 Reading time: 87 min.

The first time Don Bosco went to Rome was in 1858, from February 18 to April 16, accompanied by the twenty-one-year-old cleric Michele Rua. Four years earlier, the Church had celebrated an extraordinary six-month Jubilee, called on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854). Don Bosco seized the opportunity of this great spiritual feast to publish the volume "The Jubilee and Devotional Practices for Visiting Churches".
During what would be his first of twenty visits to the Eternal City, Don Bosco behaved like a true Jubilee pilgrim, fervently dedicating himself to the visits and devotions planned, even participating in the solemn Easter rites officiated by the Pope. It was an intense experience that he did not keep to himself but shared with his young people with the enthusiasm and educational passion that characterised him.
In giving a detailed description of his journey, the stages, and the sacred places, Don Bosco had a clear apostolic and educational intent: to make those who listened to or read him relive the same profound experience of faith, transmitting to them love for the Church and for the Christian tradition.
We now invite you, readers, to spiritually join Don Bosco, ideally retracing the paths of Christian Rome, to let yourselves be captivated by his zeal and enthusiasm and, together, renew your faith.

To Genoa by train
The departure for Rome was set for the 18th of February 1858. That night, almost a foot of snow fell on top of the two that already covered the ground. At half past eight, while it was still snowing, with the emotions of a father leaving his children, I said goodbye to the young people to begin my journey to Rome. Although we were somewhat in a hurry to arrive on time for the train, we lingered a bit longer to write up a will. I did not want to leave any pending matters at the Oratory in case Providence wanted to give us up to the fish of the Mediterranean […] Then we hurried to the train station and, together with Fr. Mentasti […], we left by train at ten in the morning.
An unpleasant incident occurred here: the carriages were almost full, so I had to leave Rua and Fr. Mentasti in one compartment and find a place in another […]

The Jewish boy
I happened to be near a ten-year-old boy. Noticing his simple appearance and kind face, I started talking to him and […] I realised he was Jewish. The father, who was

sitting next to him, assured me that his son was in the fourth grade, but his education seemed to me to be second grade at the most. However, he was quick-witted. The father was pleased that I questioned him. Indeed, he invited me to have him talk about the Bible. So, I began to ask him about the creation of the world and man, about the Garden of Eden, about the fall of the ancestors. He answered quite well, but I was amazed when I realised that he had no idea of original sin and the promise of a Redeemer.
– Isn't there the promise of God to Adam when He cast him out of Paradise in your Bible?
– No, you tell me, he replied.
– Right away. God said to the serpent: since you have deceived the woman, you will be cursed among all animals, and One, who will be born of a woman, will crush your head.
– Who is this One being spoken of?
– He is the Saviour who would free mankind from the slavery of the devil.
– When will he come?
– He has already come, and He is the One we call... Here the father interrupted us, saying:
– We do not study these things because they do not concern our law.
– You would do well to study them, because they are in the books of Moses and the prophets whom you believe.
– Alright, said the other, I will think about it. Now ask him something about arithmetic.
Seeing that he did not want me to talk to him about religion, we conversed about pleasant things, so that the father, the son, and even the other travellers began to enjoy themselves and laugh heartily. At the Asti station, the boy had to get off, but he couldn't bring himself to leave me. He had tears in his eyes, held my hand, and, moved, could only say to me:
– My name is Priest Leone of Moncalvo; remember me. When I come to Turin, I hope to be able to visit you. The father, to ease the emotion, said that he had searched for the "**History of Italy**" [written by me] in Turin. Not having found it, he asked me to send him a copy. I promised to send the one printed especially for the youth, then I also got off to look for my companions to see if there was room in their compartment. I found Rua, whose jaws were tired from yawning, as he had been very bored from Turin to Asti, not knowing with whom to strike up a conversation: his travel companions spoke only of dances, theatre, and other trivial matters […]

Towards Genoa

We arrived at the Apennines. They rose before us, very high and steep. Since the train was travelling at high speed, we had the impression we were going to crash against the rocks, until suddenly it became dark in the train. We had entered the tunnels. These are “holes” that, passing under the mountains, save several tens of miles […] Without tunnels, it would be impossible to cross them, and since there are many mountains, there are several tunnels. One of them is as long as the distance between Turin and Moncalieri. Here the train remained in the dark for eight minutes: the time necessary to travel the stretch of the tunnel.

We were surprised to find that the snow decreased as we approached the Riviera of Genoa. However, what truly amazed us was when we saw the countryside without a trace of white, the greenish shores, the gardens full of colours, the blooming almond trees, and the peach trees with buds ready to open to the sun! Then, comparing Turin and Genoa, we said that in this season, Genoa is spring and Turin the harshest winter.

The two mountaineers

I forgot to mention two mountaineers who got into our compartment at the Busalla station. One was pale and sickly to the point of pity, while the other had a healthy and lively appearance, and although he was nearly seventy, he showed the vigour of a twenty-five-year-old. He wore short trousers and his gaiters were almost unbuttoned, so much so that he showed his bare legs up to the knee, whipped by the cold. He was in a shirt with just a sweater and a coarse cloth jacket thrown over his shoulders. After getting him to talk about various topics, I said to him:
– *Why don’t you adjust these clothes to protect yourselves from the cold?* He replied:
– *You see, dear sir, we are mountaineers, and we are used to the wind, rain, snow, and ice. We hardly even notice the winter season. Our boys walk barefoot in the snow. In fact, they have fun without minding the cold.* From this, I understood that man lives by habits, and the body is capable of enduring either cold or heat depending on the circumstances, and those who want to shield themselves from every little discomfort, risk weakening their condition instead of strengthening it.

The Genoese stop

So, here is Genoa, here is the sea! Rua is restless to see it, stretching his neck. He notices a ship here, and there some boats, further down the lantern which is a very tall lighthouse. In the meantime, we arrive at the station and get off the train. Abbot Montebruno’s brother-in-law was waiting for us with some young people, and as

soon as we got on the ground, they welcomed us joyfully. Carrying our luggage, they took us to the work of the *Artigianelli*, which is a house similar to our Oratory. The conversation was brief since we were all very hungry. It was half-past three in the afternoon, and I had only had a cup of coffee. At the table, it seemed that nothing could satisfy us, yet by force of swallowing, the sack filled up.
Right after, we visited the house: schools, dormitories, workshops. It seemed to me like the Oratory of ten years ago. There were twenty boarders, while another twenty, although eating and working here, slept elsewhere. What was their food? For lunch, a good plate of soup, then… nothing else. For dinner, a small loaf that was eaten standing up, then off to bed!
At the end, we went out for a walk in the city which, to be honest, was not very attractive, although it had magnificent palaces and large shops. The streets were narrow, winding, and steep. But the most annoying thing was a bothersome wind that, blowing almost without interruption, took away the pleasure of admiring anything, even what was most beautiful […]

In short, our expectations in Genoa were not met. As if that were not enough, the headwinds prevented the docking of the ship on which we were to embark, so, much to our disappointment, we had to wait until the next day […] In the morning, I said Mass in the church of the Dominican Fathers at the altar of **Blessed Sebastiano Maggi**, a friar who lived about three hundred years ago. His body is a continued miracle, as it remains whole, flexible, and with a colour that makes you think he died just a few days ago […] Then we went to validate, that is, sign our passports. The papal consul welcomed us very courteously […] He also tried to get us a discount on the boat, but it was not possible.

To Civitavecchia by sea. Boarding
At six-thirty in the evening, before heading to the steamboat called Aventino, we said goodbye to several clergy, who had come from the *Artigianelli* to wish us a good trip. Even the boys, attracted by the noble words, but above all by some extra courses at that day’s lunch, had also become our friends and seemed to feel sorry to see us leave. Several of them accompanied us to the sea, then, nimbly jumping onto a small boat, wanted to escort us to the steamboat. The wind was very strong: unaccustomed to traveling by sea, with every movement of the boat, we feared capsizing and sinking, and our escorts laughed heartily. After twenty minutes, we finally arrived at the ship.

At first glance, it seemed to us like a palace surrounded by waves. We boarded, and

after bringing our luggage to a rather spacious accommodation, we sat down to rest and think. Each of us felt particular sensations that we did not know how to express. Rua observed everything and everyone in silence. Then the first hitch occurred: having arrived at lunchtime, we did not go to eat right away. When we did request it, everything was finished. Rua had to have dinner with an apple, a small loaf, and a glass of Bordeaux wine, while I settled for a piece of bread and a bit of that excellent wine. It is worth noting that when traveling by ship, meals are included in the ticket, so whether you eat or not, you pay all the same.

Afterwards, we went up on deck to see what this “Aventino” was like. We learned that ships are named after the most famous places of the areas they head to. One is called Vatican, another Quirinal, another Aventino, like ours, to remember the famous seven hills of Rome. This ship of ours departs from Marseille, touches Genoa, Livorno, Civitavecchia, then continues to Naples, Messina, and Malta. On the way back, it repeats the same route back to Marseille. It is also called a *postal boat* because it carries letters, packages, etc. Regardless of whether the weather is good or bad, it departs anyway.

Seasickness

They had assigned us a bunk, which is a kind of shelf where passengers lie down on a mattress in each compartment. At ten o’clock, the anchors were raised, and the boat, propelled by steam and favourable winds, began to speed towards Livorno. When we were at sea, I was overcome by seasickness that tormented me for two days. This discomfort consists of frequent vomiting, and when there is nothing left to expel, the vomiting becomes more violent, so much so that the person becomes so exhausted that they refuse any food. The only thing that can provide some relief is to lie down and, when the vomiting allows it, to stay with the body fully stretched out.

Livorno

The night of February 20 was bad. We were not in danger from the rough sea, but seasickness had prostrated me so much that I could not lie down or stand. I threw myself down from the bunk and went to see if Rua was dead or alive. However, he only suffered a bit of fatigue, nothing else. He immediately got up and made himself available to alleviate my discomfort during the crossing. When God willed, we arrived at the port of Livorno. By port, we mean a bay of the sea sheltered from the fury of the winds by natural barriers or man-made bastions. Here ships are safe from all danger. Here they unload their goods and load others for different

destinations. Here they do their restocking. Passengers who wish can also go ashore for a stroll in the city as long as they return on time […]

Although I wanted to go ashore to visit the city, say Mass, and greet some friends, I could not do so. In fact, I was forced to return to my bunk and stay there quietly, without food. A waiter named Charles looked at me with pity and every now and then came close to offer me his services. Seeing him so kind and courteous, I began to converse with him, and among other things, I asked him if he was not afraid of being ridiculed for assisting a priest under the gaze of so many people.
– *No,* he told me in French, *as you see, no one is amazed, on the contrary, everyone looks at you kindly, showing a desire to help you. Moreover, my mother taught me to have great respect for priests to earn the blessing of the Lord*. Charles then went to call a doctor: every ship has its doctor and the main remedies for any need. The doctor came, and his pleasant manners lifted my spirits somewhat.
– *Do you understand French?* He asked me. I replied:
– I understand all the languages of the world, even those that are not written, even the language of the deaf-mutes. I joked to wake myself from the drowsiness that had taken hold of me. He understood and began to laugh.
– *Peut être, perhaps!* he said while examining me. In the end, he announced that the seasickness had been associated by a fever and that a cup of tea would do me good. I thanked him and asked for his name.
– *My name, he said, is Jobert from Marseille, doctor of medicine and surgery.* Charles, attentive to the doctor's orders, quickly prepared a cup of tea for me, then shortly after another, then another again. And it did me good, so much so that I managed to fall asleep.
At five o'clock [in the afternoon], the boat raised its anchor. When we were back at sea, I had even more violent bouts of nausea, remaining agitated for about four hours, then given my exhaustion – I had nothing left in my stomach – and assisted by the rolling of the ship, I fell asleep and rested peacefully until we arrived in Civitavecchia.

