

A Pilgrimage to Italy with Fr. Nick Baumgardner

Footsteps of Faith: Rome, Orvieto, Assisi & Bologna

A 12-DAY CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGE

October 4 – 15, 2027

Day 1 | Monday, October 4: Depart USA for Rome

Begin our sacred pilgrimage as we depart the USA on an overnight flight bound for Rome, Italy, enjoying dinner and breakfast served on board.

Day 2 | Tuesday, October 5: Arrival in Rome - Welcome Dinner & Vatican City at Night

Upon arrival at Rome Leonardo da Vinci–Fiumicino Airport (FCO), we will be met by our tour manager and transferred to our hotel in the heart of Rome. Following check-in, we enjoy time to settle, refresh, and rest after our journey, or begin exploring the Eternal City at our own pace. For those who wish to select rosaries, crucifixes, or devotional items to bring to tomorrow's Papal Audience for the Apostolic Blessing, nearby streets like Borgo Pio offer a lovely afternoon wander near the Vatican.

This evening, we come together for a special Welcome Dinner of traditional Roman fare, marking the joyous beginning of our pilgrimage and uniting our group in fellowship. After dinner, for all who would like to join, we will walk to St. Peter's Square—the heart of Catholicism—to experience the tranquility of Vatican City at night with a stop for gelato. First overnight in Rome.

Day 3 | Wednesday, October 6: Papal Audience - Trevi Fountain - Spanish Steps - Major Basilicas

This morning, we attend the Papal Audience with Pope Leo XIV in St. Peter's Square, bringing our personal devotional items to be blessed during the Apostolic Blessing. Next, we head to the Piazza di Trevi for lunch and free time, followed by a visit to the famous Trevi Fountain and Spanish Steps.

This afternoon, we visit the oldest and highest-ranking of the four major basilicas in Rome, the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran – the seat of the Pope as the Bishop of Rome, holding the official title “Mother and Head of all the Churches of the City and the World.” Here we will have the opportunity to venerate the relics of Saints Peter and Paul, founders of the Church of Rome, as well as the relic of the table of the Last Supper. Then we cross the street to visit the Holy Stairs (Scala Sancta) – 28 marble steps believed to be those that Jesus climbed up to the praetorium of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem during His Passion.

We continue to the nearby Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme), built by Constantine's mother, St. Helen, to house the relics of the Crucifixion which she brought back from Jerusalem. Holy Mass will be celebrated at one of the four major basilicas in Rome, the Basilica of Saint Mary Major (Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore), the largest Marian basilica in Rome. Here, we venerate the relics of Jesus's manger from Bethlehem, as well as pray before the famous icon known as the Madonna Salus Populi Romani. We will also venerate the incorrupt body of St. Pius V and the tomb of Pope Francis. We end the day with a visit to the Church of Saint Alphonsus of Liguori (Chiesa di Sant'Alfonso di Liguori all'Esquilino), dedicated to St. Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists). The shrine is famously known for housing the original, miraculous Byzantine icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Dinner and overnight in Rome.

Day 4 | Thursday, October 7: Holy Name of Jesus Parish Dedication Mass - Jesuit Churches - Pantheon - Appian Way & Catacombs

Today is dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Parish in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. We begin our day with a special Mass at the Church of the Most Holy Name of Jesus (Chiesa del Santissimo Nome di Gesù) with Fr. Nick. Afterwards, we enjoy a tour of the church, which was designed for the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), housing the tomb of founder St. Ignatius of Loyola and the reliquary of the great Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier. Dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus, it features the ceiling fresco, titled The Triumph of the Name of Jesus, highlighting the power and significance of His name, taken from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. We continue to our next stop at the Church of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (Chiesa di Sant'Ignazio di Loyola), famous for its trompe-l'œil ceiling, a fresco depicting the triumph of St. Ignatius, transforming the flat vault of the church into a three-dimensional dome. Next, we head to the Piazza Navona area for free time and lunch.

This afternoon, we visit the Pantheon, an ancient Roman temple converted to a Catholic church, called the Basilica of Saint Mary and the Martyrs (Basilica di Santa Maria ad Martyres), dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all Christian martyrs. We continue to the Basilica of Saint Mary of Minerva (Basilica di Santa Maria sopra Minerva), where St. Catherine of Siena's remains are kept beneath the main altar.

Next, we journey on the Appian Way (Via Appia Antica) – one of the oldest and most iconic roads of the ancient Roman world, featuring basalt paving, catacombs, tombs, and sprawling archaeological parks. We walk on this legendary road, the same stones that Roman legions and early Christians once walked, including the Apostles Peter and Paul as they entered Rome. Along the way, we stop at the Church of Domine Quo Vadis (Chiesa del Domine Quo Vadis), where tradition says Peter met Jesus, and where we will see the marble slab that preserves the supposed footprints of Jesus. We continue on to tour the Catacombs of St. Callixtus and St. Sebastian, entering the catacombs through the Basilica of Saint Sebastian Outside the Walls (Basilica di San Sebastiano Fuori le Mura). We return to the hotel for dinner together and overnight in Rome.

