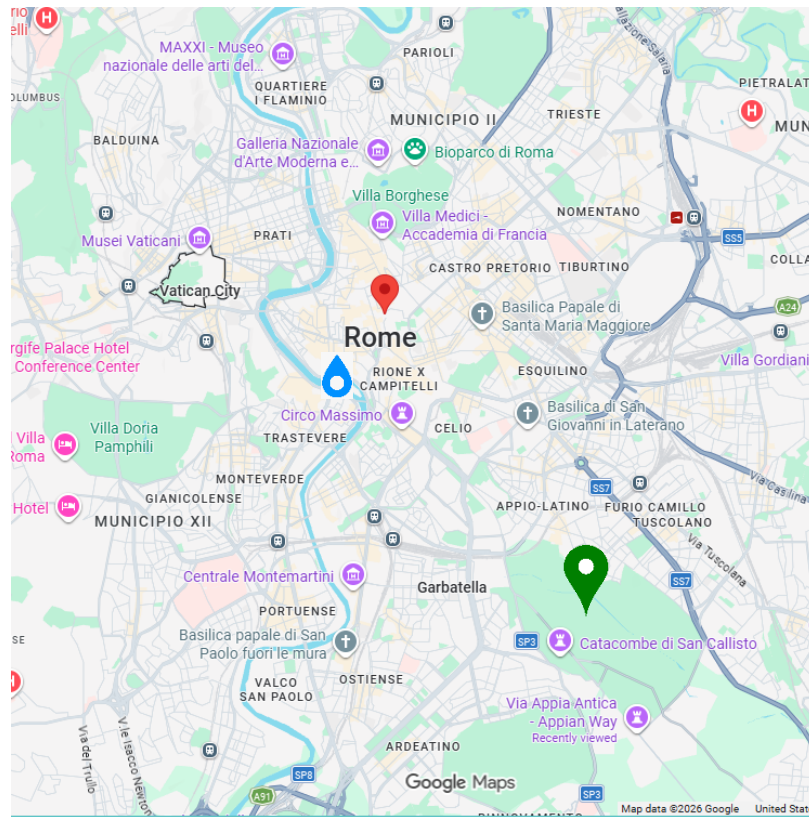


Fraser Rome Pasquali-Fraser Wedding Travelogue

May 26 – June 3, 2004



Overview Comments

I wrote this travelogue in June 2026, 21 years after our journey to Charelston, SC and 3 years after I caught the bug to create travelogues of our trips. Christopher was helping me build the deaconrogerfraser.com website, and as I was searching for content, I came across 653 photos of the wedding and Rome! While I was viewing the photos, the memories came flooding back!

Our adventure surprised us throughout the week by reminding us of forgotten history we learned long ago in school about Ancient Rome, Renaissance Rome and Modern Rome woven together in the Eternal City. The nickname "Eternal City" first appeared in Roman literature when the Latin poet Albius Tibullus in the 1st century BC wrote that "Romulus had not yet built the walls of the 'Eternal City.'"

Truth be told, I recall some of us were still nervous about traveling so soon after September 11, 2001.

So, here's what we did on our first family adventure outside of the United States in May/June 2004.:



The story goes that when Sonia was a child of 5 or 6 years old, she chose the church where she was going to be married: the Basilica of Sanctæ Mariæ de Ara Coeli. I was blessed to be asked by Sonia and Christopher to serve as Deacon at their wedding Mass.

I arranged my “good standing” paperwork to be sent from the Archdiocese of Atlanta to the Diocese of Rome, which is under the direct jurisdiction of the Pope, who is the Bishop of Rome. I then emailed Father John, the pastor. Not knowing what to expect, but I went ahead and requested that I serve and preach at the Mass. Father John replied in a most welcoming way, *“Deacon Roger please go ahead and do whatever you want to do. I’ll make sure their marriage is legal....and I would like to preach as well.”*



Our two-bedroom, one-bathroom, 3rd floor “Airbnb” apartment’s street address in Rome was Via dell’Umiltà, 30. We were conveniently located in the historic center of Rome, near Via Veneto and the American Embassy, between the Trevi Fountain and Piazza Venezia. Staying with Pat and I were GG, Pat’s mom, sister-in-law Nora, and nephew Nate.

Unbeknownst to us, Pat’s sister Kathy booked the apartment next to us. With her were our niece Stephanie, nephew-in-law Dan and niece Lisa.



The apartment was spartan but did cost half of what hotel rooms would have cost. Although it was not air-conditioned, the nights were cool and humidity low – the bedroom window was wide open without a screen, but there weren’t any bugs flying around.

I immediately noticed the tiny bathroom had a tankless water heater. I told the ladies that they needed to keep their showers short, so we didn’t run out of water...this kept us all moving along each day. They weren’t too pleased with me when I told them as we were leaving about tankless water heaters... which continuously heats the water and doesn’t run out of hot water.

The apartment location turned out to be excellent. There was a coffee/pastry shop on the ground floor perfect for a quick breakfast espresso and awesome pastry. There was also a flower stand a few steps from the front door where we bought some Italian daisies.

We ran out of TP which required going to a nearby convenience store. Unfortunately, the staff didn’t speak any English...in desperation, it took 3 trips to finally find the TP tucked away on a shelf above the door. BTW, “toilet paper” in Italian is “carta igienica.” How did we live before iPhone translators?

Catacombs of St. Sebastian and St. Callistus



The Catacombs of St. Sebastian and St. Callistus are among Rome’s most important early Christian burial sites. They are located southeast of the city next to each other along the ancient Via Appia Antica in the Ardeatino district.



