



SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

1. IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH AND THE INSTITUTE

1.3 Encountering the Church of yesterday and today

1.3.2 Catacombs and Basilicas

(Prayer in pullman)

Angelus

Entrustment to Mary

Guide: *To Mary, Mother, Teacher and Guide of our vocation, we entrust our fidelity...*

ALL: Mother and Helper of the Church, with joy and gratitude we entrust ourselves completely to you so as to live our vocation in creative fidelity. In this way we wish to continue that covenant of love that God established with Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello in favor of the most needy.

Guide. *Mary, who at Pentecost imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit to the community of believers...*

ALL: continually intercede for all the People of God, so that, docile and faithful to the charisms received, all the baptized - Christian communities and religious families - may enrich the Church, building the Kingdom of God in the world. We pray to you, Mary Most Holy, for the Pope and all the bishops that they may be guides and promoters of communion and participation.

Guide. *Mary, help us to give space to the Word of God and teach us to live and work in the style of the Preventive System...*

ALL: where loving-kindness permeates every encounter with others, reason becomes humble and understanding dialogue, and religion is evangelical witness and great love for catechesis. In this way we can experience the joy proper to a Salesian community and pray that young women and men can courageously and joyfully respond to God's call. Amen

MORNING PRAYER

Guide: The Catacombs of St. Callistus in Rome were visited with devotion and interest by Don Bosco on his first trip to Rome. The chronicles state that Don Bosco entered the Catacombs at 8am and left at 6pm. The visit gave the saint many ideas for writing the lives of martyrs and saints. Some years later, Mother Mazzarello on her trip to Rome also visited these significant catacombs. The chronicles record this fact which speaks of her love and her ability to care for others. Two days after Mother Mazzarello's arrival in Rome (8 November 1877) they went to visit the Catacombs.

Through our visit to this holy place, let us allow ourselves to be fascinated by the testimony of the first Christians so that it may lead us to become aware of the sufferings of the Church of yesterday and today.

(brief pause for reflection)

Song: Christ be Our Light

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr5XhaRaLOM>

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Refrain

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Refrain

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Refrain

Guide: Psalm 63 provides a roadmap for a faith-filled life marked by a thirst for God, satisfaction in His love, meditation on His word, and trust in His protection. It emanates a message of hope, resilience, and faith, underscoring the importance of seeking and finding solace in God amidst life's trials.

Psalm 63: My Soul is Thirsting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGxa4a6HGlg>

Refrain

My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord,
thirsting for you, my God.
My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord,
thirsting for you, my God,
thirsting for you, my God.

Alternate Refrain

As morning breaks I look to you;
be my strength this day.

As morning breaks I look to you;
be my strength this day,
be my strength this day.

O God, you are my God,
and I will always praise you.
In the shadow of your wings
I cling to you and you hold me high.

Refrain

Through the day you walk with me;
all the night your love
surrounds me.

To the glory of your name
I lift my hands, I sing your praise.

Refrain

I will never be afraid,
for I will not be abandoned.
Even when the road grows long
and weary
your love will rescue me.

Refrain

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow.

Intercessions

Guide: Our Savior's faithfulness is mirrored in the fidelity of his witnesses who shed their blood for the Word of God. Let us praise him in remembrance of them:

You redeemed us by your blood.

- Your martyrs freely embraced death in bearing witness for the faith, give us the true freedom of the Spirit, O Lord.
- Your martyrs professed their faith by shedding their blood, give us a faith, O Lord, that is constant and pure.
- Your martyrs followed in your footsteps by carrying the cross, help us to endure courageously the misfortunes of life.
- Your martyrs washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb, Help us to avoid the weaknesses of the flesh and worldly allurements

Prayer: *(together)*

Let us pray, preserve in us, Lord, the manifold riches of your gifts, and through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, grant to all people peace and the graces needed to merit it by the good works we are called to do. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

THE CATACOMBS OF ST. CALLISTUS

(guided tour)

Personal reflection: *(after visiting the Catacombs of St Callistus)*

We are invited to think of the life of those people who had to hide, who had the practice of burying the dead and celebrating the Eucharist here... Even today there are persecuted Christians, maybe even more so than in the first centuries. These Christians, who lived in God's presence, are for us women and men of hope. You are invited to take time to reflect on the following questions:

1. Today we can ask ourselves: but me, where do I feel safest: in God's hands or in others, trusting other sources?
2. What image, what words catch my attention and what aspects of our faith does it recall for me?
3. Although faith is a gift from God, it also requires readiness to receive it. What strategies have I developed in my life to nourish my faith?
4. Recall a phrase or an expression of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello that expresses their love for the Church, and their being Church.

