



TROUBADOUR

I am the Troubadour (Herald) of the Great King

*Parish of St Francis Xavier-St Clare
Greater Box Hill*

NEWSLETTER

Italian
Pilgrimage
2025

Departure – Melbourne Airport

Pilgrims from the East and the West arrived at Melbourne Airport on Tuesday evening 6th May 2025. We had all answered the call made last year by Fr. Tony Kerin, pictured below, to join him in this Jubilee year in Italy. Pilgrims came from Western Australia, Queensland, Canberra, New South Wales and various suburbs in and around Melbourne as well as a contingent from Greater Box Hill Parish.



Emirates EK 407 left Melbourne Airport at 9.15pm on the first leg of a long flight to Dubai, first stop on the way to Italy.

After leaving Dubai our flight landed at Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport on Wednesday 7th May

at 1.15pm Rome time and after collecting our baggage, we boarded our coach for a short tour around Rome before finally arriving at Casa La Salle where we spent 3 nights.

Casa La Salle is operated by the Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane and has spacious grounds with ample open-air spaces and was very welcoming.

Thursday 8th May

After breakfast, we journeyed to St. Peter's Basilica and Fr. Tony led us in prayer as we walked towards the Basilica and the Holy Doors. Inside there was time to take in all the art, some pilgrims went to confession and we later attended Mass in the Basilica. Fr. Tony concelebrated with a priest from Boston and Frances, who reads at St. Francis Xavier's on Saturdays, was asked to be the Reader for the Mass. A very special moment for her.



St. Peter's Basilica

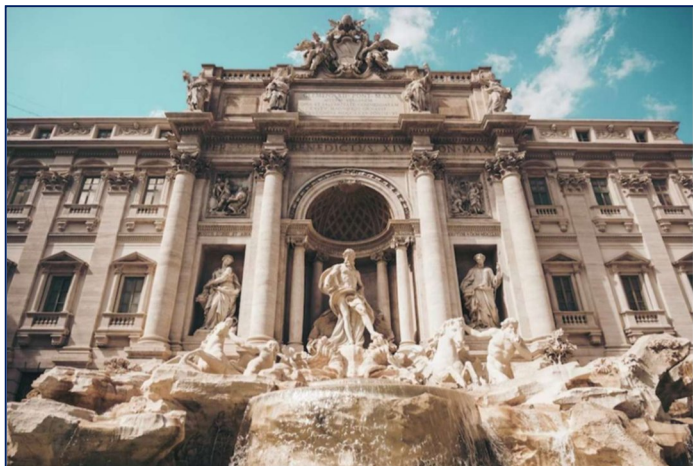


Pilgrims preparing to walk to St. Peter's



Pilgrims after Mass

Our Pilgrim group then visited **La Fontana di Trevi**, so named because three roads used to converge there, see below.



Nestled in the heart of Rome, construction of the fountain began in 1732 and is the city's largest fountain, a true masterpiece of Baroque art and architecture. The fountain is mostly built from travertine stone and about 2,824,800 cubic feet of water spills from the fountain daily. Each year millions of Euro is collected which the city dispenses to charity.

Our next stop was **The Pantheon**, which means 'honour all Gods' in Greek and is one of the best preserved Ancient Roman monuments, surviving barbarian raids which destroyed most other Roman buildings. Its massive dome measures about 43 metres in diameter and is 21 metres tall. Raphael, the Italian painter and architect of the High Renaissance, chose The Pantheon as his place of eternal rest.



We moved on to **The Piazza Navona** which was built on the site of the 1st century Stadium of Domitian; it is an elongated oval shape. Ancient Romans went there to watch games and it was known as 'Circus Agonalis'. In the 17th century it became a showcase for Baroque work by Bernini

and Borromini and other Renaissance artists. The Fountain of Four Rivers stands in front of the Church of *Sant' Agnese in Agone*, below.



Last place of interest before pilgrims stopped for lunch were the **Spanish Steps**. Not always in flower but May will usually find the steps ablaze with azaleas, pictured below.