Both catacombs reflect the late Roman and early Christian burial practices. They emerged in the late 2nd–3rd centuries to circumvent Roman law banning urban burials. And, they served as places of worship, burial, and martyr veneration as well as preserving early Christian art and inscriptions, offering insights into the faith before the rise of centralized church architecture.

Catacombs of St. Sebastian

Originally a pozzolana quarry (volcanic ash used in Roman concrete), abandoned by the late 2nd century, the site became a pagan cemetery before being adapted for Christian use. By the mid-3rd century, it was known as “memory of the Apostles” because early Christian tradition held that relics of Saints Peter and Paul were temporarily housed here around 258AD. The complex

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developed into a multi-level hypogeum with galleries, columbaria, and even residential buildings. It became the burial place of three martyrs: St. Sebastian (martyred under Diocletian, buried Jan 20), Quirinus (bishop of Sescia), and Eutychius.

In the early 4th century, the open quarry area was filled to create an embankment, upon which Emperor Constantine built a grand circular Basilica (later rebuilt in 1933). The catacombs remained accessible throughout history, with a Baroque Basilica added in the 17th century by Cardinal Borghese.

Catacombs of St. Callistus

The Catacomb of Callixtus, also called the Cemetery of Callixtus, is part of the larger Complesso Callistiano, which has roughly 12 miles of tunnels on five levels. It is considered the heart of underground Christianity in Rome, housing the Crypt of the Popes, where 16 popes and other high-ranking church figures were buried from the 2nd to 4th centuries. The catacomb fell into disuse in the 9th century as relics were moved to churches within the Aurelian Walls but was rediscovered in 1854 by archaeologist Giovanni Battista de Rossi.

Day 1 Wednesday May 26 Atlanta – Newark

ATL High: 90°F, Low: 70°F, Sunrise: 6:29AM, Sunset: 8:39PM

- Left home in Seven Oaks, Alphaetta at 8:00am. Drove to Conway Street Park'n Fly
 - LV Atlanta ATL, Delta 1484 12:35pm –
ARR Newark EWR, 2:48pm
 - LV Newark EWR, Delta 8579 Wednesday 5:10pm –
ARR Paris GDC, Thursday 6:15am
-



Day 2 Thursday May 27 Paris – Rome

Rome High: 73°F, Low: 51°F, Sunrise: 5:39AM, Sunset: 8:34PM,

- ARR Paris GDC, Thursday 6:15am
- LV Paris GDC, Air France 1204, 7:15am –
ARR Rome FCO, 9:20am (dur 14 hr 35 min) (5,500 miles)
- *FAST & Wild* cab ride from FCO to the apartment!
 - Met the owner, a 30-something man, got the keys and settled in the apartment.
- After lunch we toured Via Veneto to stay awake.
 - Via Veneto (officially Via Vittorio Veneto) is one of Rome's most famous and elegant streets. Immortalized by Federico Fellini's 1960 film *La Dolce Vita*, this sweeping tree-lined

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boulevard became the symbol of glamour, celebrity culture, and the good life in post-war Italy. It runs from Piazza Barberini at its southern end to the Porta Pinciana and Villa Borghese gardens at the top.

- We met Sonia's family and newly arrived folks for dinner at a local pizza restaurant. The plain wood-fired crust with olive oil, garlic and salt was superb!
 - Then, bone-tired, returned to the apartment to collapse into bed!
-



Day 3 Friday May 28 Rome

Rome High: 71°F, Low: 57°F, Sunrise: 5:39AM, Sunset: 8:35PM

- After a good night's sleep, we visited the Villa Borghese in the heart of Rome, just a short walk from our apartment, Piazza del Popolo, and the Spanish Steps. It is one of the city's most beloved green spaces and cultural landmarks. More than a park, Villa Borghese is a world where art, nature, and history come together to create an experience that is both relaxing and enriching.

Throughout the week, as we wandered near and far around Rome, we thoroughly enjoyed bumping into family and friends on the streets of Rome. Invariably we found it to be a perfect time to grab an espresso or gelato and talk about what we had seen that day.

And, we found it fun trying to find locations mentioned in the popular Dan Brown book Angels and Demons which follows a trail of historical symbols and clues across Rome, deciphering the locations of the four Illuminati altars where the kidnapped cardinals are to be killed.



- Pat and I hosted the rehearsal dinner for 75+ people at **Cesarina**,
Via Piemonte 109 - 00187 Roma (Lazio),
<http://www.ristorantecesarinaroma.it/>

Located in the heart of the eternal city, in the immediate vicinity of Via Veneto, a temple of the Roman dolce vita, it welcomes its customers in an elegant but at the same time friendly and relaxing environment.

It was great to be with so many of our family and friends from the USA and beyond.



Day 4 Saturday May 29 Rome

Rome High: 75°F, Low: 54°F, Sunrise: 5:38AM, Sunset: 8:36PM

- After breakfast we took a 3-hour double-decker bus tour on the upper deck with Gail and Stan to see the major sites of Rome. We really got a good feel for Rome and where the major attractions were located so later in the week we had our bearings during our walking tours. We saw:

Via Marsala (start/finish)

Basilica Papale di Santa Maria Maggiore

Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano

Colosseum

Circus Maximus

Piazza Venezia

Largo di Torre Argentina

Piazza Navona

Vatican City

Villa Borghese

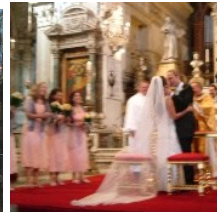
Piazza di Spagna

Piazza Barberini

Roma Termini

Via Marsala (finish/start)

We were surprised to see so many churches everywhere in Rome. It's because there are more than 930 active churches in Rome, the largest number of churches in any city in the world. When deconsecrated churches and chapels in private residences are included, the total number rises to nearly 1,600 churches.