Paying, paying, paying
The night's rest restored my strength. Although exhausted from the long fast, I got up and prepared my luggage. We were about to disembark when we were informed of a debt we did not know we had incurred. Coffee was not included with the meals but had to be paid separately, and we, who had taken four cups, paid an extra two francs, that is, fifty cents per cup.
Once out passports had been stamped, the captain handed us the disembarkation

permit. This is when the theory of tips kicked in: one franc each for the boatmen, half a franc for the luggage (which we carried), half a franc for customs, half a franc for whoever invited us into a carriage, half for the porter who arranged the luggage, two francs for the visa on the passport, one and a half francs for the papal consul. As soon as we opened our mouths, we had to pay. With the addition that, since the name and value of the coins varied, we had to trust those who exchanged them for us […] At customs, they respected a package addressed to Cardinal Antonelli with the papal seal, in which we had placed the most important things […]

After the procedures were completed, I went to the barber to shave off a ten-day beard. Everything went well, but in the shop, I could not take my eyes off two horns on a small table. They were about a meter long and adorned with shiny rings and ribbons. I thought they were destined for some special use, but they told me they were from a heifer, which we call ox, placed there only for decoration […]

Towards Rome by carriage

Meanwhile, Don Mentasti was in a fury because he did not see us arrive, while the carriage was already waiting for us. We started to run to arrive on time. Once in the carriage, we set off for Rome. The distance to cover was 47 Italian miles, which corresponds to 36 Piedmontese miles, and the road was very beautiful. We had taken a seat in the coupe from where we could contemplate the green meadows and flowering hedges. A curiosity amused us quite a bit. We noticed that everything was in threes: the horses of our carriage were harnessed in threes. We encountered patrols of soldiers going in threes. Even some farmers walked in threes, as did some cows and donkeys grazing in threes. We laughed at these strange coincidences […]

A pause for the horses

At Palo, the coachman granted the travellers an hour of freedom to have the time to refresh the horses. We used it to run to the nearby inn to satisfy our hunger. The affairs had almost made us forget to eat. Since noon on Friday, I had only had a cup of coffee with milk. We gathered around the sandwiches and ate, or rather, devoured everything. Upon seeing the waiter all exhausted and pale, I asked him what was wrong.

– *I have a fever that has been afflicting me for many months*, he replied. I then played the good doctor:

– *Leave it to me, I will prescribe a remedy that will chase the fever away forever. Just have faith in God and Saint Louis*. Taking a piece of paper with a pencil, I wrote my prescription, recommending him to take it to a pharmacist. He was beside

himself with joy, and not knowing how to better show his gratitude, he kept kissing my hand, and he also wanted to kiss Rua's, who, out of modesty, did not allow him to.

The encounter with a papal police officer was also pleasant. He thought he knew me, and I believed I knew him, so we both greeted each other with great joy. When we realised the misunderstanding, the friendship and expressions of goodwill and respect continued. To please him, I had to allow him to pay for a cup of coffee, and I offered him a small glass of rum. Then, having asked me to leave him some memento, I gave him the medal of Saint Louis Gonzaga. The name of that good officer was Pedrocchi.

In the city of the popes

Back again in the carriage and moving faster due to desire rather than from the horses' legs, every moment it seemed to us that we were in Rome. As night fell, every time we spotted a bush or a plant in the distance, Rua would immediately exclaim:

– *There is the dome of St. Peter's*. However, to arrive we had to travel until ten-thirty in the evening, and being the middle of the night, we could no longer see any details. However, we got a certain thrill at the thought that we were entering the holy city. […] Finally arriving at the stopping point, not having any knowledge of the place, we sought a guide, who for twelve *baiocchi*, accompanied us to De Maistre's house, on Via del Quirinale 49, at the Four Fountains. It was already eleven o'clock. We were kindly welcomed by the Count and Countess. The others were already in bed. After taking a bit of refreshment, we said goodnight and went to sleep.

Saint Carlino

The part of the Quirinal where we lived is called Four Fountains because four perennial fountains spring from four corners of four districts that meet here. In front of the house where we had taken residence there was the church of the Carmelites. Being all Spaniards, they belonged to the order called the *Redemption of Captives*. The church was built in 1640 and dedicated to St. Carlino, but to distinguish it from others dedicated to the same saint, it was called St. Charles. Going to the sacristy, we showed the *Celebret* (the document to celebrate, *editor's note*) and thus we were able to say mass. […] We spent the day almost entirely organising our papers, running errands, delivering letters […]

The Pantheon

Taking advantage of an hour that remained before nightfall, we went to the **Pantheon**, which is one of the oldest and most famous monuments in Rome. It was commissioned by Marcus Agrippa, the son-in-law of Caesar Augustus, twenty-five years before the common era (from the birth of Christ, *editor's note*). It is believed that this building was called Pantheon, which means *all the gods*, because it was in fact dedicated to all the deities. The façade is truly superb. Eight large columns support an elegant cornice. Just after it, there is a portico formed by sixteen columns made from a single block of granite, then the pronaos, or entrance, consisting of four fluted pillars, within which are niches that were once occupied by the statues of Augustus and Agrippa.
Inside, there is a high dome with an opening in the centre, through which light enters, but also wind, rain, and snow when it falls in this area. Here, the most precious marble serve as flooring or as decoration all around. The diameter is one hundred thirty-three feet, corresponding to eighteen *trabucchi (approximately 55 metres)*. This temple served the worship of the gods until 608 AD, when Pope Boniface IV, so as to prevent the disorder that occurred during sacrifices, dedicated it to the worship of the true God, that is, to all the saints.

This church was subject to many events. When Boniface IV obtained this place from Emperor Phocas and dedicated it to the worship of God and the Madonna, he had twenty-eight carts of relics transported from various cemeteries, which he placed under the main altar. From then on, it began to be called *Santa Maria ad Martyres*. Among the things we greatly appreciated there was the visit to the tomb of the great Raphael […] Now this church is also called the *Rotunda*, from the shape of its construction. In front, there is a square whose centre is occupied by a large marble fountain, topped by four dolphins from which water continuously springs.

Saint Peter in Chains
On February 23rd […] we were very pleased with the visit to St. Peter in Chains, a church south of Rome on the city's border. It was a memorable day because it coincided with one of the rare occasions when the chains of St. Peter were displayed, the keys of which are kept by the Holy Father himself.
Tradition holds that it was St. Peter himself who erected the first church here, dedicating it to the Saviour. Destroyed in the fire of Nero, it was rebuilt by St. Leo the Great in 442 and dedicated to the first Pope. It was called St. Peter in Chains because that is where the Pope placed the chain with which the Prince of the Apostles had been chained in Jerusalem by order of Herod. The Patriarch Juvenal had given it to the Empress Aelia Eudocia, who in turn sent it to Rome to her

daughter Eudoxia, wife of Valentinian III. In Rome, the chain to which St. Peter was chained in the Mamertine prison was also kept. When St. Leo wanted to compare this chain with that of Jerusalem, the two chains miraculously joined together, so that today they form one single chain, which is kept in a special altar beside the sacristy. We had the consolation of touching those chains with our hands, kissing them, putting them around our necks, and bringing them to our foreheads. We also carefully checked to see if we could discern the point of union of the two, but it was not possible. We could only ascertain that the chain of Rome is smaller than that of Jerusalem.

At St. Peter in Chains there is the magnificent **tomb of Julius II** […] It is one of the masterpieces of the famous Michelangelo Buonarroti, who is considered one of the greatest artists of marble, especially for the statue of Moses placed near the urn. The patriarch is depicted with the tablets of the law held under his right arm, in the act of speaking to the people whom he looks at fiercely, because they had rebelled. The church has three naves, separated by twenty columns of Parian marble, and two of well-preserved granite.

St. Louis of the French

Around nine o'clock we went to Santa Maria sopra Minerva, where we were received in a private audience by Cardinal Gaude for about an hour and a half. He spoke to us in the Piedmontese dialect, showing interest in our oratories […] After noon we went to visit Marquis Giovanni Patrizi […] In front of his palace is the church of St. Louis of the French, which gives its name to the square and the nearby district. It is a well-kept church enriched with many precious marble objects. Its uniqueness lies in the tombs of illustrious Frenchmen who died in Rome. In fact, the floor and the walls are covered with epitaphs and plaques. […]

St. Mary Major at the Esquiline Hill

From the Quirinal, a road leads to the Esquiline Hill, named for the many elms that once covered it. At the highest point stands St. Mary Major, whose origin is narrated by all sacred historians. A certain Giovanni, a Roman patrician, having no children, wished to use his wealth for some work of piety […] On the night of August 4, 352, the Madonna appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to raise a temple in the place where he would find fresh snow the next morning. The same vision was experienced by the Pope at that time, Liberius. The following day, word spread that abundant snow had fallen on the Esquiline Hill, so Liberius and Giovanni went there, and upon confirming the miracle, they set to work to carry out the command

received in the vision. The Pope marked out the layout of the new temple, which was soon completed with Giovanni's funds. A few years later, Liberius was able to proceed with its consecration […]

A vast square spreads out in front of the church, at the centre of which stands the ancient white marble column taken from the Temple of Peace. In 1614 Pope Paul V provided it with a base and a capital, on which he placed the statue of the Madonna with Child. The architecture of the facade is majestic and is supported by large marble columns that form a spacious vestibule. At the back of it is the statue of Philip IV, King of Spain, who made many donations in favour of this church and wished to be inscribed among the canons. The floor is made of precious mosaic worked with various types of marble, all of incalculable value.

The chapel to the right of the main altar houses the **tomb of St. Jerome**, the cradle of the Saviour, and the **altar of Pope Liberius**. The papal altar is covered with precious porphyry marble and supported by four gilded bronze putti. Below it opens the **Confession**, which is a chapel dedicated to St. Matthias. We went to visit it on the day of the Lenten station, so we were fortunate to find the **head of St. Matthias** displayed above a rich altar. We observed it closely and noticed the skin attached to the head, in fact there is still some hair still attached to the venerated skull.

The Virgin and the Plague

In the chapel to the left of the altar it is possible to observe a painting of the Virgin attributed to Saint Luke, highly venerated by the people. The image was highly esteemed by the popes. Saint Gregory the Great brought it in procession to the Vatican during the terrible plague of 590. It was April 25. When the procession reached the vicinity of Hadrian's mole, an angel was seen sheathing his sword, thus indicating the end of the plague. In memory of this miracle, Hadrian's mole was named Castel Sant'Angelo, and since then the procession has been repeated every year on the feast day of Saint Mark the Evangelist. In Saint Mary Major everything is majestic and grand, however speaking or writing about it are not enough to describe it truthfully. Those who see it with their own eyes gaze in wonder in every corner.