After a break for lunch, our last stop for the day was a visit to the Vatican Museum, home to over 70,000 works of art, artefacts, paintings, and thousands of statues some of which didn't have arms, some didn't have bodies but all were magnificent. The Bath of Nero is pictured below.



Moving along we entered corridors and rooms completely covered with paintings. In the *Stanza*

della Segnatura, which had been painted by Raphael, were three frescoes, the most famous being the *Scuola di Atene* or School of Athens pictured below.



Sightseeing over we went back to Casa la Salle for dinner with old friends and new, below.



Friday 9th May

Another full day ahead and after breakfast our first stop was ***Basilica di San Paolo Fuori le Mura*** or Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls one of Rome's four major papal basilicas, see below.



On the 28th June 2009, Pope Benedict XVI announced that a recent study confirmed that the body of Saint Paul is located under the papal

altar in the Basilica, see below.



The Assumption Altar in St. Paul's is decorated in a blue-green stone called malachite, a precious and rare stone. The Czar of Russia donated malachite stone to St. Paul's for the Assumption Altar, see below.



Much of what we saw at St Paul's is not original because fire destroyed huge parts of the walls both inside and outside in July 1823. Recreating the original was not possible so the new church is not an exact copy of the original structure.

After leaving St. Paul's the group visited the ***Catacombe San Callisto***, pictured below where unfortunately photos weren't allowed. Fr. Tony was able to celebrate Mass for the pilgrims in a small Chapel.



The **Basilica of St. John Lateran** beckoned and some time was spent looking at the statues of the Twelve Apostles, Sts. Peter and Jude are pictured below. The statues of the Apostles were executed in the early 1700's by the most important sculptors of the time who were given a sketch drawn by painter Carlo Maratta which they had to follow except Pierre Le Gros, a French sculptor who deviated from the standard sketches of Maratta with his sculpture of St. Thomas Aquinas.



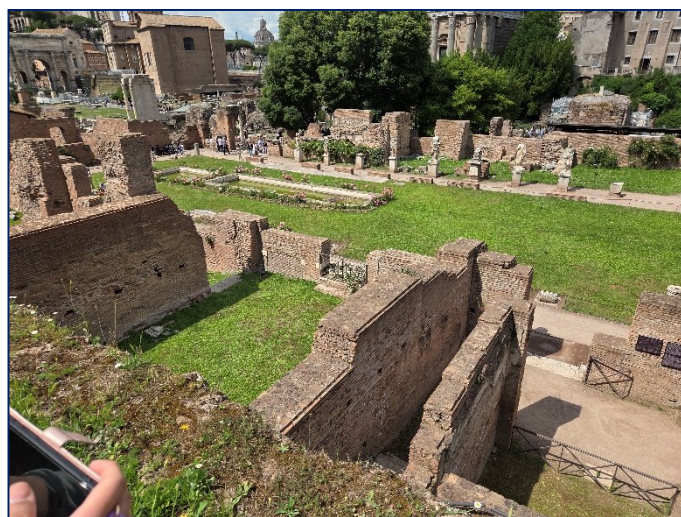
Pictured below is the altar in St. John Lateran.



The Basilica of St. John Lateran, below.



After a short break for lunch, which consisted of a picnic box provided by the Casa La Salle we spent the afternoon visiting the **Roman Forum and Palatin Hill**, Imperial Rome at its best. A magical afternoon spent taking in magnificent Roman Ruins, below, couldn't get any better.



Around the corner and across the road was the impressive **Colosseum**. It is the largest ancient Amphitheatre ever built and is still the largest standing amphitheatre in the world, despite its age. Its name comes from the Greek word *kolossos*, meaning giant and construction began under Emperor Vespasian in AD 72 and was

completed in AD 80, below.



The exterior walls, above and inside below, where gladiatorial contests, mock sea battles, executions, spectacles-including animal hunts and re-enactments of famous battles, were held.



