



# Christian Rome and the Vatican: The Diary of a Modern Pilgrim

*Rita Bogna*

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Pope Francis has proclaimed an Extraordinary Holy Year (Jubilee) of Mercy — beginning on 8 December 2015 and ending on 20 November 2016 — as “a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.” The Pope has encouraged Catholics to go on pilgrimage to Rome and other places, because this special Holy Year will be about compassion, mercy, repentance and conversion, making it, in his words, “an opportune moment to change our lives.”

The story of Christian Rome is itself one of religious conversion, as is that of those two lowly Roman subjects – a fisherman from Palestine and a tent-maker from Asia – who went on to convert tens of thousands and laid the foundations of the Church, turning the profane Mistress of the pagan World into the sacred Alma Mater of holy Christendom. The City of the Caesars became the City of Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles, who obeyed Christ’s missionary mandate to “Go into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark xvi. 10), “baptising them in the the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew xxviii. 19).

This book, *Christian Rome and the Vatican: The Diary of a Modern Pilgrim*, is intended primarily for the serious Christian pilgrim who wishes to visit sites of religious interest or significance in quiet reverence and with a spirit of humility, devotion and piety, to pray and reflect at the shrines and tombs of the Apostles, martyrs and other saints, to discover the sacred archaeology of early Christian Rome, to learn about the origins of their faith, and to be spiritually nourished, renewed and strengthened by these experiences. As Thomas Canon Pope put it, Rome is the sanctuary that enlivens our faith.


Pilgrimage is the natural outcome of a spiritual instinct deeply planted in humanity by its Creator — an instinct to seek Him “who was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John i. 14) in particular physical places and feel a connection to Him there. After the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, Rome became one of these places, equalling and even surpassing Jerusalem in the estimation of devout Christians as an object of pilgrimage. For nearly 2,000 years Christians inspired by love of God and a spirit of repentance have travelled to Rome to pray and worship, to obtain papal indulgences for their sins and to seek the intercession of the saints.

There is consolation and joy in visiting those places on earth hallowed by the bodily presence of Our Lord or His Apostles and Saints. “Who would not be moved,” asked Saint Peter Canisius, “at seeing the place where Peter was fastened to the cross, Paul beheaded with the sword, John cast into a vessel of boiling oil; where Peter said to Christ, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ — the place where Laurence was roasted on the gridiron, Sebastian was shot with arrows; the house of Saint Agnes, of Saint Cecilia?”

Written by a lay Catholic whose native language is Italian and whose relatives have lived in Rome for over 60 years, this book is a unique and very personal look at Christian Rome and the Vatican, filled with anecdotes and fabulous and colourful stories from popular and religious folklore, legend, mythology and tradition. Based on the author’s stay in Rome for nearly two months living in the modern E.U.R. District, it is, as its title suggests, structured like a daily diary rather than by theme or subject-matter.

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