

Catholic Pilgrimage Choir Tour to Italy

Standard Tour #1 (7 nights / 9 days)

Day 1

Departure from USA via scheduled airline service to Rome, Italy. Enjoy full meal/beverage service and in-flight entertainment during this trans-Atlantic flight.

Day 2 Florence

Arrive at Rome Airport. Meet your MCI Tour Manager, who will assist the group to the awaiting chartered motorcoach for a transfer to Florence. Late afternoon hotel check-in. Welcome Dinner and overnight.

Florence is known as the city of the Medici Family and Machievelli. She was once a Roman colony, but began her real development during medieval times and was at her prime during the Renaissance under the reign of the Medicis. Dante, da Vinci, Ghiberti and Michelangelo all were either born or worked extensively in Florence. The preservation of their works and that of others has made Florence the greatest museum of the Renaissance.

Day 3 Florence

Enjoy a visit to the Galleria dell' Accademia. This gallery house's paintings by Florentine artists spanning the 13th to 16th centuries, but its main draw is Michelangelo's *David*, carved from a single block of marble when the artist was only 29. After our visit here, enter the famous Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiori (Il Duomo). The Duomo is well-known for its pink, white and green marble façade, capped by Brunelleschi's famous dome. It is the 4th largest Cathedral in the world. In front of the Duomo is the Baptistery of San Giovanni, one of the oldest buildings in Florence, with its famous *Gates of Paradise*. **Participate/sing in an afternoon Mass in the Duomo (or an evening concert elsewhere in the city).**

Day 4 Assisi/Rome

Transfer to Rome via Assisi, birthplace of St. Francis. Visit this "quiet medieval town, imbued with the mystical spirit of one of the most fascinating saints of history." A guided tour includes seeing both the upper and lower Basilicas of St. Francis, built in 1253. Continue with a walking tour of the town, visiting the major sites associated with St. Francis, including the Chiesa Nuova (built over the home of Francis' family), the Duomo San Rufino (containing the baptismal font of the Saint) and also the Church of St. Clare (Chiesa di Santa Chiara), Francis' beloved friend and companion in ministry. **Participate/sing in a Mass in St. Francis Basilica.** Continue to Rome for dinner and overnight.

Rome - Popes, Vandals, the Borgias and Napoleon, Garibaldi, Michelangelo and Mussolini and, of course, the ancient Romans themselves all have left their physical and spiritual mark on Rome, but though she keeps the glory of an ancient day about her, she remains a wellspring of spiritual renewal and creative energy; in short, she really is the Eternal City.



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Day 5 Rome

Half-day Pilgrim's Tour of the Holy Sites of Rome. Enjoy touring Vatican City (the home of His Holiness the Pope and the earthly center of Roman Catholicism), as well as the Vatican Museum, St. Peter's Basilica (site of another of Michelangelo's works, the statue of the Blessed Mother holding her crucified son - we know it as the *Pieta*) and the Sistine Chapel (featuring Michelangelo's Ceiling Frescos and *The Last Judgment*). ***Participate/sing in a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.***



Day 6 Rome

Morning tour of a few sites of Ancient Rome, including the Forum and Coliseum. Its real name was the Flavian Amphitheatre, after the emperor who built it in the first century after Christ. Coliseum refers to the 'colossal' statue of Nero that at one time stood at the entrance. Originally on this spot was a pool, around which was built Emperor Nero's famous 'Golden House.' The construction was completed with the help of Jewish slaves bought here in 70 AD. The Coliseum served as the center for violent sports, and traditionally, as the site of the martyrdom of many Christians. Also view the Pantheon, Baths of Caracalla, Palatine Hill, Spanish Steps, Piazza Navona, and Trevi Fountain. ***Conduct an evening concert in Rome.***



Day 7 Rome

In the morning, go to Vatican City to the Sala Nervi (the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall) for the weekly Papal Audience (subject to the Holy Father's schedule), and possibly sing a very short recital there. In the afternoon take a guided tour (our guide is a local monk) of the Catacombs, the underground burial site of many early Christians. The Catacombs are south of Rome beside the Via Appia Antica (Old Appian Way). Owing to laws forbidding burials within the city of Rome, the Appian Way became lined with many tombs. Until the middle of the second century, there were no cemeteries for Christians, so pro-Christian families would make land available for burial of fellow Christians and their relatives. Due to lack of space and the need for secrecy, when there was no more room on one level, excavation began on a lower level. The popes strongly urged the faithful to pray at the martyr's tombs, so they also became meeting places for the faithful.



Day 8 Rome

Today, visit several of Rome's basilicas:

Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano (St. John in Lateran) is the Cathedral of Rome, the mother of all churches in Rome and in the world. Founded by Constantine during the time of Pope Silvester (314-335), it has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. The current basilica dates from the 17th century. It is here that St. Francis persuaded Pope Innocent III to give permission to begin the Franciscan Order. The night before, the Pope, in a dream, had seen a man supporting the tottering building of St. John Lateran. The next day, when Francis appeared before Pope Innocent, His Holiness recognized the face from the dream and consented to Francis's request. Nearby is the Scala Santa, purportedly the stairs that Christ climbed prior to his condemnation by Pontius Pilate.



Basilica di San Paolo Fuori le Mura (St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls) was built over the burial place of the St. Paul, the “Apostle of the Gentiles” and consecrated in 324. The building of the first place of worship over St. Paul's tomb has been attributed to the Emperor Constantine. A larger basilica was erected by the Emperors Valentiniano II, Theodosius and Arcadius. Destroyed by fire in 1823, it was rebuilt on the same foundations and consecrated by Pope Pius IX.



Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore (St. Mary Major) is the greatest of many churches dedicated to Our Lady; it is the only Roman basilica which, in spite of several additional decorations, has retained its original shape. It was built, according to tradition, in 352 A.D. after an appearance of the Blessed Virgin. The basilica, also called "Liberiana", dates from the time of Pope Sixtus III (432-440).



Participate/sing in a Mass during the visit to one of these Basilicas.
Evening Farewell Dinner.

Day 9 Depart for home

Transfer to Rome's International Airport for return flight to USA. Arrive home in the evening of the same day.



His Holiness Pope Benedict