- Sonia and Christopher's wedding was at the Basilica of Sanctæ Mariæ de Ara Cœli (Saint Mary of the Altar in Heaven). The Basilica is located on the highest summit of the Capitoline Hill directly above the Palazzo Senatorio and the Piazza del Campidoglio, making it one of the most prominent and symbolic locations in the city. Historically, it was built in the 6th century on the site of the ancient Temple of Juno Moneta and has long been a center of both religious and civic life. It is located between the Victor Emmanuel II Monument, (Il Vittoriano a.k.a, "The Wedding Cake" which houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier), and an entrance to the Roman Forum which is directly behind the church. The wedding proceeded amongst the tourists visiting the church.

Sanctæ Mariæ de Ara Cœli is known for housing relics belonging to Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, various minor relics from the Holy Sepulchre, both the pontifically crowned images

of Nostra Signora di Mano di Oro di Aracœli (1636) on the high altar and the Santo Bambino of Aracoeli (1897).

Needless to say, the church with its soaring ceiling above about 20 rows of pews and the opulent marble altar, was a magnificent setting for the marriage ceremony.

- At the beginning of Mass, Sonia and her father Gorgio went to the back of the church to walk up the aisle. The church's 15'tall doors were open with the sun pouring in on a light breeze. Sonia's veil was gently waving on the breeze. All of the people were turned around watching Sonia and her Dad, while Father John and I were waiting at the top of the steps to the altar. Father John leaned over to me asking, "Deacon Roger, can you see out the doors, down the steps to the Piazza across the street? I replied, "Yes Father, I can see it." He then asked, "do you see the buildings on the far side of the Piazza?" "Yes," I said. Do you see on the left-hand side, on the roof, a structure that looks like a castle?" "Sure thing," I said. He mischievously replied, "Sofia Loren live there!" Well, I nearly burst out laughing...I couldn't believe Father John told me that!
- Well, as I mentioned above, Father John also wanted to preach. I should have known a life lesson was coming, but I was a still "baby Deacon" having been ordained just 27 months before the wedding. I gave my homily which you can read in Attachment A. I knew it was a sold homily with some of their personal experiences mentioned among the scripture highlights...and it was brief!

But then Father John preached what became to be a much more memorable homily. He said, "*remember 3 things...*" All I remember was something about "*having glorious sex and making lots of babies!*" Essentially, I was learning that as a Deacon I would always be up-staged by the priest...especially a hot-blooded Italian one!

Fast forward 3 or 4 years later, we were at a family party in San Francisco...I think Matt and the other groomsmen "uncles" Peter, Pat and Choe were there. Anyway, I asked them if they remembered my homily at Sonia and Chistopher's wedding?...nope, not a one had any recollection. Then I said, do you remember what Father John preached? Oh, yeah... "*have glorious sex and make lots of babies!*" they chimed in.

Like I said, I don't remember the three things Father John preached... I'm sure he said something about the loving God being in our lives and loving one another. Maybe Chris, Matt, Peter, Pat and Choe remember. 😊

- Our dear friend Robin Coughlin sang for years in the All Saints Catholic Church choir in Dunwoody, GA. Her gift to Sonia and Christopher was to sing Ave Maria during Mass accompanied by the magnificent Sanctæ Mariæ pipe organ...it was glorious!
- As Father John said, he wanted to make sure the marriage was legal. That required the couple and their witnesses sign the BIG registration book, approximately 3' x 2', at the end of Mass....up on the altar.

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- We all know how important photographs are, but what surprised us were the photographers shooting pictures during Mass...on the altar...angling for shots around the bride and groom during the marriage ceremony!

And then to top it off, Peter Derrick's parents, Maraka and Wim were crawling all over the altar taking pictures along with the photographers. It was intrusive but hilarious! After Wim told Christopher, *"My friend, you would not have any pictures of your ceremony up here if we weren't taking pictures,"* Chris responded, *"Uh, what about the photographers taking pictures?"*



I have to say the photos of the wedding party with the Roman Forum in the background were positively stunning! Incredible pictures of all the wedding party youngbloods!



- The Reception at a villa on the old Appian Way was even more spectacular than the wedding! The Appian Way, or Via Appia, is one of the earliest and most important Roman roads, built in 312 BC to connect Rome to southern Italy and facilitate military, economic, and cultural exchange.

The reception began with Hors d'oeuvres including hand-carved prosciutto from a huge dry-cured ham, a beautiful selection of cheese, and drinks around the pool. After Best Man Matt gave a moving toast to his brother, one of Sonia's family-friend "uncles" asked if he could say a few words.

He gave us a humbling insight into what Italians think about America. He told us that we needed to understand, "Italians love Americans! You see, next week will be the 60th anniversary of Rome being liberated by the US Army on June 4, 1944. Rome was the first Nazi capital to fall to the Allies!" Then he said with great emotion, "I was there when the US Army tanks rolled into Rome! We love America! You saved us from the Nazis! Thank You!"

The hair stood up on the back of my neck at that moment. And I was never more proud of the USA.