Today, here in Rome every Ash Wednesday fasting is observed, which means that not only meat is prohibited, but also any soup or dish made with eggs, butter, or milk. Oil, water, and salt are the condiments used on these Wednesdays. The

practice is strictly observed by all classes of people, so much so that in the markets and shops, one cannot find meat, eggs, or butter on that day.

The Legend of Saint Galgano

In the evening, Mrs. De Maistre told us a story worth remembering. She said: *Last year, the general vicar of Siena came to visit us. Among the many things he was accustomed to telling us, he narrated the story of Saint Galgano, the soldier. This saint died centuries ago, and his head remains intact. However, the greatest wonder is that every year his hair is cut, and it imperceptibly grows back to the same length the following year. A Protestant, after hearing this miracle, began to laugh, saying: let me seal the urn where the head is kept, and if the hair grows back, I will recognise the miracle and become Catholic. The matter was reported to the bishop, who replied: I will place the episcopal seals for the authenticity of the relic, and he can place his own to ensure this fact. So this was done. But that gentleman, impatient to see if the miracle began to take place, after a few months asked to open the urn. Imagine his astonishment when he saw that Saint Galgano's hair had already grown as it would have if he were alive! Then it is true! He exclaimed. I will become Catholic. Indeed, the following year on the feast day of the Saint, he and his family renounced Lutheranism and embraced the Catholic religion, which he now professes exemplarily.*

St. Pudenziana at the Viminal Hill

From the Four Fountains, one ascends to the Viminal Hill, named so for the many reeds, that is, the rushes, that once covered it. At the foot of this hill, in the house of Pudens, a Roman senator, Saint Peter stayed when he came to Rome. The holy apostle converted his host to the faith and transformed his house into a church. Around 160, Saint Pius I, at the request of the virgins *Pudenziana* and *Prassede*, daughters of the senator Pudens' nephew, consecrated this church, which […] was later dedicated to Saint Pudenziana because she had lived and died there. Many popes took part in restructuring this place, which contains precious Christian testimonies. The **well of Saint Pudenziana** deserves special attention. It is believed that she buried the bodies of the martyrs in it. At the bottom, one can notice a large number of relics. History has it that it contains the relics of three thousand martyrs.

Next to the main altar, there is an oblong chapel whose altar features a marble group of Jesus handing the keys to Saint Peter. It is believed that this altar is the same one on which Saint Peter celebrated Mass, and on which I myself was able to

celebrate with great consolation. Various pieces of sponge are preserved there, the same ones that Pudenziana used to collect the blood from the wounds of the martyrs, or from the earth that was soaked with it.
Continuing towards the left, one arrives at **a chapel where the testimony of a great miracle is preserved**. While celebrating Mass, a priest fell into doubt about the possibility of the true presence of Jesus in the holy host. After the consecration, the host slipped from his hands and fell to the floor, bouncing first on one step and then on another. Where it first struck the marble, it remained almost perforated, while even on the second step, a very deep cavity in the shape of a host was formed. These two marble steps are preserved in that same place, guarded by special gates.

Saint Prassede
From *Saint Pudenziana*, ascending towards the *Esquiline Hill*, not far from Saint Mary Major, there is the Church of Saint Prassede. Around the year 162 AD, on the site where the baths of Novatus were, Saint Pius I erected a church in honour of this virgin, the sister of Novatus, Pudenziana, and Theophilus. The place served as a refuge for early Christians during times of persecution. The Saint, who worked to provide what was needed for the persecuted Christians, also took care to collect the bodies of the martyrs, which she then buried, pouring their blood into the well that stands in the middle of the church. It is richly adorned with precious marble and objects, as are almost all the churches in Rome.

There is also the **chapel of the martyrs Zenon and Valentine**, whose bodies, transported by Saint Paschal I in the year 899, rest beneath the altar. Here, there is also a column of jasper, about three palms high, which a cardinal named Colonna had transported from the Holy Land in the year 1223. It is believed to be the one to which the Saviour was tied during the flagellation.

The Caelian Hill
From the Esquiline Hill looking west, you can see the Caelian Hill. In ancient times, it was called *Querquetulanus* due to the oaks that covered it. Later, it was named Celio after Cele Vilenna, a captain of the Etruscans, who came to aid Rome, and whom Tarquinius Priscus had housed on that hill. The first thing that stands out *is the largest obelisk known to man*. Ramses, the Pharaoh of Egypt, had it erected in Thebes, dedicating it to the sun. Constantine the Great had it transported across the Nile to Alexandria, but, when struck by death, it fell to his son Constantius to

bring it to Rome. A vessel with three hundred oars was used for the journey, and it was brought to the city via the Tiber and placed in a location called the Circus Maximus. Here it fell, breaking into three parts. Pope Sixtus V had it restored and raised in the Lateran square in the year 1588. The obelisk reaches a height of 153 Roman feet. It is entirely adorned with hieroglyphics and topped with a tall cross.

To the right of the square is the Baptistery of Constantine with the Church of St. John in Font. It is said to have been built by Constantine on the occasion of the Baptism he received from Pope St. Sylvester in the year 324. From the two attached chapels, one dedicated to St. John the Baptist and the other to St. John the Evangelist, it took the name of the church of St. John in Font. The baptistery, which is a large basin lined with precious marble, is in the middle. The small chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist is believed to be a chamber of Constantine's, converted into an oratory and dedicated to the holy Precursor by Pope St. Hilarius.

St. John Lateran

Exiting the baptistery and crossing the vast square, one encounters the Basilica of St. John Lateran. This famous building is the first principal church of the Catholic world. On the façade is written: *Ecclesiarum Urbis et Orbis Mater et Caput* (*mother and head of all the churches of Rome and the world*). It is the seat of the Supreme Pontiff as Bishop of Rome. After his coronation, he solemnly takes possession of it. It was also called the *Constantinian Basilica* because it was founded by Constantine the Great. It was later called the *Lateran Basilica* because it was erected where the palace of a certain Plautius Lateranus stood, who was killed by Nero. It was also called the *Basilica of the Saviour*, following an apparition of the Saviour that occurred during its construction. It is still called the *Golden Basilica* for the precious gifts with which it has been enriched, and *Basilica of St. John* because it is dedicated to Saints John the Baptist and Evangelist.

It was Constantine the Great who had it built near his palace around the year 324. Later expanded with new structures, it was relinquished to the Holy Pontiff. Here the Popes lived until the time of Gregory XI. When he brought the Holy See back from Avignon to Rome, he moved his residence to the Vatican.
In the year 1308, a terrible fire broke out that destroyed it, but Clement V, who was then in Avignon, immediately sent his agents with large sums of money, and it was quickly rebuilt. The portico is supported by twenty-four large pillars. At the back is the statue of Constantine found in his baths at the Quirinal. The large bronze door is of extraordinary height. It was taken from the church of *St. Adrian in the Campo*

Vaccino and transported here. It constitutes a rare example of ancient doors called *Quadrifores*, meaning constructed so that they could open in four parts, one at a time without any of them endangering the stability of the other. On the right, there is a bricked-up door that is opened only in the year of the jubilee and is therefore called the **Holy Door**.

The interior has five naves. The length, height, exquisiteness of the floors, sculptures and paintings are enchanting to see. It would require large volumes to speak of them worthily. **The most significant relics of this church are the heads of the two princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul.** They are kept under the main altar and encased in another golden encasing. There is also a **significant relic of St. Pancras the martyr**, and **a table** is kept there that is thought to be the same one on which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his Apostles.

Exiting the church through the main door and crossing the square, one finds the Holy Stairs, a building that Pope Sixtus V had erected to house the staircase, which was previously in pieces in the old papal palace of the Lateran. It consists of twenty-eight steps of white marble from the praetorium of Pilate in Jerusalem that Jesus ascended and descended several times during His Passion. St. Helena, mother of Constantine, sent them to Rome along with many other things sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. This famous staircase is held in great reverence and therefore it is ascended on one's knees, while descending via one of the four side stairs. These steps have been worn down by the great influx of Christians who have ascended them, so they have been covered with wooden planks. Sixtus V himself also had the famous private chapel of the popes placed at the top of the stairs, which is full of the most significant relics, and is therefore called the **Sancta Sanctorum**.

Vatican City. The construction

The Vatican hill contains the most excellent pieces in the arts, and most memorable objects in religion. Therefore, we will provide a somewhat more detailed account. It was called Vatican from *Vagitanus*, a deity thought to oversee the *cries* of infants. In fact, the first syllable *Uà* (*waah, editor's note)* of which the word is composed is also the first cry of children. The hill became renowned when Caligula built the circus that was later named after Nero. Caligula built the Vatican bridge, also called the Triumphal, to cross from the left to the right bank of the Tiber, which no longer exists. Nero's circus began where the church of *St. Martha* is today and extended to

the steps of the ancient Vatican basilica. In this circus, the body of the Prince of the Apostles was buried […]

The bones of other popes were also buried there including Linus, Cletus, Anacletus, Evaristus, and others. The *Memory of St. Peter*, that is, the small temple built over his tomb, lasted until the time of Constantine, who, at the request of St. Sylvester, around 319, began the construction of a church in honour of the Apostle. It was erected right around that small temple, using material taken from public buildings. The construction was called the *Constantinian Basilica*, and at that time it was considered among the most famous in Christendom. In the middle of that church, shaped like a Latin cross, there was the altar dedicated to St. Peter, under which his body was buried, protected by gates. That space has been called the **Confession of St. Peter** since then. Once the temple was completed and endowed with rich furnishings, Pope Sylvester consecrated it on November 18, 324 […] The popes that followed adorned and expanded it. For eleven centuries, it was the object of devotion and admiration of Christians who travelled to Rome.

In the 15th century, it began to fall into ruin, so Nicholas V thought to renew it, but he only had the merit of starting the work, as his death caused everything to be suspended. Julius II resumed the construction, changing its name from **Constantinian Basilica to St. Peter's in the Vatican**, and laid the first stone on April 18, 1506. The architects were Bramante, later Fra Giocondo Domenico and Raphael Sanzio. After them, the most famous architects and the most sublime minds of the time worked on it.

The great square

[…] In front of the Basilica a vast square, whose length exceeds half a kilometre, opens up. It is formed by 284 columns and 64 pillars that, arranged in a semicircle on both sides in four rows, form three paths of which the widest, the central one, can allow the passage of two carriages. Above the colonnade there are 96 statues of saints, in marble, about 10 feet tall. In the centre, instead, stands an Egyptian obelisk. It is made from a single piece and is the only one that remains intact. It measures 126 feet in height, including the cross and the pedestal. It has no hieroglyphics. Nuncoreus, King of Egypt, had it erected in Heliopolis, from where it was taken and transported to Rome by Caligula in the 3rd year of his reign. It was placed in the circus built at the foot of the Vatican hill, as evidenced by the inscriptions that can be read there. This circus was called *Nero's* because he frequented it often. Here that cruel emperor slaughtered Christians, accusing them

of being the authors of the fire of Rome that he himself had started.