Before we wound up our sightseeing for the day, we visited **The Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore** and it is here where we find the final resting place of Pope Francis, below. The Basilica is regarded as the first Marian sanctuary in the Western world and the mother of all sanctuaries and is in Italy, not the Vatican City. Riposa in Pace.



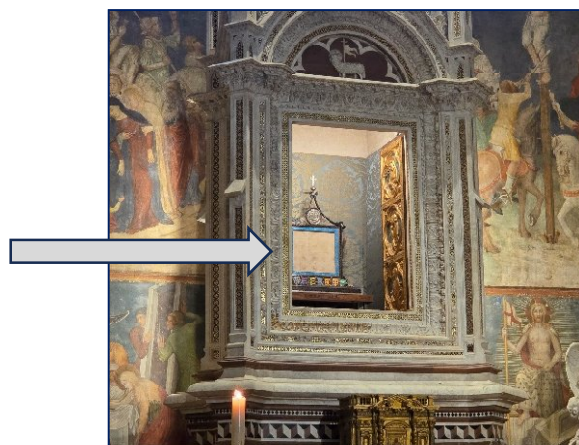
Saturday 10th May

After breakfast we checked out of The Casa La Salle, boarded our coach and settled down for a long drive to **Orvieto**, a hilltop town in the Province of Umbria about 126 km away.

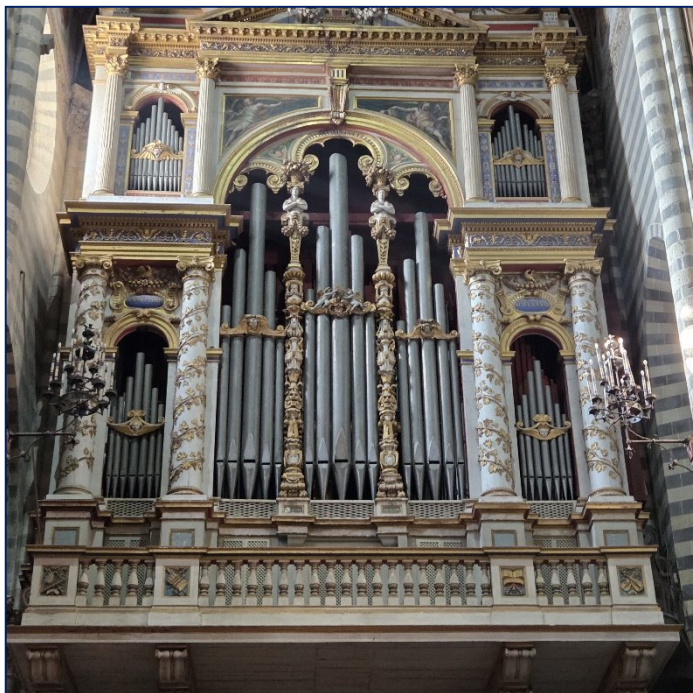
After lunch we met our guide, and although it was raining, began our tour of Orvieto. The highlight of our tour was the **The Duomo di Orvieto**, officially known **Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta**, below.



The Cattedrale is famous for the *Corporal of Orvieto*. A linen cloth stained with blood believed to be the blood of Christ which dripped from a consecrated host, below.



The Cathedral houses a large pipe organ containing 5,585 pipes, originally designed by Ippolito Scalza and Bernardino Benvenuti in the fifteenth century. It's located above the entrance of the *Chapel of the Corporal*, below.



Sunday 11th May

We drove to Cascia after breakfast to visit the ***Basilica of Santa Rita of Cascia*** in Umbria. The basilica was built in the early twentieth century to house the much visited relics of *St. Rita* who was canonized in 1900.



We used escalators and stairs to the Cathedral, and Fr. Tony celebrated Mass in a small chapel, left. Only stairs for pilgrims on the way down, but there was time for sightseeing, and we also stopped for lunch on the way.



The incorrupt body of St. Rita, above.

The basilica of Santa Rita, below.