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The tables were elegantly set in the Villa's back garden in a giant U-shape under umbrellas. Sonia and Chris were at the head table, and the Italian guests on one side, and US guests on the other side. Running down the center of the guest tables were troughs of floating flowers and candles (handmade by Christopher in Gorgio's apartment.) It goes without saying...what a special dinner it was to celebrate Sonia and Chris's marriage!



Of course the festivities didn't end with dinner. We were escorted into the Villa to witness the wedding cake rise up out of a replica of the Colosseum!

Finally Sonia and Christopher's wedding day would come to an end with another flourish! Sonia and Christopher led our dancing with their well-practiced choreographed dancing of their own.

That day's fairytale experience became the loving high point of our spectacular week in Rome!



Day 5 Sunday May 30 Rome

Rome High: 73°F, Low: 54°F, Sunrise: 5:38AM, Sunset: 8:37PM

- Sunday morning, we attended Mass...where escapes me.
- After Mass we continued our tour of Rome on an absolutely beautiful day and bumping into family and friends around Rome. We gathered at a gelato shop in Piazza Navona and for some forgotten reason started singing "YMCA" with everyone in the shop chiming in!



We visited the must see Trevi Fountain (Fontana di Trevi). It's located in the Trevi district of Rome, at the junction of three streets—Via De' Crocicchi, Via Poli, and Via Delle Muratte—hence its name, derived from the Latin trivium meaning "three roads." The fountain stands 86 feet high and 161 feet wide, making it the largest Baroque fountain in the city. The fountain is primarily made of Travertine stone from Tivoli,

with statues carved from Carrara marble. The fountain is integrated into the rear façade of the Palazzo Poli, creating a dramatic urban stage for its sculptures and water features. The fountain has appeared in numerous films, most famously *La Dolce Vita* (1960), cementing its place in popular culture.

The fountain marks the terminus of the Aqua Virgo aqueduct, constructed in 19 BC by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa to supply fresh water to Rome's baths and fountains. The current Baroque fountain was commissioned in 1732 by Pope Clement XII, designed by Nicola Salvi, and completed by Giuseppe Pannini in 1762. Its construction spanned three decades, incorporating earlier design influences from Gian Lorenzo Bernini and other architects.

The central figure of the Trevi Fountain is Oceanus, the Titan god of water, riding a shell-shaped chariot pulled by two seahorses, each guided by Tritons, symbolizing the sea's contrasting moods. Flanking Oceanus are allegorical figures: Abundance (holding a cornucopia) and Health (Salubritas, with a cup and snake), while bas-reliefs depict the origin of the Aqua Virgo aqueduct and Agrippa approving its construction.

The Trevi Fountain is renowned for the coin-tossing tradition, where visitors throw coins over their left shoulder to ensure a return to Rome. Approximately 3,000 euros are thrown daily, collected for charity.



The Bocca della Verità (Mouth of Truth) is a large, ancient Roman marble disc carved into the face of a god, with open eyes, nostrils, and mouth. It stands today in the portico of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Cosmedin in Rome's Piazza della Bocca della Verità, on the Tiber's left bank. The disc is made of Pavonazzo marble and measures about 5.6 ft in diameter, weighing roughly 2,900 lb.

A medieval legend holds that if you place your hand in the mouth and tell a lie, the stone will bite off your hand. This superstition likely arose in the Middle Ages, possibly during trials where accused individuals were tested for honesty. Some accounts say a hidden executioner stood behind the mask to cut off the hand of a liar Rome sightseeing. While no evidence confirms this ever happened, the tale remains a staple of Roman folklore and is still told to children...and gullible adults.



The Circus Maximus, located in the valley between the Palatine and Aventine hills, was first laid out in the 6th century BCE and later developed into a fully walled stadium under Julius Caesar. It became the model for circuses throughout the Roman Empire and was primarily used for chariot races, which were the most popular sport in ancient Rome. The arena also hosted gladiatorial games, beast hunts, public executions, and religious festivals known as *ludi*, often accompanied by parades and feasts.

The Circus Maximus measures approximately 2,037 feet in length and 430 feet in width, with seating arranged on three sides and a central barrier (*spina*) around which chariots raced. At its peak, it could accommodate 150,000 to 250,000 spectators, far exceeding the Colosseum's capacity.



Peggy and Phil's hotel, Trinità Dei Monti, was just down the street, at the top of the Spanish Steps. The steps, officially called Scalinata di Trinità dei Monti, were constructed between 1723 and 1725 to link the French Trinità dei Monti church at the top with Piazza di Spagna at the base. The staircase consists of 135 steps spanning a 95-foot slope, arranged in three terraces with elegant curves and balustrades, creating a sense of movement and rhythm. Despite their name, the steps are not Spanish; the name comes from the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See located at the bottom of the staircase.

Nearby Attractions include: Luxury shopping on Via dei Condotti, Trevi Fountain (7-minute walk), Pantheon (15-minute walk), Piazza Navona (17-minute walk), and Villa Medici.



The Pantheon in Rome is an ancient temple that was originally built by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa around 27 BC and later completely rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian between AD 118 and 128. It is renowned for its massive dome, which was the largest of its kind when constructed, and it remains one of the best-preserved monuments of ancient Rome. Since AD 609, the Pantheon has served as a Catholic church known as the Basilica of St. Mary and the Martyrs.

The Pantheon has a massive unreinforced concrete dome and central oculus – a circular opening at the apex of the dome. The oculus provides Structural Relief by removing the keystone's mass to reduce the dome's weight, easing internal stresses and preventing collapse; Ventilation by allowing natural airflow to help circulate air; and Symbolism creating a direct visual and spiritual link between the interior and the heavens...symbolizing the connection between the gods and the Roman people.