Day 5 | Friday, October 8: St. Peter's Basilica - Vatican Museums - Scavi Tour

Today we tour Saint Peter's Basilica (Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano), the largest church in Rome (and the world), built over the tomb of St. Peter, the first Pope. We will have the opportunity to view Michelangelo's Pietà sculpture, as well as to pray at the tombs of Pope Benedict XVI and St. John Paul II. Following the tour, we celebrate Holy Mass at the basilica. After Mass, we enjoy a Roman cuisine lunch near the Vatican.

Following lunch, we partake in a private tour of the Vatican Museums, where we will see some of the world's most spectacular art, including the Tapestry Gallery, Raphael Rooms, and the Sistine Chapel. Next, we go on a private Scavi Tour (Vatican Necropolis tour), an exclusive guided excursion which will take us beneath St. Peter's Basilica to the ancient, underground Roman cemetery to the tomb of St. Peter the Apostle. The remainder of the day is at leisure. Dinner and overnight in Rome.

Day 6 | Saturday, October 9: St. Clement's Parish Dedication Mass - Basilica of St. Peter in Chains - Colosseum & Roman Forum

Today is dedicated to St. Clement Catholic Parish in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. We begin our morning by celebrating a special Mass at Saint Clement's Basilica (Basilica di San Clemente) with Fr. Nick. After Mass, we embark on a tour of this early Christian basilica, dedicated to Pope St. Clement I, the third Papal successor to St. Peter, who was believed to have been ordained by St. Peter. Here, we will have the opportunity to venerate the relics of Pope St. Clement I, as well as of St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Cyril (of Saints Cyril and Methodius).

Next, we visit the Basilica of Saint Peter in Chains (Basilica di San Pietro in Vincoli), which preserves the chains that bound St. Peter when in Jerusalem and Rome. The basilica also famously displays Michelangelo's iconic statue of Moses in the tomb of Pope Julius II. We enjoy lunch in the area.

In the afternoon, we explore the glories of ancient Rome with a visit to the iconic Colosseum, the city's monumental amphitheater, the epicenter of Roman entertainment—where gladiators once fought, and grand spectacles captivated thousands. We continue to the Roman Forum, an archaeological treasure nestled between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills. Here, we wander among the layered remains of temples, basilicas, and public spaces that formed the heart of Rome's political, legal, religious, and economic life. Dinner and final overnight in Rome.

Day 7 | Sunday, October 10: Papal Angelus - Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls

After breakfast, we transfer to the Vatican and head to St. Peter's Square to attend the 12:00 noon Papal Angelus address of Pope Leo XIV, the first American Pope.

Following the Angelus and a leisurely lunch, we visit the magnificent Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls (Basilica di San Paolo Fuori le Mura), one of Rome's four major basilicas, built over the burial site of St. Paul the Apostle. Here we will celebrate Sunday Holy Mass followed by an insightful private tour, with the opportunity to pray at the tomb of the apostle beneath the main altar. The remainder of the evening is at leisure. Dinner and overnight in Rome.

Day 8 | Monday, October 11: From Rome to Orvieto - Orvieto Cathedral - Piazza del Duomo - Arrival in Assisi

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel. We leave Rome early this morning for a comfortable transfer north into Umbria. We take the scenic journey through the rolling landscape of Umbria and stop in the stunning hilltop town of Orvieto, perched atop a sheer volcanic tuff cliff. Here, we visit the famous Orvieto Cathedral (Duomo di Orvieto or Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta), dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. We celebrate Holy Mass followed by a tour of the cathedral. The duomo stands out as one of the most magnificent examples of Italian decorative Gothic architecture, renowned for its stunning mosaic facade. Within the cathedral, we visit the Chapel of San Brizio (Cappella di San Brizio), celebrated for its incredible fresco cycle of the Last Judgment. The cathedral also houses the Corporal of Bolsena, the sacred relic from a Eucharistic miracle in Bolsena, Italy, in 1263 when a consecrated host miraculously bled onto a corporal, the small linen altar cloth upon which the host and chalice rest during the Mass. Step inside the Chapel of the Corporal (Cappella del Corporale) to venerate the enshrined relic and view the featured frescoes detailing the story of the miracle. This profound miracle is commemorated to this day and directly inspired the institution of the solemn feast of Corpus Christi (Corpus Domini) in 1264 to celebrate the Eucharist.

Next, we enjoy a hearty Umbrian lunch at the Piazza del Duomo before continuing our scenic ride to the charming hilltop town of Assisi, the hometown of St. Francis and St. Clare. Settle in, enjoy dinner, and enjoy our first overnight stay in Assisi.

