

Pilgrimage to the Patriarchal Basilica of St John Lateran

The Pope's Cathedral



Across the street from the sanctuary of the Holy Stairs stands the imposing Basilica of St John Lateran, the Pope's Cathedral Church. The basilica is part of a large complex which also consists of the Lateran Palace which serves as the headquarters of the Diocese of Rome. Although it is usually referred to as St John Lateran the official title of the Basilica is the "Patriarchal Archbasilica of the Most Holy Saviour and Saint John the Baptist Evangelist and Saint John the Evangelist at the Lateran", its patronal feast is that of the Transfiguration on the 6th August.

The Lateran palace was originally the home of the Laterani family, but having fallen into disfavour with the Emperor Constantine, their palace and lands were seized and given to Pope St Sylvester for the use of the Church – probably as an act of reconciliation following three centuries of persecution. Work on the basilica began under Constantine, and the pope established the official residence of the popes in the palace; it would remain the official residence of the pope for a thousand years until the move to Avignon. Following the return to Rome the popes lived in the Vatican and for a period in the Quirinal Palace. While St Peter's Basilica is well known as the pope's basilica, the Lateran Basilica is his seat and as such is granted the title "*Mother and Head of all Churches in Rome and in the World*".

After Mass in the Chapel of St Laurence, the group visited the Basilica to pray for the Holy Father and the Church. The church is perhaps one of the most impressive buildings in the world. Built in the style

of a traditional Roman basilica it has a number of unique characteristics. Statues of the Apostles line the nave of the basilica standing as sturdy pillars to remind pilgrims that as this building symbolizes the Catholic Church, the Apostles are the pillars on which the Church is built. The Papal Altar is covered by a medieval baldacchino within which the heads of SS Peter and Paul are enshrined. Behind the baldacchino is the pope's cathedra, his throne as Bishop of Rome. Among the many relics and treasures of the Basilica is a table upon which St Peter is said to have celebrated Mass – it is to be seen above the Blessed Sacrament Altar.



Baldacchino of St John Lateran with the Reliquaries with the heads of SS Peter and Paul over the altar.

The basilica has two facades, the front (East) is capped by magnificent statues of Jesus and his Apostles; the North façade features the Loggia of Benedictions from which the popes used to bless the people. From this loggia Pope Boniface VIII inaugurated the first Holy Year in 1300. Among those buried in the basilica is Pope Leo XIII (reigned 1878-1903), the last pope not to be interred in the Vatican and the first pope to be filmed.