In 1818, a sundial was built in the square. The twelve signs of the zodiac were drawn on the ground. The obelisk served as a gnomon (staff), and with its shadow indicated the stations of the sun. All around, the names of the winds were written in the direction in which each of them blows. On the sides, two identical fountains perpetually spout water from a group of jets that rise even up to sixty feet. The Queen of Scotland, welcomed pompously in this place, looked in wonder at the two fountains thinking they had been made especially for her reception. No, said a gentleman who was beside her, these jets are perennial.

A visit to St. Peter's

Walking towards the facade of the Basilica, one arrives at a magnificent staircase flanked by two statues, one of St. Peter and the other of St. Paul, placed there by the reigning Pius IX. Having climbed the stairs, one stands before the facade which has this inscription: *In honour of the Prince of the Apostles Paul V Supreme Pontiff in the year 1612, the 7th of his pontificate.* Above the portico extends the great **Loggia of Blessings**. The facade is majestic and imposing. The portico is entirely adorned with marble, mosaic paintings, and other elegant works. At the back of the vestibule on the right, one can observe the beautiful equestrian statue of Constantine in the act of gazing at the miraculous cross that appeared to him in the sky before the final battle with Maxentius.

From the portico, one enters the Basilica through four doors, of which the last on the right is opened only for the Holy Year. The main door is made of bronze, very tall, and it takes many strong arms to open it. The interior presents five naves in addition to the transept that ends with the apse. Curiosity and surprise led us to the middle of the main nave. Here we stopped to admire and reflect without saying a word. It seemed to us to see the celestial Jerusalem. The length of the Basilica is 837 palms; its width is 607. It is the largest temple in all of Christendom. After St. Peter's, the largest is that of St. Paul in London. If we add the Church of St. Paul to that of our Oratory, it forms the exact length of St. Peter.

After being still for some time, we sought the basin of holy water. We spotted two putti, very small at first glance, holding a kind of shell in the first pillar of the Basilica. We were amazed that such a vast church had such a small holy water font. But the amazement turned into surprise when we saw the putti growing larger as we approached. The shell became a vase of about six feet in circumference, and the

putti on the sides showed us their hands with fingers as large as our arms. This demonstrates that the proportions of this marvellous building are so well-regulated as to make its vastness less perceptible, which, however, becomes more noticeable when examining each detail. Around the pillars of the main nave, one can see statues of the founders of religious orders carved in marble.

In the last pillar on the right is the bronze statue of St. Peter, held in great reverence. It was cast by St. Leo the Great from the bronze of that of Jupiter Capitolinus. It recalls the peace that that Pontiff obtained from Attila, who was raging against Italy. The right foot, which protrudes from the pedestal, is worn down by the lips of the faithful who never pass by without kissing it with respect. While we were admiring the statue, the Austrian ambassador in Rome passed by, bowed before the Prince of the Apostles, and kissed his foot.

Naves and chapels

Now let's say something about the minor naves and the chapels found there. In the right one, the first chapel encountered is the Chapel of the **Pietà**. In addition to magnificent mosaics and the statues that adorn it, one admires above the altar the celebrated group sculpted by Michelangelo Buonarroti in white marble when he was only twenty-four years old. It is perhaps the most beautiful sculpture in the world. The same Buonarroti was so pleased with it that he signed it on the belt of Mary's chest.

To the left of the Chapel of the Pietà is the inner chapel dedicated to the **Crucifix** and **St. Nicholas**. From here, one enters the so-called **Chapel of the Holy Column**, where one of the twisted columns that once stood in front of the altar of the **Confession of St. Peter** is preserved, protected by an iron gate. This is the column to which Jesus Christ leaned when he preached in the temple of Solomon. One is marvelled to note that the part touched by the sacred shoulders of the Saviour is never covered in dust, and therefore does not need to be dusted like the rest.

After the Chapel of the Pietà, one encounters the tomb monument of *Leo XII,* erected by Gregory XVI. The Pope is depicted as he blesses the people from the Loggia above the porch. Around him are the heads of the cardinals assisting at the ceremony. Opposite this tomb is the cenotaph of *Christina Alexandra*, Queen of Sweden, who died in Rome on April 19, 1689. This woman, a Protestant, convinced of the little substance of her religion, had herself instructed in Catholicism and

made a solemn abjuration in *Innsbruck*on November 3, 1655. Various bas-reliefs adorning the tomb represent the event.

Next is the **Chapel of St. Sebastian**, also rich in paintings and marble. Exiting to the right, one finds the burial point of *Innocent XII* of the Pignatelli family from Naples. Opposite is the tomb of the famous Countess *Matilda*, a distinguished benefactor of the Church and supporter of papal authority. Urban VIII had her ashes transferred here from the monastery of St. Benedict in Mantua. She was the first of the illustrious women who earned a tomb in the Vatican Basilica. The countess is depicted standing. The tomb is adorned with a bas-relief depicting the absolution granted by Gregory VII to Henry IV, Emperor of Germany, at the request of Matilda and other figures, on January 25, 1077, in the fortress of Canossa.

This brings us to the Chapel of the Sacrament, rich in marble and mosaics. Next to the altar, there is a staircase that leads to the papal palace. This altar is dedicated to *St. Maurice* and his fellow martyrs, the principal patrons of Piedmont. The two twisted columns made from a single piece that adorn the altar are two of the twelve believed to have been brought to Rome from the ancient temple of Solomon. On the floor in front of the altar, the bronze tomb of *Sixtus IV* Della Rovere can be admired. It was executed by order of his nephew Julius II and represents the virtues and knowledge of the deceased. It contains the ashes of the two popes.

When exiting the chapel, to the right is the tomb of *Gregory XIII* Buoncompagni. It is adorned with two statues: *Religion* and *Fortitude*, while in the centre a large bas-relief represents the reform of the calendar, hence called Gregorian. Here are depicted a number of illustrious figures who played a part in that work, all in the act of venerating the Pope. Opposite, within a stucco urn, rest the bones of *Gregory XIV* of the Sfrondato family. This is where the minor nave ends, and one enters the Greek cross according to Buonarroti’s design.

Exiting the nave, to the right is the **Gregorian Chapel**. Above the altar an ancient image of the Madonna from the time of Paschal II is venerated. Below rests the **body of St. Gregory Nazianzen**, transferred by order of Gregory XIII from the church of the nuns of Campo Marzio. Continuing along, one arrives at the tomb monument of *Benedict XIV* Lambertini, erected by the cardinals he created. On either side of the tomb rise two magnificent statues representing *Disinterest* and *Wisdom*, the two most luminous virtues of this pope. The statue of the Pontiff, standing, blesses the people with a majestic gesture. This

work is so well executed that merely gazing at the Pope makes one recognise the greatness and elevation of his spirit. Opposite, one recognises the altar of *St. Basil the Gre*at, with a precious mosaic above it depicting Emperor Valens, who fainted in the presence of the Saint, while watching him celebrate Mass.

Then one reaches the tribune. The first altar on the right is dedicated to *St. Wenceslaus the Martyr*, King of Bohemia. The middle one is consecrated to *Saints Processus* and *Martinian*, guards of the Mamertine prison, converted to the faith by St. Peter when the Apostle was imprisoned there. The structure takes its name from these saints, and their bodies rest beneath the altar. Three precious bas-reliefs represent St. Peter in prison being freed by the Angel (the middle one), St. Paul preaching in the Areopagus (the one on the right), and the third depicts Saints Paul and Barnabas being mistaken for gods by the inhabitants of Lystra.
Next is the tomb of *Clement XIII* Rezzonico, a sculpture by Antonio Canova. It is a masterpiece. The painting of the altar facing the monument depicts St. Peter in danger of drowning, supported by the Redeemer. Further on is the altar of *St. Michael*, then that of *St. Petronilla*, daughter of St. Peter. This saint is represented in a mosaic that narrates the exhumation of her corpse to show it to Flaccus, a noble Roman, who had asked for her hand in marriage. In the upper part, her soul is depicted praying to die a virgin and her being welcomed by Jesus Christ. Further on, one sees the sarcophagus of *Clement X*, Altieri: the bas-relief represents the opening of the holy door for the Jubilee of 1675. Above the altar is the painting of St. Peter, who at the prayers of a crowd of beggars, raises the widow Tabitha from the dead.

Crossing over two steps of porphyry that were part of the main altar of the ancient basilica, one ascends to the **Altar of the Chair**. A stunning group of four metal statues supports the papal seat. The two in front represent two Latin Fathers, Ambrose and Augustine. The two behind represent the Greek Fathers, Athanasius and John Chrysostom. The weight of these groups amounts to 219,161 pounds of metal. The bronze chair covers, as a precious relic, the wooden one inlaid with various ivory bas-reliefs. This chair belonged to the senator Pudens, who served the Apostle Peter and many other popes after him.

Above the *Altar of the Chair*, as a backdrop, the *Holy Spirit* is depicted on canvas in the middle of coloured and radiant glass, so that to the viewer, it seems there is a shining golden star. Instead, below, to the viewer’s left is the magnificent tomb of *Paul III* Farnese, a highly valued monument for its sculptures. The statue of the

Pope seated on the urn is made of bronze, while the other two statues, made of marble, represent *Prudence* and *Justice*. Opposite is the tomb of Pope Urban VIII, whose statue is made of bronze. *Justice* and *Charity* are on either side of him, sculpted in white marble. On the urn, one can see the image of death in the act of writing the Pope's name in a book. Here we interrupted the visit. We were tired. The visit had lasted from eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon.

Rome. St. Mary of Victory

Towards noon looking from the Quirinal, one sees the road of Porta Pia, so named after Pope Pius IV, who carried out several works to beautify it. Along this road, near the fountain of *Acqua Felice*, the Church of St. Mary of Victory rises to the left, built by Paul V in 1605, and named so for a miraculous image of the Madonna brought there by Father Domenico of the Discalced Carmelites. To this image, or rather to the protection of Mary, Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, owed the great victory achieved in a few days against the Protestants, who with a very large army had turned the Kingdom of Austria upside down. The miraculous image is preserved on the main altar. Banners taken from the enemies hang from the cornices: a glorious monument to the protection of Mary.

In memory of the liberation of Vienna, the feast of the *Name of Mary* was established and is celebrated by all of Christendom on the Sunday within the octave of the birth of Mary. This event occurred on September 12, 1683, during the pontificate of Innocent XI. In this same church, a special solemnity is celebrated on the second Sunday of November in remembrance of the famous victory achieved by Christians against the Turks at *Lepanto* on October 7, 1571, under Pius V. Some banners taken from the Turks are also hung as trophies on the cornice of this church.
In front of St. Mary of Victory is the Termini fountain, called the Fountain of *Moses*, because in a recess there is a statue of Moses who, with a staff in hand, makes water spring from the stone. It is also called *Acqua Felice* after Fra Felice, which was the name of Sixtus V when he was in the convent.

The Tiber Island

In the afternoon, we decided to go with Count De Maistre to visit the great work of *St. Michael* across the Tiber. We therefore had to cross the river at the height of a small island called the Tiber Island or also Lycaonia, from a temple dedicated to Jupiter Lycaonio. This island originated as follows. When Tarquin was expelled from Rome, the Tiber was almost devoid of water, leaving some sandbanks exposed. The

Romans, driven by hatred against this king, went into his fields, cut down the grain and spelt that were almost ripe, and threw everything into the Tiber. The straw came to rest on that sand, and as the muddy sand that the water carried flowed, it became consolidated to the point of being cultivable and habitable. On this island, the pagans erected a temple in honour of Asclepius, but in 973, the **body of St. Bartholomew** was transferred there, resting in the urn beneath the main altar.

