

Catholic Pilgrimage Choir Tour to Italy

Standard Tour #2 (8 nights / 10 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 Rome

Arrive at Rome Airport. Meet your MCI Tour Manager, who will assist the group to the awaiting chartered motorcoach for a transfer into Rome. Enjoy a panoramic tour of Rome's highlights, stopping at sites such as the Spanish Steps, Trevi Fountain, and Piazza Navona. Welcome 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 creative energy; in short, she is the Eternal City.

Day 3 Rome

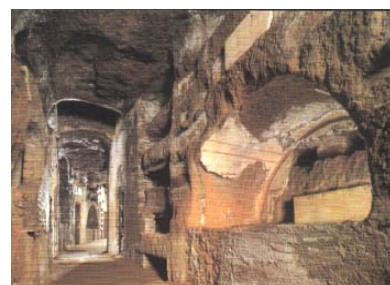
In the morning, go to Vatican City to the Sala Nervi (the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall) for the weekly Papal Audience (subject to the Holy Father's schedule), and possibly sing a very short recital there. Afternoon tour of some of the sites of Ancient Rome, including the Forum and Coliseum. Its real name 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 4 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 5 Rome/Assisi

Morning 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



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for the faithful. Afternoon transfer to Assisi where you will *sing in an evening Mass in the Basilica of St. Francis*.

The walled city of Assisi, prettily spread across the slopes of Monte Subasio, retains its prominence as one of the great pilgrimage sites of Italy. Its most revered son, Francis, was born here in 1182, the son of a wealthy merchant, who after spending his early years in a life of dissipation, devoted himself to the service of the poor and the sick. He died in 1226, surrounded by friends of his Franciscan Order which continues to thrive today in ministry to those in need. Francis' life, around which are many chapters, has inspired major works from famous artists (including Giotto). With its well-preserved medieval streets and houses and its treasures of art, Assisi is one of Italy's most compelling destinations.

Day 6 Assisi/Florence

Guided tour of 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 service and ministry. Afternoon transfer to Florence.

Florence is known as the city of the Medici Family and Machievelli. Florence 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 has made Florence the greatest museum of the Renaissance.

Day 7 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 Duomo (Santa Maria in Flore). 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 8 Venice

Morning transfer to Venice, stopping in Padua to visit the Basilica of St. Anthony (*possibly sing in a Mass in this basilica*).

Venice is known as 'The Queen of the Adriatic'. "A unique position, the grace of her buildings, the changing colors, and not least the total absence of wheeled transport, make Venice the most charming and poetic city in the world."



Day 9 Venice

Transfer to the main island of San Marco via public boat. Today our visit begins at the Basilica of St. Mark--golden mosaics from the Second Golden Age of Icons adorn this magnificent Byzantine basilica built to honor the body of St. Mark brought from Alexandria in Egypt. Popes John XXIII and John Paul I were Patriarchs of Venice. We visit the Piazza di San Marco and the Palazzo Ducale (the palace of the Doge, the political leader of the Republic of Venice). *Sing in an evening Mass in San Marco Cathedral.* Farewell Dinner.



Day 10 Depart for home

Early morning transfer to Milan's International Airport for return flight to USA. Arrive home in the evening of the same day.



Choir singing in a Mass at St. Peter's Basilica