Back on the coach and on to Assisi. Wonderful. Magnificent. Fantastic Assisi. After booking into the Hotel Domus Pacis we wandered over to ***Santa Maria degli Angeli*** and ***The Porziuncola***, the small chapel where St. Francis is said to have founded the *Franciscan Order*, below.



Here is the place where St. Francis is reported to have died, above.

The *Porziuncola*, where St. Francis founded the Franciscan Order is located inside the Basilica, below.



After visiting this wonderful cathedral of *Santa Maria degli Angeli* we wandered back to our hotel and afterwards walked to a local restaurant for a magnificent meal.

Monday 12th May

Today we had a full day of sightseeing in Assisi, starting at the *Basilica di Santa Chiara*, a major landmark dedicated to St. Clare of Assisi, founder of Poor Ladies (Poor Clares). The basilica is pictured below in the morning mist of Assisi.



On the top of the hill is located *Rocca Maggiore*, pictured top right, a grand castle dating back to the 12th century which dominated the city of Assisi for more than 800 years. The castle commands magnificent views of the valley

formed by the Chiascio River and its largest tributary, the Topino River.



The *Chiesa Nuova Church* was built in 1615 on the site of the presumed birthplace of St. Francis, the house of Pietro di Bernardone. The church was built in a Renaissance style with a high dome dominating the view, below.



A statue of the parents of St. Francis, Lady Pica and Pietro di Bernardone, a cloth merchant, left. His father was away when he was born and his mother baptised him Giovanni but Pietro changed the baby's name to

Francesco, above.

We also visited the tomb of *Blessed Carlo Acutis* which is located in the Basilica. We were not allowed to take photos, but here is his resting place, below. Riposa in Pace.



After lunch we proceeded on foot to the ***Basilica di San Francesco d'Assisi***, below.



The countryside from the basilica, below.



After an exhausting day we returned to our hotel for dinner.

Tuesday 13th May

After breakfast we left Assisi for Loreto, a short 138 km away. Upon arrival we commenced our half-day tour which included a visit to the ***Basilica della Santa Casa***.

The basilica is known for enshrining the house in which the Blessed Virgin Mary is believed to have lived. Legend claims the house was flown over by angels from Nazareth first to Croatia, then to Recanati (Province of Macerata) and finally to Loreto. Our guide told us a different story. During the crusades Christian people felt that the house was in danger from Muslims and so organised for the house to be removed; the rest is history.



Pilgrims waiting to enter Our Lady's house, above.

On the 10th of December 1920, Our Lady of Loreto was proclaimed the patroness of aviators by Pope Benedict XV which coincides with the celebration of the transportation of the house which also happened on the 10th of December.



One of the frescoes in the basilica shows airmen, astronauts etc, above.



The basilica in the background, above and the ceiling inside, below.



A view of the valley above the basilica and an aeroplane signifying the connection between Our Lady and aviation, below.



After a leisurely lunch we travelled to Siena to attend Mass at The ***Basilica of San Bernardino da Siena***, better known as the ***Basilica of L'Osservance*** from the ancient name of the Order of the Friars Minor to which it is entrusted.

Fr. Tony celebrating Mass, below.



St. John the Baptist, St. Francis, St. Peter and St. John the evangelist painted by Andrea di Bartolo in 1413, below.



The vestment of San Bernadino of Siena, is pictured below. He was canonised by Pope Nicholas V in 1450 and is referred to as 'the Apostle of Italy' for his efforts to revive the country's Catholicism during the 15th century.



We arrived in Siena late in the afternoon and after checking into our hotel walked to our restaurant for dinner where we had lovely home-made food over-looking the *Piazza del Campo* which is known for the famous Palio horse race. The photo below was taken at 8.45pm!



Wednesday 14th May

After breakfast we started our tour of Siena and our first stop was the basilica **Cateriniana di San Domenico**, also known as Basilica Cateriniana, one of the most important churches in Siena.

It is the seat of the Archbishop of Siena and was built in the 13th century and contains several relics of St. Catherine of Siena which are enclosed in a Renaissance Chapel built especially for the relics. Pilgrims walking to the Basilica, below.