Day 6 Monday May 31 Rome

Rome High: 73°F, Low: 54°F, Sunrise: 5:37AM, Sunset: 8:38PM

- We attended 7:00am Mass at St. Peter's and afterward toured the Basilica.
- Today, St. Peter's Basilica stands as a symbol of faith, artistic achievement, and historical continuity, representing the enduring legacy of the Catholic Church. It was the largest church in Christendom until 1989 and remains one of the four major Basilicas of Rome, alongside St. John Lateran, Santa Maria Maggiore, and St. Paul Outside the Walls. Construction of the current Basilica spanned over 120 years, from 1506 to 1626, involving eight major architects and countless artisans

The Basilica from the start was built directly over Saint Peter's tomb, making it a sacred site for

Catholics worldwide. It has been associated with the papacy, the Protestant Reformation, and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Many popes, cardinals, and bishops have been interred here. Archaeological excavations under the Basilica in the 1970's confirmed the presence of ancient shrines and vestments, supporting the tradition of Saint Peter's burial.

The original St. Peter's Basilica, known as Old St. Peter's, was commissioned in the early 4th century by Emperor Constantine the Great. It served as a simple Christian Basilica and the burial site of Saint Peter, one of Jesus's apostles and the first Bishop of Rome.

Over centuries, the structure deteriorated, prompting Pope Nicholas V in the 15th century to plan a new Basilica due to structural instability and the poor condition of frescoes and walls. Pope Julius II laid the first stone of the new Basilica on April 18, 1506, commissioning Donato Bramante to design it in the form of a Greek cross with a central dome inspired by the Pantheon. Over the next century, several renowned architects contributed to the project, including Michelangelo, who redesigned the dome and transformed the plan into a Latin cross, and Carlo Maderno, who extended the nave. Gian Lorenzo Bernini later designed the piazza and interior fittings, adding Baroque elements that enhanced the Basilica's grandeur.

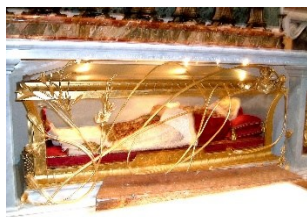
- We took a guided tour of the Sanctuary, the basement crypt and roof of the Basilica to view its incredible history and elements of this most sacred site.



The Pietà, sculpted by Michelangelo between 1498 and 1499, is a monumental marble representation of the Virgin Mary cradling the body of Jesus after his crucifixion.

The Pietà was located to its current position in the new Basilica after the original structure was demolished in the early 16th century. In 1972, the sculpture was attacked by a vandal, Laszlo Toth, who damaged Mary's face and arm. Following extensive restoration, the Pietà was placed behind bulletproof glass to protect it from future harm.

The Pietà is notable for being the only work that Michelangelo signed. He inscribed his name on a sash worn by Mary after overhearing people attribute the sculpture to another artist. This act not only asserts his authorship but also highlights his pride in this exceptional piece.



WE viewed Pope John the XXIII, one of my favorite Popes. Beatified in 2000 by Pope John Paul II and canonized in 2014 by Pope Francis, John XXIII is remembered as the temporary/ interim/place-holder Pope who called for the Vatican II Council only 90 days after being elected. He was known for his progressive openness to ecumenism, his call for peace, and his efforts to make the Church more accessible to the faithful. His presence in St. Peter's in an altar reflects the Basilica's role as a place of both veneration and teaching.

After his death in 1963, Pope John XXIII's body was said to be incorrupt. The 2001

inspection of John XXIII's remains sparked discussion because the body's appearance was strikingly preserved. Some speculated whether this was a sign of sanctity or simply the result of embalming and coffin conditions. Church officials did explain that the body had been embalmed and interred in a triple-sealed coffin with limited oxygen exposure. These conditions are standard preservation methods, not signs of supernatural incorruptibility.

On June 4, 2001, his remains were transferred from the Vatican crypt to the Altar of St. Jerome in the Basilica's right-side aisle. Beneath the altar, his body rests in a glass coffin covered in wax, while above are gilt bronze bas-reliefs depicting key moments of his pontificate, including the Second Vatican Council and his encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*.



We had the opportunity to view the Main Altar up close...from the stairs going down to the crypt level and the canopy to the Tabernacle and dome above. It was truly awe-inspiring!



All of the paintings we saw around the Sanctuary, up close were mosaics, not paint!



I found the large marble tablet list of the names all the popes who have been interred in the Basilica. Of a total of 266 popes, 148 are listed here. However, several of the popes on the list were later moved to other churches: Eugenius IV (r. 1431-48) to San Salvatore in Lauro, Callixtus III (r. 1455-58) and Alexander VI (r. 1492-1503) to Santa Maria in Monserrato, and Pius II (r. 1458-64) and Pius III (r. 1503) to Sant' Andrea della Valle. The tablet is crowned with a bronze image of St Peter, by tradition the first pope, with the papal tiara and crossed keys.



The Vatican Necropolis, or crypt, the ancient burial complex beneath St. Peter's Basilica, lies about 10–36 feet below the floor of the central nave of the Basilica. This depth places it below the level of the Vatican Grottoes and under the floor of the modern Basilica, which was built over the site in the 4th century under Constantine the Great. The necropolis was originally a Roman-era cemetery used from around AD 130 to AD 300, containing over 20 tomb buildings and an estimated 1,000 burials.