Crossing the Tiber and continuing towards St. Michael, on the right you come upon the Church of St. Cecilia, built on the site where her house once stood. Urban I consecrated it around the middle of the third century, and Saint Gregory the Great enriched it with many precious objects. Entering on the right is the chapel where Saint Cecilia's bath was, in which it is said she received the mortal blow. The main altar, protected by an iron gate, houses the **body of the saint**. Above the urn is a touching marble sculpture representing her lying down and dressed as she was found in the tomb.

Having arrived at the *St. Michael Hospice*, we had an audience with Cardinal Tosti, who narrated various episodes that happened to him during the republic. He too was forced to live away from the hospice for a while to avoid becoming a victim of some attack. Among the various items stolen in that sad circumstance from this pious cardinal were three very precious snuff boxes, especially for their antiquity and origin. Taken to the members of the triumvirate, Mazzini thought to keep one for himself and give the other two to his companions. But they did not dare to take them. Mazzini sorted everything out and graciously put all three in his pocket!

The Capitol

Along the way back, halfway along rises the highest hill in Rome, the Capitol, named so from *caput Toli*, the head of Tolo, which was discovered while Tarquin the Proud was levelling the top to build a fortress. We climbed a long staircase at the top of which stand two colossal statues representing Castor and Pollux. The flat area that forms the square was anciently called *inter duos lucos*, because it was situated between the groves that covered the two peaks. Here Romulus had created a refuge for neighbouring peoples who wished to take shelter. Today's Capitol no longer has a warlike grandeur, but it is a majestic square surrounded by buildings that house museums, and where municipal affairs are conducted. In one part of this square stood the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, so named from the weapons of the vanquished that the victors would hang at the altar of that temple.

In the middle of the square stands the **famous equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius** portraying a peacemaker. It is the most beautiful among the oldest bronze statues that have been preserved intact. Part of the large buildings surrounding the square constitutes the senatorial palace, founded by Boniface IX in 1390 on the same ground where the ancient Roman Senate stood. To the side is the Fountain of *Acqua Felice*, adorned by two reclining statues of the Nile and the Tiber. From here, through a small staircase, one reaches the tower of the Capitol, erected in the form of a bell tower on the same site where anciently observers would climb to admire Rome and monitor enemies attempting to approach the city […]
At the highest part towards the east was the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which was called *Jupiter Optimus, Maximus*, and was erected by Tarquin the Proud on the foundations prepared by Tarquin the Elder, who had made a vow during the war against the Sabines. Just as the excavation was being done, the *caput Toli* was discovered.

Santa Maria in Aracoeli
Where the **temple of Jupiter Capitolinus** was, now there stands the majestic church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, built in the 6th century of the common era. For a while it was called *Santa Maria in Campidoglio*, from the place where it stood. It was then called *Aracoeli* from the following fact. After lightning struck the Capitol, Octavian Augustus, fearing some misfortune, sent someone to consult the oracle of Delphi […] For this event, and for some sayings of the Sibyls regarding the birth of the Saviour, Augustus had an altar erected entitled: *Ara primogeniti Dei*, altar of the firstborn of God. Hence this is where the name Santa Maria in Aracoeli comes from, after a church was erected on the site in honour of the Mother of God. The interior has three naves divided by 22 marble columns that once belonged to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. The main altar is worthy of special observation, because above it is **an image of Mary** that is venerated, **believed to be by Saint Luke**. During the time of Saint Gregory the Great, it was taken around Rome in procession to obtain liberation from the plague. The event is depicted in a painting on the pillar beside the altar. In the middle of the crossing is the **chapel of Saint Helena**, where the *Ara Primogeniti* was erected. The altar's table is a large porphyry urn, within which the **bodies of Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, and Saints Abundius and Abundantius** are found.

In a room near the sacristy is preserved a **miraculous effigy of the Infant Jesus**. The swaddling clothes that cover him are adorned with precious stones. It is displayed for veneration during the Christmas festivities, in a beautiful nativity

scene represented in the church inside a chapel. Along with the Child, the figures of Augustus and the Sibyl are also placed as a reminder of a tradition that states that the Cumaean Sibyl predicted the birth of the Saviour, and therefore Augustus erected an altar there.

Exiting Aracoeli and heading towards the western part of the Capitol, one encounters the Tarpeian Rock, which occupied the side towards the Tiber, and was named after the Virgin Tarpeia, who was unexpectedly killed there during the war with the Sabines. From the top of this rock, traitors to the homeland were thrown down. Many Christians were martyred here, who, out of hatred for the faith, were thrown down. Nearby was the Curia, and the hut of Romulus, where, it is said, he awaited the response of the vultures […]

Descending downwards, there is the Temple of Concord, built by Camillus in the year 387 of Rome. […] Near this temple on the left side of the descent there was that of *Jupiter Tonans*, of which three marble columns remain. It was erected by Augustus on the Capitoline slope and dedicated to Jupiter in gratitude for having escaped the lightning that killed the servant who preceded him.

The Mamertine Prison

On the morning of March 2, together with the De Maistre family, we went to visit the Mamertine Prison, which is at the foot of the Capitol in the western part. This prison got its name from Mamertus, or Ancus Marcius, the 4th king of Rome who had it built to instil terror in the plebeians, thus preventing thefts and murders. Servius Tullius, the 6th king of Rome, added another prison beneath it, which was called Tullian. It has two underground chambers, which in the vault present an opening large enough for a man to pass through. Through it, the condemned were lowered with a rope […]

Here there is a **water spring** that legend says Saint Peter miraculously caused to flow when he was imprisoned there with Saint Paul. The Prince of the Apostles used this water to baptise the Saints *Processus* and *Martinian*, the guardians of the prison, along with 47 other companions, all of whom died as martyrs. This water has miraculous properties. Its taste is natural. It never increases or decreases in volume, regardless of how much is drawn from it. Two English gentlemen, almost to mock Catholics, wanted to try to empty the small pit of water that resembles a small vase. They and their friends grew tired, but the water always remained at the same level. Many miraculous healings are reported to have been obtained from its

use. Next to the spring is a stone column to which the two princes of the Apostles were tied. Beside the column is a small and low altar where, with great consolation, I celebrated Mass, attended by the De Maistre family and other pious people. Above the altar, a bas-relief represents Paul preaching and Peter baptising the guards […]

In a corner of the first floor of the prison, on the wall one can see the **imprint of a human face**. It is said that Saint Peter received a strong slap from a henchman, so that when his face struck against the wall, he left the imprint of his face that was miraculously preserved. Above this figure is carved this ancient inscription: "*On this stone Peter struck his head pushed by a henchman and the miracle remains*." A church was built above this prison, and above this another dedicated to Saint Joseph. The confraternity of carpenters is located here. The members gather on holidays, attend sacred functions, and provide for the maintenance of the church and for the cleaning of the prison. In ancient times, to reach the entrance of the prison, one descended through a staircase at the bottom of which was the opening from which the condemned were thrown. Those stairs were called *Gemonian*, from the moaning of the condemned […]

Vatican City. Jubilee Devotions
March 3 was designated for the visit to Saint Peter's. Leaving home at six-thirty with a cool air that brightened life and quickened our steps, we headed towards the Vatican hill. Arriving at the Aelian Bridge, or Sant'Angelo Bridge, over which one crosses the Tiber, we recited the creed. The Popes grant fifty days of indulgence to those who recite the Apostles' symbol while passing over this bridge. It is called Aelian from Aelius Hadrian who built it. However, it is also called Sant'Angelo Bridge from Castel Sant'Angelo, which is the first building encountered on the opposite bank.

Let us say something about this castle. Emperor Hadrian wanted to erect a great tomb on the right bank of the Tiber. For its width, length, and height, it was called *Mole Adrianorum*. When Emperor Theodosius had the columns taken from Hadrian's mausoleum to furnish the Basilica of Saint Paul, this construction was left without its upper half and without columns. In the year 537, Belisarius's troops assaulted the Goths to drive them away from Rome, and then almost all the remains of that mausoleum were reduced to pieces. In the 10th century, it was called *Castro and Torre di Crescenzio* from a certain Crescentius the Younger, who took possession of it and fortified it. Shortly after, history gave it the name *Castel Sant'Angelo*, derived perhaps from a church dedicated to the angel Michael […]

However, the most probable opinion remains that which tells of a procession of Saint Gregory the Great to obtain liberation from the plague from the Virgin. On that occasion, an angel appeared on the high summit of the Mole, sheathing his sword, a sign that the scourge was about to cease. Now Castel Sant'Angelo has been reduced to a fortress and is the only one in Rome.

Continuing along our journey, we arrived at the grand Saint Peter's square. Passing in front of the *obelisk*, we removed our hats, because the popes have granted fifty days of indulgence to those who show reverence or uncover their heads while passing near that obelisk, on which a cross has been placed. It holds a piece of the Holy Wood of the Cross of Jesus.
Here we are again in the Vatican Basilica. We had already visited the larger half plus the tribune, which forms a kind of choir to the papal altar, located in the middle of the crossing, opposite the chair of Peter. This choir was erected by Clement VIII and consecrated by him in the year 1594: it encloses the altar already built by Saint Sylvester. Being the papal altar, only the Pope celebrates there, and when someone else wishes to use it, an apostolic "*Breve*" is required. On four sides rise four large spiral columns that support a baldachin adorned with friezes all in bronze. The height of this baldachin from the floor level equals that of the tallest buildings in Turin.

The tomb of Peter: curiosities of a saint
In front of the papal altar, a double marble staircase descends to the Confession level. At the end of the stairs, there are two columns of alabaster from Orte, a very rare material, transparent like a diamond. One hundred and twelve lamps burn continuously around the venerable site. At the back, a niche opens up, formed on the ancient oratory erected by Saint Sylvester, where Saint Anacletus *"erected a memorial to Saint Peter".* Here lies the **body of the Prince of the Apostles**. On the side walls, two doors equipped with an iron gate lead to the sacred grottos. On November 28, 1822, the marble statue of Pius VI, kneeling in fervent prayer, was placed directly in front of the niche. This is one of the most beautiful works of Antonio Canova. Pius VI used to go during the day and sometimes even at night to the tomb of Saint Peter to pray. In life, he showed a strong desire to be buried there, and upon his death, he wished to have it fulfilled. However, after a shallow excavation, a tomb was discovered with the inscription: *Linus episcopus*. Immediately, everything was put back in place, and the Pope was buried in another corner of the church. In the chosen place, instead of the body, the statue we mentioned was placed. We have seen and touched with our hands how precious

everything is here, but we could not see the body of the first pope, because for centuries the tomb has not been opened for fear that someone might attempt to break off some relic.