We also visited **Duomo di Siena**, or the Siena Cathedral which boasts a rich history spanning several centuries. Construction began in 1196 and over the next 2½ centuries many improvements were made and in 1339 plans

were made to expand the cathedral, but the Black Death Plague halted this work leaving the 'new cathedral' incomplete and to this day, it remains unfinished. Pilgrims pictured below in front of the Duomo.



Ancient books in the *Biblioteca Piccolomini*, above and the altar, below.



After lunch we journeyed to San Gimignano, a small walled medieval hill town in the province of Siena known as the Town of Five Towers. It was here we visited the **Duomo de Santa Maria Assunta**, which sits on top of a hill overlooking the Tuscan countryside and served as an important relay point for pilgrims travelling to or

from Rome on the Via Francigena.



San Gimignano was named after St. Geminianus a fourth century deacon who became Bishop of Modena. He exhibited strength of character and unwavering faith necessary for a servant of Christ during tumultuous times. His devotion to the church, his persistent fight against heresy and his remarkable miracles continue to inspire Catholics worldwide.



There are more than two kilometres of walls surrounding San Gimignano with five gates which are the access points to the city, above. The walls are a prominent feature of the town and are a popular attraction for visitors.



A pretty alleyway, above.

View of the township, below.



Thursday 15th May

After breakfast we left Siena and headed to Florence, magical Florence. Our hotel was only a few metres from the Ponte Vecchio but no time to shop, yet. We were on our way to the ***Cathedral Santa Maria del Fiore*** or ***Florence Cathedral***. The cathedral was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio, the dome by Filippo Brunelleschi and the bell tower by Giotto.



Pilgrims checking out the cathedral, above and the bell tower, below.





The magnificent doors of the cathedral, above and listening to our guide, below.



After lunch we visited the **Santa Maria Novella Basilica**, above so called because it was built on the site of a 9th-century oratory of Santa Maria

delle Vigne. In 1221 a new church was built on the site designed by two Dominican friars, Fra Sisto Fiorentino and Fra Ristoro da Campi. Building began in the mid-13th century and lasted 80 years.



The Crucifix in the church is painted in tempera (usually glutinous material such as egg yolk) and gold on wood by Giotto di Bondone, commonly known as Giotto around 1290-95 and is one of his earliest known works, above.

A short walk took us to the **Basilica of Santa Croce**, (Basilica of the Holy Cross), a minor basilica and the principal Franciscan church of Florence, below.



-12- Small sculpture in the Basilica, above.

Many notable Italians are buried in the Basilica, Michelangelo, Dante, Galileo, Machiavelli and the composer Rossini to name only a few. Below is the tomb of Machiavelli.



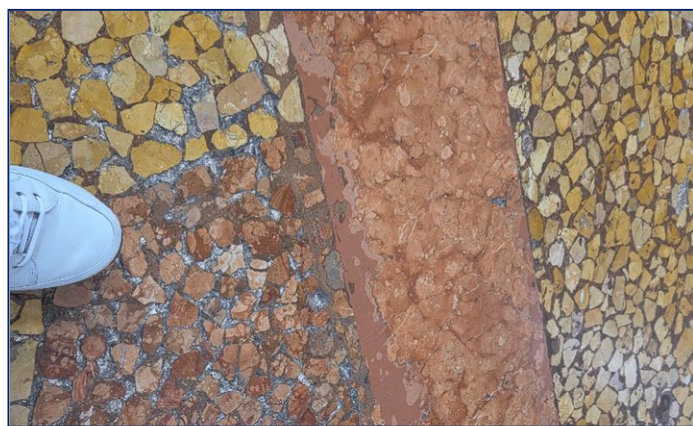
Fr. Tony celebrated Mass in Santa Croce after which we hurried back to our hotel in the rain, stopping only to do a little shopping on the Ponte Vecchio before going to dinner!