When the Basilica was constructed, Constantine ordered the demolition of the upper parts of the highest tombs and then the whole area to be filled in to create a level foundation for the new church. The remains of the necropolis were thus preserved beneath the Basilica floor, accessible only through archaeological excavations. Today, visitors can explore the necropolis via guided tours, where they can see the ancient tombs, inscriptions, and the path leading to the traditional site of St. Peter's.

We had to wait to go on the extraordinary Scavi Tour until our Deaconate Pilgrimage in January 2024. It goes through the excavations below Saint Peter's Basilica and is one of the most exclusive tours in all of Rome. Only 250 people are allowed through each day – compare that to the 30,000 that daily visit the Vatican Museums! These tours are in small groups of a maximum of about 12 people and last around 90 minutes. The grand finale is a visit to the actual tomb of Saint Peter, where, by peering around a corner, you will see the niche where the bones of the Prince of the Apostles were found! Reservations must be made well in advance of your visit to Rome, in fact, it should be the first thing you do when you know the dates you will be in Rome! It is amazing!



When the Tour in the Sanctuary was ending we were at the entrance doors to the Basilica, our guide told us to look down on the hard red marble disc we were standing on. We had walked through the central nave but really didn't notice these red marble discs embedded in the floor. These aren't just decorations; they mark the lengths of the naves of other significant Basilicas around the world, as if St. Peter's "embraces" them all under its roof.

Imagine, on an average day, around 20,000 people tread upon the Basilica's marble surfaces... That's about seven million visitors a year contributing to its wear! Over time, the softer white marble around the red discs wore down faster than the much harder red marble. Many had to be replaced. This hard red marble is no longer available for building...the quarries around the Mediterranean were depleted hundreds of years ago.

The red disc we were standing on was the exact location where Charlemagne was coronated. In the Middle Ages, papal coronations were held at St. Peter's, most famously in 800 AD Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Carolingian Empire by Pope Leo III in the Basilica's nave. This event marked the symbolic union of the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire.

Today, the Pope's coronation ceremony is still held in St. Peter's Basilica, with the Pope being crowned in the main altar area under the dome, the central architectural and symbolic feature of the Basilica.



We were able to visit the restricted areas outside St Peter's Basilica as well.

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Stairs up to the altar dome first with it's balcony overlooking the altar below. My fear of heights was about to be challenged like never before.



The stairs continued up and began to narrow substantially as we went...my claustrophobia was kicking in, but there was no going back!

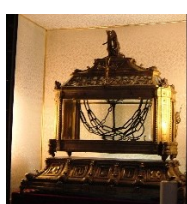
We suddenly popped out onto a massive area on the roof.. it was like a park on the roof of St. Peter's Basilica!



The views from the top were spectacular! My acrophobia was manageable. We walked up close to the back of the huge statues along the top front of St. Peter's...it was breathtaking! And as I recall, in order to get back, we took an elevator to the ground floor



Once again, we were sharing the experience with our dear family and friends! As we left St. Peter's, it was a bittersweet moment knowing that today was truly one of those once-in-a lifetime days!



Day 7 Tuesday June 1 Rome

Rome High: 73°F, Low: 63°F, Sunrise: 5:37AM, Sunset: 8:38PM

- Peggy and Phil invited us to join them and GG, Maddie, Lindsey, Gretchen, Ginny and Courtney on a private tour of Christian Rome starting with visiting the three great Basilicas: St. Peter in

Chains, St. John Lateran, and St. Paul Outside the Walls. Our guide took us on the subway to visit St. John Lateran.

We drove past the Coliseum, briefly stopped to view the Circus Maximus, and several Obelisks.

Rome is home to 13 ancient obelisks — the most in the world — making it a unique destination for history and architecture lovers. These include eight ancient Egyptian obelisks and five ancient Roman obelisks, plus some modern replicas Art Facts.

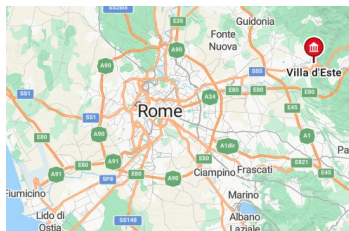
After the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC, emperors ordered that obelisks from Egyptian temples be sent to Rome. They were transported in specially designed obelisk ships down the Nile to Alexandria, then across the Mediterranean, and erected using large Roman cranes. These monuments were both religious symbols and imperial showpieces, reflecting Rome's power and cultural reach.



We were then on our way to the Catacombs when I asked our guide if we could visit “the chapel of Quo Vadis”. He said it wasn’t much of a church to see but immediately understood when I explained that I was a Deacon in the Catholic Church.

The “Quo Vadis” church’s official name is the Chiesa di Santa Maria in Palmis. It is a small, very plain, chapel-size Church dating back 1200 years. It’s on the old Appian Way...near the Catacombs of St. Sebastian and St. Callistus and built on the spot where Peter had a vision of Jesus when he was fleeing for his life from Nero. Peter said to Jesus “*domine, quo vadis?*” or “*Lord, where are you going?*” Legend has it that Jesus replied, “*I am returning to Rome to be crucified again.*” With that Peter knew what he had to do and returned to Rome to lead and to be led where he didn’t want to go.

In the Church there are paintings on either side of the altar. On the right a painting of Christ crucified. On the left, one of St. Peter crucified upside down. Peter demanded to be crucified this way, because he didn’t feel worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus.