BASILICA OF ST JOHN LATERAN *(in the pullman before arriving at the basilica)*

Guide: The Cathedral of the Most Holy Savior and of Saints John the Baptist and the Evangelist in the Lateran is the oldest and highest ranking of the four papal major basilicas, giving it the unique title of "Archbasilica". Because it is the oldest public church in the city of Rome, it is the oldest and most important basilica of the Western world, and houses the cathedra of the Roman bishop. It has the title of ecumenical mother church of the Catholic faithful.

The Basilica of St. John Lateran is the Cathedral of the diocese of Rome. The Roman Basilica is a symbol of unity of the whole Christian community with Rome and the "mother of all churches". It reminds us that we are united by the one faith and we all journey towards the same goal.

Personal prayer (*in the Basilica of St. John Lateran*)

As you walk through the “mother of all churches” silently name the Cathedral of your diocese and pray for all priests, religious and lay persons who serve in your diocese.

BASILICA OF MARY MAJOR (*in the pullman before arriving at the basilica*)

Guide 1: Our Lady, Guide and Protectress of the people of Rome is known by the title the *Helper of the Roman People*. Pope Liberius commissioned the construction of the Liberian basilica around 360. He wanted a sanctuary built on the spot where there was an apparition of the Virgin Mary to a local nobleman and his wife. According to tradition, the outline of the church was physically drawn on the ground by a miraculous snowfall that occurred on 5 August 358 on the Esquiline Hill. The Basilica is dedicated to Mary, 'Our Lady of the Snow'.

Guide 2: A living Monument to Mary Help of Christians in Mornese: Don Bosco's words to the first FMA: “You now belong to a religious Family that is all of Mary; you are few in number, lacking in means and not supported by human approval. Take heart, let nothing disturb you. Things will soon change and you will have so many girls that you will not know where to put them; and not only girls but also so many postulants that you will be spoilt for choice. Yes, I can assure you that the Institute will have a great future, if you keep yourselves simple, poor, mortified... Have as your glory your title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and often think that your Institute must be the living monument of Don Bosco's gratitude to the Great Mother of God, invoked under the title of Help of Christians.” (Cronistoria I, 303)

Through Mary, Help of Christians Don Bosco creates a religious family on the hills of Mornese, initiated on the same day as in Rome centuries before. A sweet snowfall of fresh and clear flakes fell again on 5 August 1872, on the altar in the chapel of Mornese to spread candor of virtue and faith all around.

Personal prayer *(in the Basilica of Mary Major)*

In this memorable basilica of Mary's intervention in the Church and in our Institute, we pause in prayer and address Mary with Pope Francis' prayer to her:

"Virgin and Mother Mary, you who, moved by the Spirit, welcomed the Word of life in the depths of your humble faith, totally given to God, help us to say our "yes" in these demanding times, to make the Good News of Jesus resound. Obtain for us now a new ardor of hope to bring to all the Gospel of life that conquers death. Confer on us the audacity to seek new paths so that the gift of beauty that does not fade, may reach all. Star of the New Evangelization, help us to shine, witnessing communion, service, an ardent and generous faith, and justice and love for the poor. In so doing may the joy of the Gospel reach the ends of the earth and no periphery be deprived of its light. Mother of the Living Gospel, source of joy for the little ones, pray for us. Amen".

SACRED HEART BASILICA

(a tour of the Basilica will take place once inside)

Introduction

Guide: The church was intended to be built by Pope IX, and the first stone of the new building was laid down by him in 1870, but because of the annexation of Rome to the Reign of Italy the work was interrupted. Owing to the tenacity of Don Bosco, the construction resumed in 1880 and was completed in 1887. The architect was Francisco Vespignani.

This Basilica was desired by two Popes: Pio IX and Leone XIII. With the help of the dioceses of the Catholic world, it was built by St John Bosco with the assistance of the architect Count Francesco Vespignani, architect of the Holy Buildings from 1881-1887.

(tour continues)

Personal reflection *(after the visit to the Sacred Heart Basilica)*

An important moment in Don Bosco's life was the Eucharist he celebrated on 16 May 1887 at the altar of Mary Help of Christians... There he understood everything about all his undertakings and Mary's maternal action in his life and mission.

- I re-read my life recognizing the moments in which Mary Help of Christians has had a special intervention and I thank God for this maternal guidance.

Don Bosco led the construction of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, trusting fully in God's Providence and living obedience to the Pope in a heroic way: his strength diminished, his health weakened... but a wish from the Pope was an order for Don Bosco.

- I remember the moments in my life when an obedience was difficult, but became fruitful in my life. Thanks to these hidden 'YESs', the Lord has built wonders for the salvation of young people... everything is grace... I remember and thank the Lord.

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION *(celebrated in the Sacred Heart Basilica)*

Prayers of the Faithful

Celebrant: Let us pray together as we say:

Lord, help us to love one another.

