

The Vatican



Our Pilgrimage began in earnest this morning with breakfast at 6:30 am. We started our day with prayer and chanting our mantra Pax et Bonum as we walked to Vatican City. This Latin expression is more than just a greeting: peace and all good. It can be called a summation of Franciscan theology and spirituality. Good is the predominant name the Franciscan gives to God. We are invited to join into the continuum of God's overflowing fountain fullness of GOOD.

Going to Rome summed up a direction to which Francis always turned in his life. Assisi was secondary to and dependent on Rome. Francis had to leave home to respond to the new stirrings in his life. The journey to Rome played a significant part of his conversion process. He came to Rome to visit and pray at the Tomb of St. Peter.

THE LEGEND OF THREE COMPANIONS 10

How Francis changes clothes with a beggar

He was so changed by divine grace that, although he was still in secular attire, he yearned to be in another city where, as someone unknown, he would take off his own clothes and, in exchange, put on the rags of a poor man. And he would try begging alms for the love of God.

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At this time he happened to go to Rome on pilgrimage. As he was entering the church of Saint Peter, he noticed the meager offerings made by some, and said to himself: "Since the Prince of the Apostles should be greatly honored, why do they make such meager offerings in the church where his body rests?" With great enthusiasm, he took a handful of coins from his money pouch, and threw them through a grating of the altar, making such a loud noise that all the bystanders were astonished at his generosity.

As he was leaving and passed the doors of the church, where there were many poor people begging alms, he secretly exchanged clothes with one of those poor people and put them on. Standing on the steps of the church with the other poor, he begged for alms in French, because he would speak French spontaneously, although he did not do so correctly.

After taking off the beggar's clothes and putting on his own, he returned to Asisi, and began to pray that the Lord would direct his way. He did not share his secret with anyone.



The Tomb of St. Peter has been a magnet that drew pilgrims since St. Peter's crucifixion in 67 A.D. in a graveyard for the poor and pagans. Pope Anacletus, Peter's immediate

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successor, built a small chapel over the Apostle's tomb. It immediately became a place of pilgrimage as early Christians flocked to the site despite the risks of persecution and death.

In 326, Constantine leveled the hill and built a basilica over the entire cemetery with the main altar standing over St. Peter's tomb which was left undisturbed. This would be the basilica that Francis prayed at.

Over time, the basilica began to deteriorate. Pope Julius II, a Franciscan, ordered the basilica torn down and laid the cornerstone for a new one in 1506. Construction of the current basilica lasted 120 years. The church was to be a "timeless image of heaven." Thus, the interior could have no materials that would fade. It is made of marble and mosaics. The mosaics are so finely done that they look like a fresco. Please see the virtual tour on the web site for more detail.

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We celebrated the Eucharist in the “Irish” chapel of St. Columbo. We spent several hours reflecting not only on the art, the tombs, and the Eucharist, but on the following questions. I encourage you to do likewise.

- Francis, at the beginning of his conversion exchanged clothe with a beggar and attempted to overcome shame (cf. 2C 8) What does it mean to overcome shame? How can this deepen one’s spiritual journey?
- What does it mean to share the faith of the apostles?
- What is the meaning of a pilgrimage to the tomb of a saint?
- How do you answer Christ’s question to Peter: “Who do you say I am?”



The twisted columns you see are modeled on the small ones in the balcony which are from the first basilica.

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A bronze of St. Peter. People touch his foot for blessings and the toe of his left foot is worn down from centuries of faithful touching it.

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A statue of St. Francis just behind the main altar.