Friday 16th May

Off to the beach today! We left Firenze and drove to Ravenna on the east coast of Italy stopping on the way for sight-seeing in Bologna at the magnificent **San Petronio Basilica**, below. It is the sixth largest church in the world, 132 metres in length, 60m wide, and the vault reaches 45m inside and 51m in the façade. The basilica dominates Piazza Maggiore.

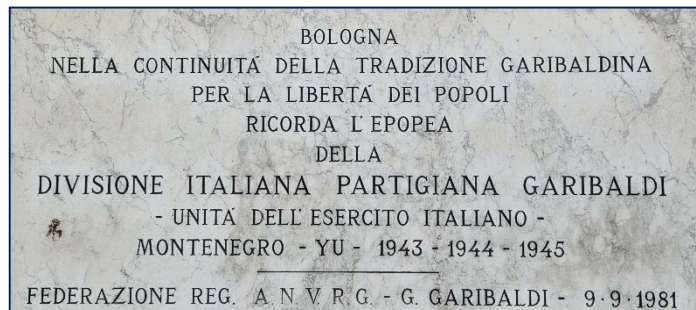


The altar in the distance surrounded by mighty columns, (above) and someone certainly earned their pay this day mosaicing, below.



We met the group in a piazza which has a very large statue of Neptune dominating the area.

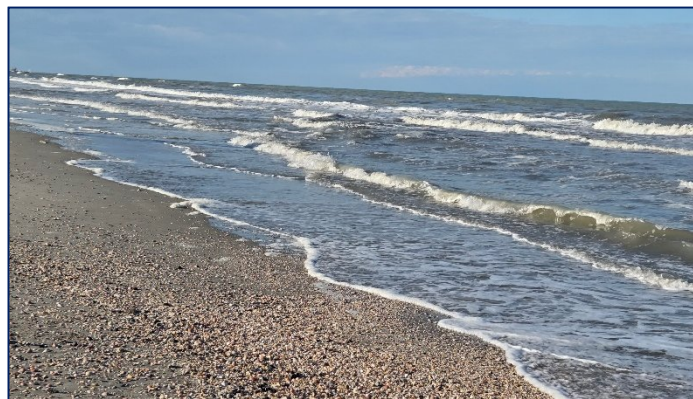
There are many references to Giuseppe Garibaldi in Italy, streets named after him and plaques like the one below which simply means '*Continuing the Garibaldi tradition for the freedom of the people*'. Garibaldi was involved in the unification (Risorgimento) of Italy in 1871 and is considered to be one of Italy's 'fathers of the fatherland'. Garibaldi passed away in June 1882.



A short walk to the **Parrocchia di San Benedetto** (Parishes of San Benedetto and San Carlo di Bologna) where Fr. Tony celebrated Mass, below.



After a short walk to our coach we drove to our hotel and had a leisurely walk along the beach after we checked in. Back to the hotel for dinner, and no, did not dip toes in the water!



Ravenna at night, below.



Saturday 17th May

Sightseeing in Ravenna this morning and first stop was the **Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo**, (below) which was erected by King Theodoric the Great as his palace chapel during the early part of the 6th century. The Arian church was originally dedicated to *Christ the Redeemer* but was later reconsecrated in 561 under the rule of emperor Justinian and dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours, an opponent of Arianism.





The Main altar above and mosaic images of saints, prophets and evangelists, each holding a book in either scroll or codex format, below.



The Tomb of Dante Alighieri is in Ravenna situated next to the to the *Basilica of San Francesco*. Inside the tomb is a 1483 relief by Pietro Lombardo and from the ceiling hangs an 18th century lamp, continually kept burning with olive oil from the Tuscan hills donated every September on the anniversary of Dante's death.