Above this tomb, a rich altar has been raised: here I had the consolation of celebrating the holy Mass. This altar, with an attached chapel, receives light from some portholes covered with metal grates. During the construction of the Basilica, a miraculous event occurred, reported by an eyewitness. Before the roof was finished, such heavy rains fell that the waters flooded the Basilica floor up to a foot high. Despite such abundance, the water did not dare to approach the altar of the *Confession*, nor did it descend into the lower oratory through the aforementioned three portholes, because, when coming close, it stopped, remaining suspended so that not even a drop reached that sanctuary to wet it. After observing every object, looking at every corner, the walls, the vaults, the floor, we asked if there was anything else to see.
– *Nothing more*, we were told.
– *But where is the tomb of the Holy Apostle?*
– *Right down below. It is located in the same place it occupied when the ancient basilica was standing* […]
– *But we would like to see down there.*
– *It is not possible […]*
– *But the pope said we could see everything. If he were to ask us when we return if we have seen everything, I would regret not being able to answer affirmatively.*
The monsignor [who was accompanying us] sent for some keys and opened a kind of cabinet. Here a cavity opened that descended underground. It was all dark.
– *Are you satisfied?* The monsignor asked me.
– *Not yet, I would like to see.*
– *And how do you want to do that?*
– *Send for a cane and a match.* They brought a cane and a match, which, applied to the tip of it, was lowered down, but it went out immediately in the air without oxygen. The cane did not reach the bottom. Then another cane was brought that had a metal hook at the end. Thus, it was possible to touch the lid of Saint Peter's tomb. It was seven/eight meters deep. Tapping lightly, the sound that came up indicated that the hook was hitting now iron, now marble. This confirmed what ancient historians had written.

It would take a volume to describe the things we saw. What existed in the Constantinian Basilica is preserved in side slabs, or on the floors or in the vaults of

the undergrounds. I will highlight only one thing, the image of *Santa Maria della Bocciata*, very ancient, placed in an underground altar. The name derives from the following circumstance. A young man, with disdain or perhaps inadvertently, hit the figure of Mary in the eye with a ball. A great miracle occurred. Blood flowed from the forehead, and the eye, which is still red, is seen above the cheeks of the image. Two drops splashed sideways onto the stone, which is scrupulously preserved behind two iron gates.

Altars, chapels, tombs

Above the papal altar and the tomb of Saint Peter rises the vast dome that leaves those who observe it enchanted. Four large pillars support it: each of them has one hundred and fifty steps, about twenty-five *trabucchi*, of circumference. All around that high dome, there are elegant mosaic works executed by the most famous authors. On the pillars, four niches called *Loggias of the Relics* are carved, which are the *Holy Face* of Veronica, the *Holy Cross*, the *Sacred Lance*, and *Saint Andrew*. Among them, the one of the Sacred Face is famous, believed to be the cloth that the Saviour used to wipe his face dripping with blood. He left his image imprinted on it, which he gave to Veronica, who, weeping, accompanied him to Calvary. Trustworthy people recount that this Sacred Face, in the year 1849, bled several times, even changing colour so much that it altered its features. These things were written down, and the canons of St. Peter testify to them.

Starting from the papal altar and proceeding southwards, one encounters the tomb of *Alexander VIII* of the Ottobuoni family. It was erected by his nephew Cardinal Pietro Ottobuoni. The statue of the Pope seated on the throne is made of metal. Two marble statues are on either side, representing *Religion* and *Prudence*. The urn is covered by the bas-relief of the canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani, Giovanni da Capistrano, Giovanni da San Facondo, Giovanni di Dio, and Pasquale Baylon, made by Alexander VIII in 1690. Next to it stands the altar of *Saint Leo the Great*, on which the surprising bas-relief of the Pope going to meet the fierce Attila can be admired. Above are depicted Peter and Paul, next to the Pope is Attila, frightened by the appearance of the two and in the act of bowing to the Pontiff. In an urn under the altar rests the body of the holy pope and doctor of the Church. In front is the tomb of *Leo XII*, who died in 1829, who had so such veneration for this glorious predecessor that he wished to be buried next to him. […]

The following altar is dedicated to the **Virgin of the Column**, so called because it venerates the image of Mary painted on a column of the ancient Constantinian

Basilica. It was placed there in 1607. The altar houses the bodies of Leo II, III, and IV. Continuing the tour along the southern line, we find on the right the tomb of Alexander VII Ghigi with four statues: *Justice, Prudence, Charity*, and *Truth*. Since this pope always had thoughts of death in mind, the sculptor laid a blanket in relief covering the figure of death that shows an hourglass, that is, a sand clock, which is about to finish its charge. The Pope is praying with hands joined on his knees. The altar on the left is dedicated to the apostles *Peter and Paul*. It depicts the fall of Simon Magus. In front is the altar of *Saints Simon and Jude*, who rest here. The altar on the right, however, is dedicated to *Saint Thomas* and houses the body of *Boniface IV*, while the one on the left preserves the remains of *Leo IX*. In front of the sacristy door, the altar of Saints *Peter* and *Andrew* represents in precious mosaic the death of Ananias and Sapphira.

Thus, we reach the Clementine chapel, whose altar, dedicated to *Saint Gregory the Great*, is topped by a beautiful mosaic of the saint in the act of convincing the unbelievers. Under the altar, his body is venerated. Above the door leading to the organ is the tomb monument of *Pius VII*. The Pontiff, seated on a rich chair and dressed in papal garments, is in the act of blessing. The statues placed on the sides represent *Wisdom* and *Fortitude*. Before reaching the side nave, one encounters the altar of the *Transfiguration*, whose mosaic presents the Transfiguration of the Saviour on Mount Tabor.

The left minor nave

Entering the minor nave, one encounters on both sides two tombs, on the right there is that of *Leo XI* of the Medici. A bas-relief describes the Pontiff absolving Henry IV, King of France […] Lower down are carved roses with the motto: *Sic floruit*, to indicate the transience of life and symbolise the brevity of the pontificate of Leo XI, which lasted only 21 days.

The sarcophagus on the left is of Innocent XI Odescalchi. The overlaid bas-relief depicts the liberation of Vienna from the Turks, which occurred during his pontificate. Proceeding along the nave, one arrives at the *Choir Chapel*, enriched with mosaics and paintings. Under the altar rests the body of *Saint John Chrysostom.* This chapel has an underground area where the ashes of *Clement XI* are preserved. It is called the *Sistine Chapel* by Sixtus IV, who erected another one in the same place as the ancient basilica. To the right, one accesses the choir loft and the *Cappella Giulia*, named so after Julius II, who was its founder. Above this door, there is a stucco urn that contains the ashes of *Gregory XVI*, who died in 1846. This urn is reserved to receive the corpse of the last pope until a burial is erected

for him.

The tomb of Innocent VIII of the Cibo family is in front. There are two figures of this Pope: one seated with the iron of the lance in hand, alluding to the one with which Jesus was pierced, sent to him as a gift by Bayazid II, Emperor of the Turks, while the other is lying down, under the first […] Facing the small door that leads to the dome staircase is the cenotaph of *James III*, King of England, of the Stuart family, who died in Rome on January 1, 1766, and of his two sons Charles III and Henry IX, Cardinal, Duke of York. The three busts in bas-relief are by Antonio Canova.
The last chapel is that of the Baptistery. The baptismal font is made of porphyry and formed the lid of the urn of Otto II, Emperor, which was transported here when his ashes were placed in the Vatican grottos […]

Rome. St. Andrew at the Quirinal
The visiting permit ended at half past noon, so Mr. Carlo, who was guiding us, and we, also guided by a strong appetite, postponed the ascent to the dome and the visit to the Vatican palace for another time. After lunch and a few hours of rest, we briefly visited the Quirinal and the most important things near our residence. The Quirinal is one of the seven hills of ancient Rome, so named by the Quirites, who came here to live, and from a temple dedicated to Romulus, venerated under the name of Quirinus. To our left, proceeding towards Piazza Monte Cavallo, there is the Church of Saint Andrew, where today the novitiate of the Jesuits is located. The chapel dedicated to **Saint Stanislaus Kostka** houses the body of the saint inside a lapis lazuli urn adorned with precious marbles. Next to this church is the monastery of the Dominicans. It is believed that these two buildings were built on the ruins of the temple of Quirinus. To the right of the street rises the majestic Quirinal palace, begun by Paul III about 300 years ago and completed by his successors. It is adorned with architecture, sculptures, paintings, and mosaics of great value. The Pope resides there for part of the year. The palace has a spacious garden of about a mile in perimeter. Among other wonders, one can admire an organ that plays powered by the force of the water that flows here.

In front of the Quirinal opens the Piazza di Monte Cavallo, so named because of two colossal bronze horses representing *Castor* and *Pollux*. Pius VI had an obelisk erected in the middle of this square. It was carried out by order of Smarre and Efre, princes of Egypt, and transported to Rome by Emperor Claudius. It has no hieroglyphics. To the south dominates the magnificent Rospigliosi Palace, built where the baths of Constantine once were. Lovers of the fine arts can visit many

masterpieces of painting and sculpture here.

Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem
March 4 was dedicated to the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. The weather was cloudy, and having travelled just a short distance, we got caught in the rain. Not having an umbrella, we arrived soaked like two rats, but the consolation felt during the visit compensated us for both the water and the discomfort endured. This is one of the seven basilicas that are visited to gain indulgences. Founded by Constantine the Great, where a palace called Sassorio stood, it was named the Sassorian Basilica and was erected in memory of the finding of the Holy Cross made by St. Helena, the emperor's mother, in Jerusalem. This princess had lots of soil from Calvary transported there, taken from the place where the Cross of Christ was found. The building took the name *Holy Cross* from the considerable part of the Holy Wood that is preserved there, and *in Jerusalem* was added because this holy relic, along with many others, were transported from that city. The church was consecrated by Pope St. Sylvester. Under the main altar rest the bodies of St. Cesarius and St. Anastasius, martyrs […]

In front of the altar is the Gregorian chapel, privileged because one can gain the plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in purgatory, both for those who celebrate the mass and for those who listen to it. At this altar, with great consolation, I also celebrated. Next to the church stands the convent of the Cistercians. The Abbot is a certain Marchini, from Piedmont, who treated us with great courtesy. Among other things, he had us visit the library, rich in ancient parchments and other works […]

A rainy day
March 5 was a rainy day, so we spent almost the entire day writing. There is something peculiar about Rome, that is that it rains and there is sunshine at the same time, so that at certain times of the year one must always be equipped with an umbrella to protect oneself from either the sun or the rain. At ten o'clock that day, Father Lolli, rector of the Jesuit novitiate, passed away in the church of *St. Andrew at Monte Cavallo*, a Piedmontese who had lived for a long time in Turin, where he became famous for his preaching and diligence in the confessional apostolate. The Queen of Sardinia, Maria Teresa, had chosen him as her confessor […]

On this day, we learned that diseases in Rome had multiplied, and that the current

mortality rate was four times higher than average. In the months of January and February alone, about 6,600 people died, a very large number, considering the population amounts to about 130,000 inhabitants. Towards evening, I went out to have my beard shaved. I went into a shop and was served quite well. However, I resolved never to go there again, because of how much the barber whacked and shook me with his big hands, which would have dislocated my teeth and jaw if they hadn't had strong roots.

St. Michael's Hospice

According to the invitation we received from Cardinal Tosti, on March 6 we went with the De Maistre family to visit *St. Michael's Hospice*. In addition to what I said last time, I can add the following. The first act of courtesy shown to us was a sumptuous breakfast, to which we could not participate because we had already eaten before leaving, and being a day of fasting, we could not eat again until lunch. So we limited ourselves to a small cup of chocolate, which His Eminence told us was compatible with fasting. We were also given a drink that tasted excellent made from mandarin, a sort of wine made with dried fruits infused with water and sugar. Only Rua, not being obliged to fast, ate something more solid.