1. For Pope Francis: that he may continue to be, by word and example, the voice and hope of those living in situations of material, moral and spiritual poverty. We ask that all Christians and people of good will have an ever-stronger desire for communion with him and docility to his teachings; we pray to the Lord.
2. For the Church and in particular for our sisters and brothers who are called to bear witness to the faith today through martyrdom, that the Lord may give them the strength to face this moment with joy and courage, we pray to the Lord.

3. For the leaders of nations and international agencies, that they may seek with a righteous conscience what benefits progress and not be corrupted by the lure of money and power, we pray to the Lord.
4. For peace in the world, hear Lord the cry of pain of those who suffer and implore an end to violence, and grant those who promote peace to persevere in doing good towards those most marginalized, we pray to the Lord.
5. For all of us pilgrims in these holy places, that we may be open to the foreseeing love of God the Father, who has called us to follow Jesus Christ more closely, and confirm our resolutions of holiness, making us strong and firm in faith, we pray to the Lord.

ROSARY (*Mysteries of Light prayed in the pullman*)

Concluding prayer: Faithful to the spirit and mission of Don Bosco, we Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, allow ourselves to be guided and sustained by the maternal presence of the Blessed Virgin for an ever-fuller gift to the Lord so as to bear witness to God's love for young people. With this love we pray the Rosary for peace in the world, for Christians who suffer in various ways.

Hail Holy Queen, mother of mercy;
hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
to you do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
your eyes of mercy towards us.
And after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit
of your womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

ADDITIONAL READING

Don Bosco in Rome

The **Catacombs of San Callistus in Rome** were visited with devotion and interest by Don Bosco on his first trip to Rome. The chronicles say that Don Bosco entered the Catacombs at 8am and left at 6pm. The visit offered the saint many ideas for writing the lives of the Martyrs and Saints.

Let us recall some facts about the Catacombs of St Callistus. They are located on the right side of the Via Appia Antica, after the little church of '*Quo Vadis*'.

The Catacombs of San Callisto are among the largest and most important in Rome. They were created in the mid-2nd century and are part of a cemetery complex occupying an area of 15 hectares, with a network of tunnels almost 20 kilometers long, on different levels, and reaching a depth of more than 20 meters. They take their name from the deacon St Callistus who, in the early 3rd century, was appointed by Pope Zephyrinus to administer the cemetery, and so the Catacombs of St Callistus became the official cemetery of the Church of Rome. In the 1st century, the Christians of Rome had no cemeteries of their own. If they owned land, they buried their dead there, otherwise they resorted to the common cemeteries also used by non-Christians. This is why St Peter was buried in the *necropolis* (city of the dead) on the Vatican Hill, which was open to all. St Paul was also buried in a *necropolis* on the Via Ostiense.

These Catacombs were the official cemetery of the Church of Rome in the 3rd century where dozens of martyrs, 16 pontiffs and many Christians were buried. **Since 1930 they have been entrusted to the guardianship of the Salesians of Don Bosco.**

The underground cemetery consists of several areas. The Crypt of the Popes is the most sacred and important place in these catacombs, called 'the little Vatican' because 9 popes and probably 8 dignitaries of the 3rd century Church were buried there. Along the walls are the original inscriptions in Greek of 5 popes. On four gravestones, next to the name of the pontiff is the title 'bishop', because the pope

was considered the head of the Church of Rome, and on two gravestones there is also the Greek abbreviation for 'MPT' (martyr).

The Statue of St Cecilia is a copy of the famous work by Maderno, sculpted in 1599. The crypt was decorated with frescoes and mosaics. On the wall next to the statue is an ancient image of St Cecilia in a praying attitude. Further down, in a small niche is a depiction of the Savior, holding the Gospel. Next to it, is a painting of the martyred Pope, St Urban. On one wall of the skylight are the figures of three martyrs: Polycamus, Sebastian and Quirinus. These are the oldest depicted paintings (2nd century).

Passing through imposing galleries full of niches, one comes to five small rooms, real family tombs, called Sacrament Cubicles which are particularly important for their frescoes. The frescoes date from the early 3rd century and symbolically represent the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The prophet Jonah, symbol of resurrection, is also depicted there.

The beautiful image of the Good Shepherd in the Catacombs makes one think of Don Bosco, the founder. An attentive observer with a passionate heart for his mission, looks to Don Bosco who walked and visited the humblest of abodes and walked the corridors of the most sumptuous of places always with the gaze of a caring father, willing to give his life for 'his' boys. He responded promptly to any need and then planned for the future, leaving it to Providence to dispose of the ways and means. (*Don Bosco a Roma-Venti Viaggi nella Città Eterna*, edited by Fr. Antonio Sperduti)

SOURCES

- *Cronistoria* of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Vol II
- *Don Bosco a Roma-Venti Viaggi nella Città Eterna*, edited by Fr. Antonio Sperduti.