Our next stop was the *Basilica di San Vitale* below, which has been considered a minor

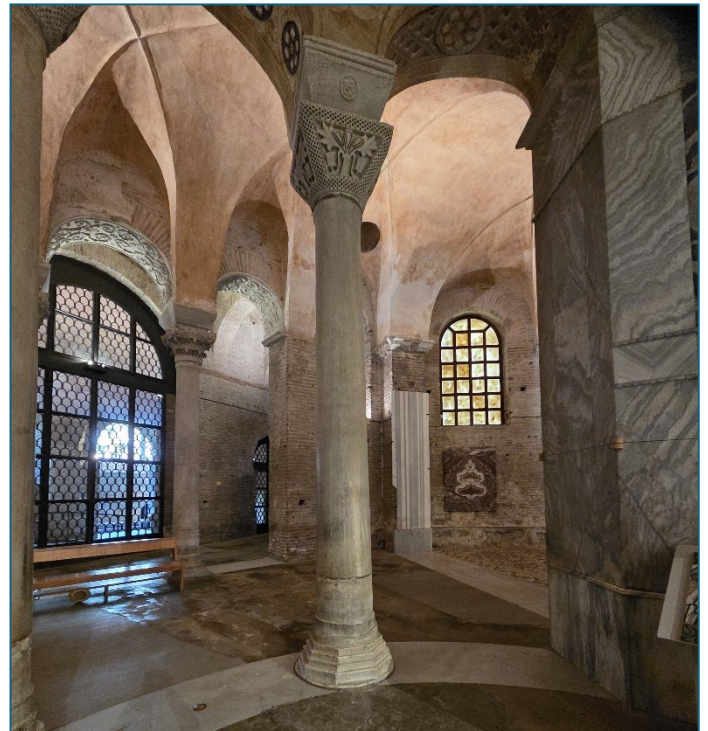


basilica since October 1960.

San Vitale is an octagonally shaped church and is renowned for its coloured religious mosaics. A section of the floor below.



Inside the basilica, below.



We walked to the *Church of Santa Maria Maggiore*, (below) which is situated very close to the Basilica di San Vitale and where Fr. Tony celebrated Mass.

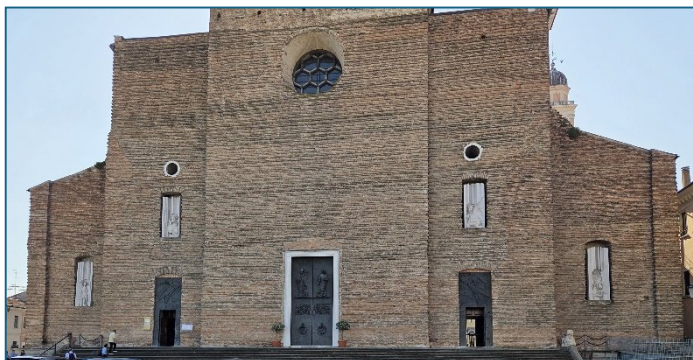


We left the Chiesa and continued to Padova for check in and dinner at the hotel, below.



Sunday 18th May

We started our tour of Padova after breakfast visiting the city centre and the **Abbey of Santa Giustina**, a 10th-century Benedictine Abbey dedicated to St. Justina of Padova, below.



The main altar of Santa Giustina, above.



Mass was being celebrated in the Abbey and Alpini were singing in the choir, above. The Alpini are a specialized mountain warfare infantry corps of the Italian Army, known for their combat prowess in the Alps during World War I and World War II. They are also known as 'Le Penne Nere' because of the black raven feather on their distinctive Cappello Alpino, Alpine Hat.



Oratory of Saint Prosdocius, above and mosaic flooring below.



We then walked to what is regarded as the second most important church of the Order of Franciscans, the **Basilica di Sant'Antonio di Padova** which is known as Il Santo by the locals

and it was here we attended Sunday Mass, below.



Construction of the basilica began around 1232, one year after the death of St. Antonio and was completed in 1310 with several structural modifications in the 14th and 15th century.



The courtyard at the basilica, above.



A Relic of St. Anthony, above. When he was exhumed in 1263 he had totally decomposed, except for, curiously, his tongue.



Waiting for Mass to begin, above and below.



The high altar is by Donatello, above.



A short stop for lunch then we drove to Milan. Unfortunately our driver was unable to park close to the ***Dominican Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie*** where we had a booking to see Leonardo da Vinci's *Cenacolo* (The Last Supper). We all had to sprint to make it in time.