Then we began the visit of that spacious hospice where over eight hundred people were housed. Cardinal Tosti accompanied us everywhere. We stopped especially to consider the work of the young people. Here they learn the same trades that they learn from us. Most are engaged in drawing, painting, and sculpture, and many work in an internal printing house. The Holy Father, to help the Hospice, granted it the privilege of exclusively printing the school books used in the Papal States. Above the building, there is a terrace with a magnificent view: looking west, one can see the camp of the French who came to liberate Rome […] At twelve-thirty, by which time the boys were at lunch, and seeing that the cardinal was also very tired, we took our leave […]

St. Mary in Cosmedin and the Mouth of Truth

As usual, it was pouring down rain, and between Rua and me, having only one very small umbrella, we found a way to get both of us soaked. We crossed the Tiber over a bridge called *Ponte Rotto* because it had fallen apart and was replaced with an iron bridge very similar to the one we have over the Po in Turin. In ancient times, it was called the Coclite Bridge, because it was the same one where Horatius Cocles made a heroic stand against the army of Porsenna until the bridge was cut, and he jumped into the Tiber, swimming to the other bank amidst the arrows of the

astonished enemies.

Here one encounters a street called the Mouth of Truth, because at the end of it was the place where those who had to take an oath were led. Now there is a church called St. Mary in Cosmedin, a word that means *ornament*, because it was magnificently adorned by Pope Adrian I. Inside, the chair used by St. Augustine when he taught Rhetoric is preserved. We retreated under the vestibule to wait for the downpour that was flooding all the streets to stop. While we were there, we took a look at the square also called the Mouth of Truth.

The herdsmen

There were many oxen yoked together, grazing, exposed to the rain, mud and wind. The herdsmen had taken shelter under the same vestibule, sitting down to eat with enviable appetite. Instead of soup and a dish, they had a piece of raw cod, from which each one tore off a piece. Some small loaves of cornmeal and rye were their bread. Water was the drink. Seeing in them an air of simplicity and goodness, I approached and had this conversation.

– You have a good appetite, don't you?

– Very much, one of them replied.

– Is that food enough to satisfy your hunger and sustain you?

– It is enough, thank God, when we can have it, since being poor, we cannot expect more.

– Why don't you take those oxen to the stables?

– Because we don't have any.

– Do you always leave them exposed to the wind, rain, and hail day and night?

– Always, always.

– Do you do the same in your villages?

– Yes, we do the same, because there too we have no stables, so whether it rains, or it's windy, or it snows, day and night they are always outside.

– And the cows and the calves are also exposed to such weather?

– Certainly. Among us, it is customary that the animals, those in the stable stay in the stable, and those that begin to stay outside always stay outside.

– Do you live very far from here?

– Forty miles.

– On holidays can you attend the sacred functions?

– Oh! Do you have any doubts? We have our chapel, the priest who says mass, gives the sermon and catechism, and everyone, however far away, makes an effort to attend.

– Do you also go to confess sometimes?
– Oh! Without a doubt. Are there perhaps Christians who do not fulfil these holy duties? ***Now we have the jubilee and we all will make an effort to do it well.*** From this conversation, emerges the good nature of these peasants, who in their simplicity live content with their poverty and happy with their state, as long as they can fulfil the duties of a good Christian and complete that which concerns their lowly trade.

St. Mary of the People
Sunday, March 7 was designated for the visit to St. Mary of the People. Some pious and noble people wished that we go there to celebrate mass, so that they could receive communion. This was a pious devotion. At nine o'clock, Mr. Foccardi, a helpful and faithful person, came to pick us up with his own carriage to take us to the indicated place. This church was built on the site where Nero and the Domitian family had been buried. Tradition says that ghosts continuously appeared there, terrifying the citizens so much that no one wanted to live nearby. Pope Paschal II in the year 1099 had a church built there, and to drive away the diabolical infestation, he dedicated it to the Most Holy Mary. In 1227, the ancient church was threatening to collapse, and the Roman people generously contributed to the reconstruction expenses. For this reason, it was called St. Mary of the People. It is a grand church, rich in marble and paintings. In the main altar, a miraculous image of the Madonna is venerated, which was ordered to be taken from the chapel of the Saviour in Lateran by Gregory IX. Nearby is the convent of the Augustinian fathers.

The Porta del Popolo was formerly called Porta Flaminia, because it was at the beginning of the Flaminian way […]. Outside this gate, turning right, one finds *Villa Borghese*, a majestic building worthy of being visited by tourists because of the many art objects preserved there. The Porta del Popolo marks a large square called *Piazza del Popolo*, adorned with abundant fountains and obelisks, which as everyone knows, are monuments of a remote antiquity erected by the kings of Egypt to immortalize the memory of their deeds. The superb obelisk that rises in the middle of the square was built in Heliopolis by order of Ramses, King of Egypt, who reigned in 522 B.C. Emperor Augustus had it transported to Rome. Unfortunately, it fell over, breaking, and so it was covered with soil. Pope Sixtus V in 1589 had it unearthed, raising it in the square, after having topped it with a high metal cross. Its four sides are covered with hieroglyphics, that is, mysterious symbols used by the Egyptians to express sacred things and the mysteries of their theology.

At the bottom of the square rises the Church of St. Mary of Miracles, built by Alexander VII, and called so because of a miraculous image of the Madonna that was previously painted under an arch near the Tiber. To the left is another church, St. Mary of Monte Santo, because it was built over another church that belonged to the Carmelites of the province of Monte Santo. It was inaugurated in 1662. Having thus satisfied devotion and curiosity, we got back into the carriage that took us to the home of Princess Potosca, of the Sobieski counts and princes, ancient sovereigns of Poland. The breakfast prepared for us was sumptuous, but too elegant, therefore not very suitable for our appetite. We made do as best we could. However, we were very satisfied with the truly Christian conversation that those ladies held for the time we stayed at their home.
One thing aroused our wonder. After we finished eating, the hostess had a bunch of cigars brought to her and began to smoke. Despite a very animated conversation, she continued with great eagerness to smoke one cigar after another, and this made me uncomfortable, as I was forced to endure the smell of smoke that permeated the whole house. It made me nauseous, proving unbearable […]

Vatican City. Going up to the Dome
We reserved March 8th to visit the famous Dome of St. Peter's. Canon Lantieri had procured the necessary ticket to satisfy this curiosity. The time allowed for the ascent is from 7 to 11:30 in the morning. The weather was clear and therefore favourable. After celebrating the Eucharist at the Church of Jesus, where the Jesuits are, at the altar of St. Francis Xavier, we arrived in Vatican City at 9 o'clock in the company of Mr. Carlo De Maistre. After handing over the ticket, a small door was opened for us, and we began to ascend a very comfortable staircase made like a steep terrace. **As we climbed, we encountered various inscriptions that recall the name and year of all the popes who opened and closed the jubilee years.** Near the terrace landing are written the names of the most famous figures, kings or princes, who ascended to the ball of the dome. We were pleased to also read the names of several of our sovereigns and the royal family.

We took a look at the terrace of the Basilica. It presents itself as a vast paved square where one can play ball, bocce, and similar games. Some people entrusted with the care of the upper part of the temple live here: carpenters, blacksmiths, asphalt workers. Almost in the middle of the terrace is a fountain that is always running, where Rua went to drink. From the square below, we had observed the statues of the Twelve Apostles that adorn the high cornice of the Basilica. From down there, they appeared small, but up close we realised that the big toe of the

foot alone was as thick as a man’s body. From this, one can understand how high we were. We also visited the largest bell, which has a diameter of over three meters, meaning three *trabucchi* in circumference (*about 9 meters, editor’s note*).

A view that was very curious for us was the Vatican Gardens where the pope usually goes for a walk on foot. It is estimated they cover a distance as long as that from Porta Susa to the beginning of Via Po. To the south, vast fields could be seen. Our guide told us:
– *That whole plain was covered with French soldiers when they came to liberate our city from the rebels.* And he pointed out the Basilica of St. Sebastian, San Pietro in Montorio (St. Peter on the Golden Mountain), *Villa Pamphili*, *Villa Corsini*, all buildings that suffered severe damage for having been made battlefields.
A spiral staircase on the sides of the dome led us up to the first railing. From this landing, it seemed we were flying high and distancing ourselves from the ground. The guide opened a small door that led to an internal railing that went around the dome. I wanted to measure it, and walking like a good traveller, I counted 230 steps before completing the circuit. A curiosity: at any point on the railing, even speaking softly with your face turned to the wall, the smallest sound is communicated clearly from one wall to the other. We also noticed that the mosaics of the church, which appeared very small from below, took on a gigantic form from there.
– *Get moving*, the guide urged us, *if we want to see other things*. So we took another spiral staircase and arrived at the second railing. Here it seemed we had risen towards Paradise, and when we entered the internal railing and let our gaze fall on the floor of the basilica, we realised the extraordinary height we had reached. The people who worked or walked down there looked like children. The papal altar, which is topped by a bronze baldachin that surpasses the tallest houses in Turin in height, looked like a simple armchair from there.

The last floor we ascended is the one that rests on the tip of the dome, from where one enjoys perhaps the most majestic view in the world. All around, one’s gaze gets lost in a horizon formed by the limits of human sight. They say that looking east, one can see the Adriatic Sea, and to the west, the Mediterranean. However, we could only glimpse the fog that the rainy weather of the past days had spread everywhere.

There was still the ball, a globe that from the ground looks like one of the balls we use to pass the time. From there it appeared enormous. Those most brave, passing through a perpendicular ladder and walking as if inside a sack, climbed like cats to a

height of two *trabucchi*, or six meters. Some did not have enough courage. We, who were a bit more daring, succeeded. From the ball, everything looks wonderful. I was told it could hold sixteen people. However, it seemed to me that thirty could fit comfortably. Some holes, almost small windows, allow one to observe the city and the countryside. But the great height gives a certain sensation and does not make the view entirely pleasant. We thought it would be cold up there. Quite the opposite: the sun beating down on the bronze of the ball warmed it to such an extent that it felt like we were in the middle of summer. I believe this is one of the reasons why after lunch it is not allowed to go up there: due to the unbearable heat. Here, after discussing various matters concerning the youth of the oratory, satisfied with our venture, as if we had achieved a great victory, we began the descent with slow and grave steps, so as not to break our necks, and without stopping, we reached the ground.

To rest a bit, we went to listen to the sermon that had just begun in the Basilica. We liked the preacher. Good language, pleasant movement, but the theme did not interest us much because it dealt with the observance of civil laws. However, what did not serve to nourish the spirit served very well to give rest to the body. With a little time left, we used it to visit the sacristy, which is a true magnificence worthy of St. Peter. Meanwhile, it was eleven-thirty, and due to fasting and all the walking, we had a great appetite. Therefore, we went to have a small meal. Rua, not satisfied, thought it best to go to lunch, so I remained alone with Mr. Carlo De Maistre, an inseparable companion of that day. After refreshing ourselves a bit, we went to visit Monsignor Borromeo, the “majordomo” of His Holiness, who welcomed us very well. After talking about Piedmont and Milan, his homeland, he noted our names to include us in the catalogue of people who wish to receive the palm from the Holy Father during the Palm Sunday service.