After the catacombs we drove to the Tivoli Gardens, located about 18 miles east of Rome in the foothills. They are world-renowned Renaissance gardens which are part of Villa d’Este, a 16th-century Renaissance villa built by Cardinal Ippolito II d’Este. The villa and gardens are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, showcasing the height of Renaissance Garden design and hydraulic engineering. They

feature over 50 large fountains and 250 water jets, most of which operate purely by gravity.



We then drove to a nearby town where we walked on ancient streets to a restaurant where we dined next to a Greek temple under a canopy of wisteria. We were pinching ourselves through the whole experience to make sure it all wasn't just a dream. It was quite a treat!



Day 8 Wednesday June 2 Rome

Rome High: 75°F, Low: 63°F, Sunrise: 5:36AM, Sunset: 8:39PM

- Our day in Rome began at the weekly 10:30am audience with Pope St. John Paul in St. Peter's Square. We arrived early to be sure we got good seats for the gaggle of Fraser, Deacon, Rock and Ternes families in attendance. The seats were arranged in corrals to separate and contain the crowds. We selected seats at the rear of one corral that I thought would be on the Popemobile route...we weren't disappointed. Pope St. John Paul II drove within 15' of us. I stood precariously on a flimsy chair to get 3 clear photos...all I could do was whisper, "Papa, Papa." We could see how feeble and fragile the Pope was. The Popemobile drove up a ramp to the altar and the Pope was lifted into his wheelchair and rolled into position. I wondered how he could preside at Mass not realizing how long he would be there. I remember 5 cardinals preached homilies in different languages. It was amazing that he lasted another 11 months until he died April 2, 2005.

After the long Mass we walked to the obelisk in St. Peter's Square to meet the rest of the family and friends. The Vatican Obelisk is an ancient Egyptian monument, standing at the center of St. Peter's Square as a symbol of historical continuity and Christian triumph. The obelisk originally came from Heliopolis, Egypt, and was carved from red granite over 3,000 years ago, likely during the reign of Pharaohs such as Seti I or Amenhotep II, serving as a tribute to the sun god Ra. It was transported to Alexandria by Roman authorities and later brought to Rome by Emperor Caligula in 37 AD to adorn the Circus of Nero, a chariot racing stadium where early Christian martyrs, including Saint Peter, were said to have been executed.

The obelisk is approximately 83 feet tall, and with its base and the bronze cross added during its Christian consecration, it reaches nearly 135 feet in height. The base is square, measuring about 13 feet per side, and weighs around 330–372 tons. Originally devoid of hieroglyphs, it now bears a Christian cross at its apex, which contains a relic of the True Cross, symbolizing the triumph of Christianity over paganism

In 1586, Pope Sixtus V ordered the obelisk to be moved to the center of the newly designed St. Peter's Square. Architect Domenico Fontana oversaw the monumental task, employing over 900 men, 75 horses, cranes, and pulleys to transport the obelisk 260 meters in a single day. Before its erection, the Pope performed a solemn exorcism, blessing the obelisk and placing the cross atop it, transforming it from a pagan monument into a Christian symbol,

The obelisk serves as the central focal point of St. Peter's Square, designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the 17th century. Its position aligns with the square's elliptical layout, radiating cobblestone and travertine marble lines that emphasize the obelisk as the spiritual and visual center. It also functions as a gnomon, casting shadows on a solar meridian line to mark the sun's position. Beyond its architectural role, the obelisk stands as a living testament to the continuity of human history, bridging ancient Egyptian civilization, Roman imperial power, and Christian faith

- After lunch “we” toured the Vatican Museums and visited the Sistine Chapel

As we entered the Museum entrance there were a long flight of steps leading up to the second floor. Museums entrance and straight ahead there was what looked like a gallery of artifacts which I assumed would be a short visit. I told Pat to go ahead taking time with her mom up the steps...I would meet them at the top in a few minutes. Well, the tour through the gallery took 30 minutes and by the time I got to the top of the stairs, Pat and her mom were nowhere in sight!

I proceed quickly through the museum galleries searching for Pat and her mom. I may have seen these areas as I quickly traversed the corridors and halls:

- The Pinacoteca is a collection of 460 paintings, displayed across 18 rooms
- The Gallery of Maps is one of the most fascinating spaces within the Vatican Museums, this long gallery features topographical maps of Italy's regions painted on the side walls.
- The Pio Clementino Museum displays classical Greek sculptures in 12 rooms.
- The Raphael Rooms: Raphael, another great Renaissance artist was commissioned to paint the rooms of Julius II. He began the work in 1508 and continued until his death in 1520, after which his pupils carried on for four more years.
- Bramante's Staircase: At the end of the tour, as you exit the Museums, you'll find a spectacular spiral staircase called Bramante's Staircase. The original staircase was designed in 1512.
- The Sistine Chapel: Finally, the most visited and anticipated point of the Vatican Museums tour: Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.

Panicking, when I finally got to the Sistine chapel I had yet to find Pat and her mom! I quickly discovered a return path through long corridors back to the Museums entrance...I ran back and started my second tour through the Museums!

My second tour, however, was no more successful than the first....but then, near the end, I somehow did find them. As I recall we really didn't know how I could have missed them on my first tour. Needless to say, I was exhausted!