During World War II, on the 15th August 1943, an allied aerial bombardment at night hit the church and the convent. Much of the refectory was destroyed, but some walls survived, including the

one that holds *The Last Supper* which had been sand-bagged in order to protect it. Some preservation works have been done to maintain it for the future. The lighting in the refectory did not really allow for a good clean photo, but below is the Last Supper at its best.



Pilgrims regrouped and back on the coach and our next stop was Milano and after checking in, gathered again for dinner in the hotel.

Monday 19th May

We started a half day tour of Milano after breakfast and slowly making our way to *The Duomo* we walked through the *Castello Sforzes* grounds. The clock tower is pictured, below, and the fountain.



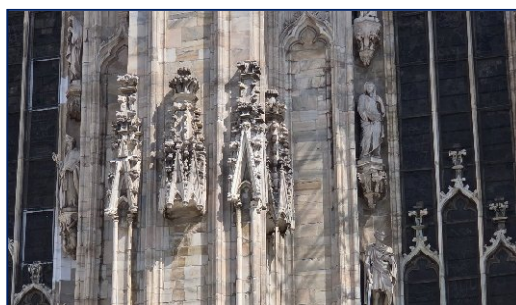
The ***Duomo di Milano*** is one of the largest cathedrals in the world and the largest in Italy. Construction began in 1386 and the building was completed in 1965!



Inside the Duomo, above and below.



Details of the walls outside, below.

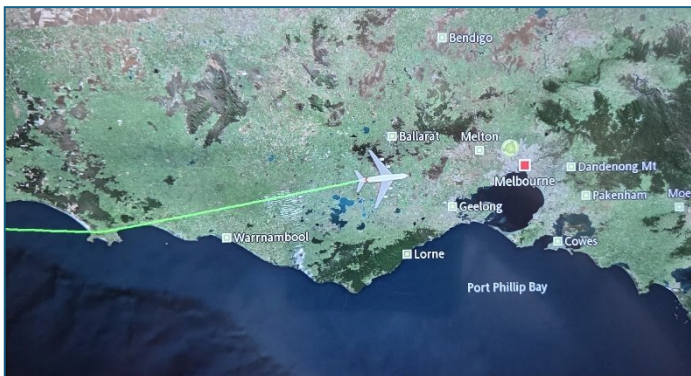
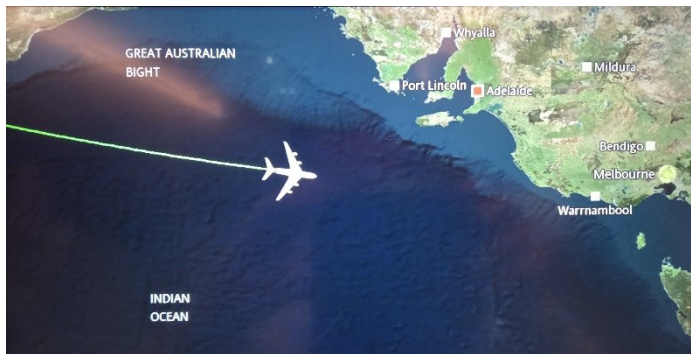


After leaving the Duomo we had time for lunch and also for a bit of shopping and a leisurely look around Milan before meeting the group and walking to our restaurant for our final dinner as a pilgrim group. Coach back to our hotel at about 10.00pm, all tired and exhausted after a very long day.

Tuesday 20th May

The final breakfast with our pilgrim friends this morning; some were returning to Australia today, some heading off to Spain, another to Malta and some to do more sightseeing in Milan.

The Aussie group boarded our coach and we drove to Milano's Malpensa Airport, which took just over an hour. The usual check-in procedures and before we knew it we were off to Dubai, then after a short 4 hours stop were on our way to Melbourne and home, arriving about 10.00pm Wednesday evening. The photos below track our descent to Melbourne Airport.



Where to next ?

