



ROME PILGRIMAGE FOR THE HOLY YEAR 19th to 24th JUNE 2025



Sant Anselmo, International Benedictine College.
Image © Mark D. Leahy

A small group of Oblates, Tina, Tim, Andrew, Mark, Anthony and his wife Gabrielle, took part in this Holy Year pilgrimage to Rome. We were privileged to be able to stay at Sant Anselmo, the International Benedictine College on the Aventine. Sant Anselmo is where the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation lives; it is also a college for Benedictine monks from all parts of the world. Our Father David teaches there and is the Choir Master. We participated in Lauds and Mass at 6.20 in the morning and Vespers at 7.15 in the evening. After breakfast we gathered for lectio, reflecting and praying

the gospel passage of the day.

Our days were action packed with visits to the four major basilicas, Saints Peter, Mary Major, John Lateran and Paul. All four basilicas are very different. On our first afternoon we stayed on the Aventine hill and walked to the beautiful church of Santa Sabina which is run by the Dominicans and is where the Master of the Dominicans lives. We remembered Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe. Close by is the church of San Alessio, very much in demand for weddings. Piazza Cavalieri di Malta where the entrance to Sant Anselmo is situated has the entrance to gardens of the Knights of Malta. There are always queues in front of the closed doors as tourists look through the key hole for the view of the dome of St Peter's with yew trees on either side of the path.

On our first full day we visited the church of San Clemente not far from the Colosseum. We saw the top church with its magnificent apse and mosaics.

Under this basilica, there are two other churches from the first century. Our afternoon was the highpoint of our pilgrimage, our visit to St Peter's. I was able to arrange a special visit that meant we avoided long queues through security and the Holy Door. We were met in the Vatican State by a friend of a cousin and Fra Agnello, the Parish Priest of St Peter's. We saw the Sacristy and entered the basilica in the area beyond the High Altar, which was closed to visitors. We were able to appreciate the magnificent Bernini baldacchino over the High Altar and the two monuments of Popes Paul III and Urban VIII, as well as

the large statues of four doctors of the Church - east and west - Saints Ambrose, Athanasius, John Chrysostom and Augustine. Fra Agnello acted as our guide with Alessandra; they took us through the Holy Door.



The Upper Basilica of St. Clement. Image © Mark D. Leahy



St. Peter's Baldachin over the High Altar, basilica St. Peter. Image © Mark D. Leahy



Beyond the High Altar, basilica St. Peter. Image © Mark D. Leahy

On Saturday we visited the basilicas of Saint Mary Major and St Paul's. As expected, there were many pilgrims in Saint Mary Major's with a queue leading from the Holy Door to the tomb of Pope Francis.



Pope Francis' tomb, basilica St. Mary Major. Image © Mark D. Leahy



Salus Populi Romani icon, basilica St. Mary Major. Image © Mark D. Leahy

This church was of great importance for Pope Francis. Before setting off to visit another country and on return, he always went there and spent time in prayer before the *Salus Populi Romani* icon. We saw the beautiful baptistery designed by the architect Flaminio Ponzio in 1605. The baptistery was originally the Chapel of the Winter, where the canons celebrated the Divine Office in winter.



Basilica St. Paul Outside the Walls. Image © Mark D. Leahy

We reached St Paul Outside the Walls with no difficulty, travelling on the metro. There were few pilgrims and no queues but not long after our arrival there were ordinations to the priesthood and the diaconate. It is a vast church with five aisles. Attached to the church is the cloister, a place of great peace and simplicity. There is a small community of Benedictine monks who are responsible for running the Basilica.

On Sunday some of us attended the Angelus in St Peter's Square. This was our only encounter with Pope Leo, as our visit did not coincide with a Papal Audience. A few of the energetic oblates walked to the Spanish Steps and the Church of Santa Trinita dei Monti.

Monday morning was spent visiting the Venerable English College. We were fortunate in meeting a young seminarian from the Portsmouth Diocese, Ryan, known to Tina. He was generous with his time and showed us round the College, giving a detailed history of the place. In the afternoon some of us found our way to St John Lateran's Basilica, the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Rome. We were also able to visit the Baptistery.



Basilica St. John Lateran – cathedral church of the Diocese of Rome. Image © Mark D. Leahy

We went out for our last evening to an Osteria in the Testaccio. Fr Benoit, our attentive and welcoming guest master, joined us.

On Tuesday morning we found our way to the airport and our return flight to Bristol Airport and home. It was good to spend time together as oblates in the Eternal City. We were fortunate to have been able to stay at Sant Anselmo College, participating in the life of prayer. My thanks to my fellow pilgrims for their friendship during our pilgrimage. Special thanks to Tina who arranged the stay at Sant Anselmo. I conclude with a verse from chapter 72 of the Rule: *Thus the pure love of one another as belonging to one another should be their ideal.* (RB 72 v. 8)

Fr James Hood
Oblate Master