The Vatican Museums are located within Vatican City next to St. Peter's and are among the most visited art museums in the world. Founded in the early 16th century by Pope Julius II, the museums house an extensive collection of art and historical artifacts, including approximately 70,000 works, of which about 20,000 are on display. The museums feature a diverse range of collections, including:

- Renaissance Art: The museums are renowned for their masterpieces, including works by Michelangelo, Raphael, and Botticelli. The Sistine Chapel, famous for its ceiling painted by Michelangelo, is a key highlight and the last room visited in the museum
- Ancient Sculptures: The collection includes significant ancient sculptures, such as the Laocoön and His Sons, which sparked the creation of the museums when it was discovered in 1506
- Raphael Rooms: A series of rooms decorated by Raphael, showcasing his artistic genius and the humanist culture of the Renaissance.



The Sistine Chapel is a Renaissance masterpiece in Vatican City, renowned for its frescoes by Michelangelo and other Renaissance artists, serving both religious and papal ceremonial functions. It's located in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City, was built between 1473 and 1481 under Pope Sixtus IV, from whom it takes its name. Originally called the Cappella Magna, it replaced an earlier chapel and was consecrated on 15 August 1483, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Its dimensions follow the biblical measurements of Solomon's Temple, emphasizing its symbolic and spiritual significance

The chapel is a simple brick building with a barrel-vaulted ceiling and six arched windows along each side wall. While the exterior is unadorned, the interior is richly decorated with frescoes and marble elements, including a marble screen, choir stalls, and the papal coat of arms. The chapel's

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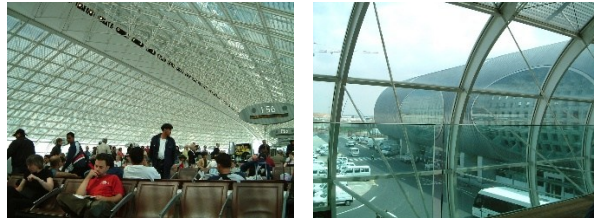
layout and proportions have made it central to Vatican ceremonial life, including papal conclaves for electing new popes.



A bunch of us had dinner on our final night at a restaurant on Via Veneto. We had the time of our lives...with our family, babies and GG!

Thank you Sonia and Christopher for bringing us to Rome for an unforgettable adventure!

Ah, La Dolce Vita!



Day 9 Thursday June 3 Rome – Paris – Boston – Atlanta

Rome High: 75°F, Low: 60°F, Sunrise: 5:36AM, Sunset: 8:40PM

Atlanta High: 81°F, Low: 61°F, Sunrise: 6:27AM, Sunset: 8:44PM

- 9:00am Departed the apartment for FCO
 1. LV Rome FCO, Air France 1505 12:00pm
 - ARR Paris GDC, 2:10pm
 2. LV Paris GDC, Delta 8258 3:55pm
 - ARR Boston BOS, 5:45pm
 3. LV Boston BOS, Delta 1207 7:55pm
 - ARR Atlanta ATL, 10:33pm (dur 13 hr 30min) (5,500 miles)
- Arrived bone-tired at home in Seven Oaks, Alpharetta on Friday around 1:00am

Home again, home again, jiggety jig!

Attachment A

Homily

May 29, 2004

At the Marriage of Sonia and Christopher Fraser

First Reading: Song of Songs 2:2-6

As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among women. As an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my lover among men. I delight to rest in his shadow, and his fruit is sweet to my mouth. He brings me into the banquet hall and his emblem over me is love. Strengthen me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left hand is under my head and his right arm embraces me.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:2-8a

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Gospel Mark 10:6-9

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother (and be joined to his wife), and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

Sonia and Christopher, it has been some time since you have thought of just yourself without the other. You have already been bonded into one being. You are soul mates fused together. The Gospel reading calls you to be married in a special way...in the ancient male-dominated society, the woman was to leave her parents home to join her husband, but the Gospel says just the opposite...the man left his father and mother to be with his wife...you see, if necessary, we are to give up every privilege to be joined to our soul mates...that's what it means to be married in the Grace and love of God. You will come to a deep understanding of today's Gospel: "*So they are no longer two but one flesh.*"

You are surrounded here today by family and special friends. We didn't just come as spectators though; we came to pray with you, to bless you and to witness the Grace of God in this holy union. We support you, today and will in years to come. And after you declare your vows before us, the Church, we will all respond in a rousing AMEN! Let it be so.

Last weekend I had the opportunity to speak with a wise old woman. She is the mother of your uncle Joe Deacon. I told Mrs. Deacon that I would share with you what she told me. She mentioned the many fortunate times in her life that she used to consider were because of good luck. But, now she realizes that these times and in fact every day when somebody touches her, it's with the Grace and love of God. We come to realize this in the common experiences of life...like when you were first dating and Sonia made

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sure you went to Easter Sunday Mass, or the look on your mother's face when you popped off your hat to show us your bright green Christmas hair, or at more extraordinary times like when family and friends were invited to Rome to witness wedding vows in an incredibly beautiful church. We have never seen God and yet the reality of the Scriptures you chose for this celebration is that God loves us so much He dwells in us, so we love each other during both the common and extraordinary events of our lives...and *"that love never fails."*

Sonia and Christopher we also know it will not always be easy be the lovers who delight each other that we heard about in the first reading, especially when the times ahead pose difficult challenges with illness, or anger, or loss of a loved one, or the hundred things that will try to sweep your love away. You will give unconditional love in many forms in the years ahead, as well as receive the miracle of love in many ways...be patient, and kind, and unselfish, and endure all things...remember that love flows to you from the Grace of God.

So in Good times and in bad, always love each other and remember that all of us will be there with His Grace and love when you need us. We are honored to be here today.

All God's Blessings, The Dad Fraser



Crucifixion 2 by William Congdon