts 9:4-5)*

Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor became defender of the resurrected Jesus Christ, surrendering his life to the Living God. Transformed, he changed his name to Paul and founded Christian communities throughout Asia Minor, Turkey, Syria, Cyprus, Greece, Antioch and Rome (the Book of Acts covers most of his travels). He wrote letters of encouragement and instruction to the new converts. His Epistles, included in the New Testament, are well recognized (Letter to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, Philippians, Thessalonians, Ephesians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews); St. Paul’s zeal could not be contained. St. Paul is referred to as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Approx. 60 A.D., Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, however due to his Roman citizenship he was transferred to Rome for trial (Acts 27, 28). In Rome he was placed under house arrest which allowed him to receive visitors. He continued to preach Christ’s resurrection and salvation. There was great Christian persecution in Rome under Nero’s rule. Approx. 66-67 A.D., Paul suffered martyrdom in Palude Salvia outside of Rome (later known as Tre Fontane) where he was beheaded. His body was taken to Ostia, a poor section of Rome two miles outside city limits. Paul’s followers built a sepulchral memorial chapel over his grave which immediately became a place of pilgrimage for the faithful.



Emperor Constantine ended the Christian persecution in 313 A.D. He requested a church be built over the tomb of St. Paul in 324 A.D. Pope Sylvester consecrated St. Paul’s Basilica in 330 A.D., which at the time faced east towards Jerusalem. A renovation to the basilica changed the entrance to face west toward the Tiber River. Pope Siricius consecrated the larger basilica in 390 A.D. In 1823, a devastating fire destroyed most of the church. After a major rebuild Pope Pius IX dedicated the new basilica on December 10, 1854. The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls is one of the four papal basilicas in Rome, the second largest basilica after St. Peter’s.



The statue of Saint Paul sculpted by Giuseppe Obici (1807-1878) greets all visitors. The apostle holds in his hand a sword, symbol of his martyrdom for the faith. He holds in his other hand the Word of God. St. Paul conveys to the visitor his mission was to spread the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ wherever he was. He is known as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Where the statue is located outside, the landscape of flowers, palm trees and green grass is peaceful; one can walk, sit, and meditate on St. Paul’s life. The interior was carefully restored using as much of the old marble as possible. The church section of the basilica is open, airy, spacious. Removable pews can be set up for Mass.



- Architect Luigi Poletti was responsible for reconstructing the structure after the fire; he chose a neoclassical style. The church is in the form of a Latin cross. Hearing of the fire many countries donated materials to the renovation. *‘The Viceroy of Egypt sent pillars of alabaster, the Emperor of Russia the precious malachite and lapis lazuli for the tabernacle.’*
<https://www.spottinghistory.com/view/7070/basilica-of-saint-paul-outside-the-walls/>
- Architect Pasquale Belli helped to rebuild the complex which is a combination of early-Christian, Byzantine, Gothic and Renaissance structures.

- Pope Leo the Great (440-461) wanted to add Pope Papal circular portraits in the central nave to honor the popes in the Catholic Church. Gregory XVI requested papal medallions destroyed or damaged in the fire be reproduced. There is a medallion for each of the 266 popes. A light shines on the portrait of the current pope (Pope Francis). Above the portraits are frescos of St. Paul's life. 
- The 1220 apse mosaic by Pietro Cavallini survived the fire. Christ sits as a majestic teacher as his hand is raised in blessing. Sts. Paul and Luke are on His right, Peter and Andrew on His left. <https://www.christianiconography.info/sanPaoloFLMure/apseMosaic.html> 
- In 1170, Nicola D'Angelo and Pietro Vassalsetto carved out scenes of Christ's passion and ascension on an 18 foot marble candelabrum which holds the Easter candle. It survived the fire.
- In 1282 A.D. a Gothic baldachin canopy is placed over the Papal altar and tomb of St. Paul. The baldachin is supported by four columns, each column dedicated to the following: Peter, Paul, Timothy and Bartholomew. 
- Under the Papal Altar lies a marble tombstone bearing the Latin inscription PAULO APOSTOLO MART (Apostle Paul, martyr). As it is covered in glass one is allowed to pray at the tomb of St. Paul.
- There is a chain, according to ancient tradition, attached Paul to the Roman soldier assigned to guard him while in prison in Rome.
- Four chapels are located inside the Basilica.
 - Chapel of St. Stephen, the young martyr in whose stoning Paul witnessed before his conversion
 - The Chapel of St. Lawrence; The Chapel of St. Benedict
 - Inside the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament is a 14th-century wooden cross considered miraculous which survived the 1823 fire. St. Bridget of Sweden, mother and mystic, spent many hours praying before the miraculous cross. *St Bridget reported having seen the face of Christ turn toward her while she was praying at the foot of this Crucifix in 1370. St. Ignatius of Loyola professed his vows on August 22, 1541 before the 13th century mosaic icon located in this Chapel.* https://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/en/basilica/giubilei.htm
- In addition to the Basilica, the complex includes a 13th Century Benedictine cloister (architects Jacopo and Pietro Vassalsetto). The Benedictine Monks are the caretakers of the Basilica. One of the cloister gardens is open to the public and is often used as a retreat to escape the crowds of tourists. 

Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, gave himself completely to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. His zeal and witness is reflected through the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles and through his Epistles.

"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:20-21)

Prayer Before A Crucifix (Crucifix in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in St. Paul Outside the Walls)

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Thy face I humbly kneel, and with burning soul pray and beseech Thee to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity, true contrition for my sins and a firm purpose of amendment while I contemplate with great love and tender pity Thy five wounds, pondering over them within me, having in mind the words which David Thy Prophet said of Thee my Jesus: *"They pierced my hands and my feet; they numbered all my bones."* (Psalm 22:17-18)

May our pilgrimage open our hearts and draw us deeper into our faith

Peace be with you

Sources for photos and information on St. Paul's Basilica website: <https://basilicasanpaolo.org/en/>
 A virtual tour can be found at <https://basilicasanpaolo.org/en/virtual-tour/>
https://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/index_en.html
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lig0twu8qpo>

To learn more about the Station Churches in Rome visit online: <https://frcoulter.com/pics/station-churches/index.html>