Day 9 | Tuesday, October 12: Assisi - Basilica of St. Francis - Church of St. Mary Major - Piazza del Comune - Basilica of St. Clare - Cathedral of St. Rufinus

After an early breakfast, we partake in a walking tour of Assisi's main spiritual sites. We begin with Holy Mass at the Basilica of Saint Francis (Basilica di San Francesco d'Assisi), followed by touring the upper and lower churches, which feature famous fresco cycles depicting St. Francis's life. We will have the opportunity to visit the crypt and venerate the tomb of St. Francis.

From there, we continue on to visit the Church of Saint Mary Major (Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore), also known as the Sanctuary of the Spoliation (Santuario della Spogliazione), which houses the remains of St. Carlo Acutis, the first millennial saint known for his devotion to the Eucharist. We enjoy a classic Umbrian lunch at the Piazza del Comune, the historic heart of Assisi.

After lunch, we stop at the Basilica of Saint Clare (Basilica di Santa Chiara), holding the remains of St. Clare, the first follower of St. Francis and founder of the Order of Saint Clare. This basilica also houses the original San Damiano Crucifix, renowned as the image before which St. Francis was praying when he received the commission from Christ to rebuild the church. Our last stop will be the Cathedral of Saint Rufinus (Cattedrale di San Rufino), Assisi's main church and cathedral, dedicated to Saint Rufinus, the city's first bishop and martyr. This cathedral is famous as the church where St. Francis and St. Clare were baptized, where the ancient baptismal font is still intact and visible near the entrance. Return to the hotel for dinner and second overnight in Assisi.

Day 10 | Wednesday, October 13: Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels - Journey to Bologna - Basilica of St. Petronius & Cathedral of St. Peter

Following breakfast at our hotel, we board our coach to visit the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels (Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli), situated at the foot of the hill of Assisi. Here we will celebrate Holy Mass followed by a tour of the basilica. This basilica was built over the "chiesetta" (little church) of Porziuncola (Italian for "little portion") – the most sacred site for the Franciscans, where St. Francis lived and founded the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans). Within the basilica, we visit the Chapel of the Transito (Cappella del Transito), the place where St. Francis died. Step inside the Rose Garden (Roseto) where St. Francis and his early friars lived, as well as the Rose Chapel (Cappella delle Rose), the cell where the saint retired and prayed.

After lunch, we travel in comfort through Umbria and Emilia-Romagna to Bologna. Upon arrival in the heart of Bologna, we check into our accommodation. Later this afternoon, we meet and depart to the Piazza Maggiore to visit the Basilica of Saint Petronius (Basilica di San Petronio), dedicated to the patron saint and former bishop of the city. We continue to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Saint Peter (Cattedrale Metropolitana di San Pietro), the Bologna Cathedral and the seat of the Archbishop of Bologna. Following our visits, we enjoy a dinner of traditional Bolognese fare and an evening walk to view Piazza Maggiore at night. First overnight in Bologna.

Day 11 | Thursday, October 14: St. Dominic Parish's 100th Anniversary Celebration - Basilica of St. Dominic - Sanctuary of St. Luke - Seven Churches - Farewell Dinner

Begin our morning with breakfast at the hotel. Today is a special day honoring the centennial anniversary of St. Dominic Catholic Parish in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. This great landmark on the journey of St. Dominic Parish's life will be honored with a special dedication Mass with Fr. Nick at the Basilica of Saint Dominic (Basilica di San Domenico). After Mass, there will be a guided tour of the basilica, which entombs the remains of St. Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans). Here, we pray at the Ark of Saint Dominic (Arca di San Domenico), the site of the tomb of the saint. For lunch, we experience authentic Bolognese in the city that is globally celebrated as the culinary capital of Italy.

This afternoon, we offer an (Optional) excursion to walk or ride up to the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin of Saint Luke (Santuario di Madonna di San Luca), housing the famous image of the Madonna with Child, believed to be painted by St. Luke. From this site, we will have the opportunity to overlook the whole city of Bologna. Next, we visit the Sanctuary of Saint Mary of Life (Santuario di Santa Maria della Vita), famous for its terracotta masterpiece, Lamentation over the Dead Christ. Our final stop will be at the Basilica of Saint Stephen (Basilica di Santo Stefano), known as the Seven Churches (Sette Chiese) and Holy Jerusalem (Santa Gerusalemme).

Tonight, we gather in fellowship for a special Farewell Dinner. With grateful hearts, we give thanks to God for the sacred encounters, answered prayers, and blessed friendships formed along the way. Final overnight in Bologna.

Day 12 | Friday, October 15: Farewell Bologna - Departure for USA

As our sacred pilgrimage draws to a close, we bid farewell to Italy and transfer to Bologna Guglielmo Marconi Airport (BLQ) for our return flight home to the United States. Though our pilgrimage ends here, the spiritual graces we have received—deepened by the intercession of the saints and martyrs, the witness of the apostles, and the profound mysteries of the Eucharist and Our Lady—remain ever with us to guide our daily lives.

Itinerary is tentative and subject to change.