To the famous Museums

Next to the loggia of this prelate, around the courtyard of the papal palace, are the Vatican Museums. We entered and saw truly exceptional things. I will describe only a few. There is a hall of extraordinary length adorned with marble and precious paintings. In the middle of the second arch stands a holy water font about one and a half metres high, made of malachite, one of the most precious marbles in the world. It was a gift from the Emperor of Russia to the Supreme Pontiff. There are various other objects of a similar kind. At the end of that large hall on the left opens a kind of long corridor that houses the Christian museum […] Along the same corridor there is the Vatican Library, where the most famous manuscripts of antiquity are

preserved […]

Going around Rome
From the Vatican heading towards the centre of Rome, we arrived at Scossacavalli square where the writers of the famous periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* work. We stopped to pay them a visit and felt a real pleasure in observing that the main supporters of this publication are from Piedmont. I was now feeling a strong desire to return home, overcoming any hesitation, and we were almost at the Quirinal when Mr. Foccardi saw us pass in front of his shop and called us inside. Given the numerous invitations and so much courtesy, he kept us for quite a while, and when we asked to leave, he said:
– *The carriage is here; I will accompany you home*. Although I reluctantly got into the carriage, I agreed to please him. But Foccardi, wanting to stay with us longer, made us take a long detour so that we arrived home late at night.

Here I was handed a letter. I opened it and read it. *Mr. Abbot Bosco is informed that His Holiness has deigned to admit him to the audience tomorrow, March 9th, from eleven forty-five to one o'clock*. This news, hoped for and much desired, caused an inner revolution in me, and for the whole evening, I could not talk about anything else but the Pope and the audience.

The papal audience. St. Mary above Minerva
March 9th had arrived, the great day of the papal audience. However, first I needed to speak with Cardinal Gaude. Therefore, I went to say Mass in the church of St. Mary above Minerva, where the cardinal had his residence. It was formerly a temple that Pompey the Great had built for the goddess Minerva. It was called St. Mary above Minerva because it was built precisely above the ruins of this temple. In the year 750, Pope Zacharias donated it to a convent of Greek nuns. In 1370, it passed to the Preachers who still officiate it today. The area in front of this church opens up to a square where we admired an Egyptian obelisk with hieroglyphics, whose base rests on the back of a marble elephant. Upon entering, we were able to admire one of the most beautiful sacred buildings in Rome. Under the main altar rests the **body of St. Catherine of Siena**. After celebrating Mass and hastily going to Cardinal Gaude, I spoke to him, and then we set off for the Quirinal.

The young liar
Along the way, we met a boy who graciously asked us for alms, and to let us know his condition, he told us that his father was dead, his mother had five daughters,

and that he knew how to speak Italian, French, and Latin. Surprised, I addressed him in French, to which he replied with a single *oui*, without either understanding what I was saying or articulating any other expressions. I then invited him to speak Latin, and he, without paying attention to my words, began to recite from memory the following words: *ego stabam bene, pater meus mortuus est l'annus passatus et ego sum rimastus poverus*. Mater mea etc. At this point, we could no longer hold back our laughter. However, we then warned him not to tell lies and gave him a baiocco.

The antechamber

Meanwhile, the time for the audience was approaching […] Arriving at the Vatican, we climbed the stairs mechanically. Everywhere there were noble guards, dressed so they seemed like many princes. On the noble floor, they opened the door that led into the papal rooms. Guards and servants, dressed in great luxury, greeted us with deep bows. After handing over the ticket for the audience, we were led from room to room until we reached the papal antechamber Since there were several others waiting, we waited about an hour and a half before being received.

We spent this time observing the people and the place where we were. The Pope's servants were dressed almost like the bishops of our towns. A monsignor, who is given the title of *domestic prelate*, took turns introducing people for the audience as the previous one finished. We admired large halls, well-upholstered and majestic, yet without luxury. A simple green cloth carpet covered the floor. The tapestries were made of red silk but without embellishments. The chairs were made of hard wood. A large chair placed on a somewhat elegant platform indicated that this was the papal hall. All of this pleased us because with our own eyes we were able to realise the falsity of the rumours that some spread against the space and luxury of the papal court. While we were immersed in various thoughts, the bell rang, and the prelate signalled us to advance to present ourselves to Pius IX. At that moment, I was truly confused and had to force myself to remain calm.

Pius IX

Rua followed me carrying a copy of the *Catholic Readings*. Upon entering, we genuflected at the beginning, then halfway down the hall, and finally, the third time, at the feet of the Pope. All apprehension ceased when we saw in the Pontiff the appearance of a kind, venerable man, and at the same time the most beautiful that any painter could depict. We could not kiss his foot because he was seated at a small table; however, we kissed his hand, and Rua, remembering the promise made

to the clerics, kissed it once for himself and once for his companions. Then the Holy Father signalled us to rise and stand before him. I, according to etiquette, would have liked to speak while remaining on my knees.
– *No*, he said, *you may rise.* It is worth noting here that when we announced ourselves to the Pope, our name was read incorrectly. In fact, instead of writing Bosco, Bosser was written, so the Pope began to question me:
– *Are you from Piedmont?*
– *Yes, Your Holiness, I am from Piedmont, and at this moment I feel the greatest consolation of my life, being at the feet of the Vicar of Christ*.
– *What do you do?*
– *Your Holiness, I am involved in the education of youth and the Catholic Readings.*
– *The education of youth has been a useful apostolate in all times, but today it is much more so. There is also another in Turin who is concerned with young people.* Then I noticed that the Pope had a wrong name in front of him, but, without knowing how, he also realised that I was not Bosser, but Bosco. Thus he took on a much more cheerful demeanour and asked many things regarding the youth, the clerics, the oratories […] Then with a smiling face he said to me:
– *I remember the offering sent to me in Gaeta and the tender feelings with which those young people accompanied it. I took the opportunity to express to him the attachment of our young people to his person and asked him to accept a copy of the Catholic Readings:*
– *Your Holiness, I said, I offer you a copy of the booklets printed until now in the name of the governance. The binding is the work of the young people of our school.*
– How many are these young people?
– Your Holiness, the young people of the house are about two hundred, the binders are fifteen.
– *Good*, he replied, *I want to send a medal to each one.* Then going into another room, after a few brief moments he returned carrying fifteen small medals of the Conception:
– *These will be for the young binders,* he said as he handed them to me. Turning then to Rua, he gave him a larger one saying:
– *This is for your companion.* Then turning again to me, he handed me a small box that contained a larger one:
– *And this is for you.* Having knelt to receive the gifts, the Holy Father invited us to rise, and then believing that we wanted to leave, he was about to dismiss us when I began to speak to him like this:
– *Your Holiness, I have something particular to communicate to you.*
– *That's fine,* he replied […].

The Holy Father is very quick to understand questions and very prompt in giving answers, so with him, it takes five minutes to discuss what would require over an hour with others. However, the Pope's kindness and my strong desire to stay with him extended the audience by over half an hour, a considerable time both regarding his person and regarding the hour of lunch which was delayed for our sake […].

The Janiculum

At 1:30 p.m. on March 10, Father Giacinto of the Discalced Carmelites came to pick us up with a carriage to take us to the Basilica of St. Pancras and San Pietro in Montorio. These are two churches located on the Janiculum, named so because of Janus, who is said to have lived there. At the top of this hill beyond the Tiber is the Basilica of St. Pancras, built by Pope Felix II in 485, about 100 years after the martyrdom of Pancras. General Narses, having defeated the Goths, made a solemn procession together with Pope Pelagius from St. Pancras to St. Peter. St. Gregory the Great, who had great veneration for this church, celebrated Mass there several times and held some homilies, finally donating it to the Benedictine monks. In 1673 it was entrusted to the Discalced Carmelites with the attached convent and a seminary for the missions to the Indies […]

Under the main altar, there is another underground altar where the body of the Saint was once kept, protected by an iron railing. It was customary to bring those suspected of perjury before this railing, for if they were guilty, they would be seized by a noticeable trembling or some other accident.

The Catacombs

– *Come with me,* said Father Giacinto, *we will go to the catacombs*. He had prepared a lamp for each of us. We began to follow him. In the middle of the church, he pointed to a trapdoor on the floor. When he lifted the lid, a dark and deep cavity appeared: the catacombs began. At the entrance, it was written in Latin: *"In this place the martyr of Christ Pancras was beheaded."* Here we are in the catacombs. Imagine long corridors now narrower and lower, now higher and more spacious, now cut by other corridors, now descending, now ascending, and you will get the first idea of these undergrounds. On the right and left, there are small graves dug parallel in the tuff. Here, Christians were buried in ancient times, especially martyrs. Those who had given their lives for the faith were designated with particular emblems. The palm was a sign of victory over tyrants; the ampoule indicated that they had shed blood for the faith; the "χ" meant that they had died in the peace of

the Lord or had suffered for Christ. In others, the instruments with which they were martyred appeared. Sometimes these emblems were enclosed in the small tomb of the saint. When persecutions were not too severe, the name and surname of the martyr were written along with a few lines highlighting some important circumstance of their life. […]
– *Here*, the guide said to us, *this is the place where St. Pancras was buried, next to him St. Dionysius, his uncle, and nearby another relative.* Then we visited some graves gathered in a small room whose walls bore ancient inscriptions that we could not read. In the middle of the vault, there was a painting of a young man who seemed to represent St. Pancras […]

This time the guide pointed out a crypt to us. Crypt, a Greek word, that means depth. It is a space larger than usual where Christians used to gather during times of persecution to listen to the Word, attend Mass, and sacred functions. On one side, there is still an ancient altar where it is possible to celebrate. Generally, it was the tomb of some martyr that served as an altar. After a bit of walking, we were shown the chapel where Pope St. Felix used to rest and celebrate the Eucharist. His tomb is not far away. Everywhere we saw human skeletons reduced to pieces by time. Our guide assured us that soon we would arrive at a place where slabs with intact inscriptions were preserved.

But we were very tired, also because the underground air and the difficulties of the path – everyone had to be careful not to bump their heads, not to hit their shoulders, and not to slip with their feet – had fatigued us quite a bit. The guide warned us that the undergrounds are numerous and some extend up to fifteen/twenty miles in length. If we had gone alone, we could have sung *requiescant in pace*, because it would have been very difficult to find the way back to the surface. However, our guide was very practical and soon led us back to the point from where we had started […]

San Pietro in Montorio
Once again in the carriage with Father Giacinto, we headed down from the Janiculum to go to *San Pietro in Montorio*. The word is a corrupted version of *“mount of gold”,* because here the soil and gravel take on a yellow colour similar to gold. It was also called *Castro Aureo*, fortress of gold, for the remains of the fortress of Ancus Marcius that still exist on the top. It is one of the churches founded by Constantine the Great, rich in statues, paintings, and marble. Between the church and the attached convent stands a round-shaped building called the Tempietto of

Bramante. It is one of Bramante's most significant works. It was built on the site where St. Peter was martyred. At the back, a staircase leads to a circular underground chapel, in the middle of which there is a hole where a lamp burns continuously. It is the place where the top of the cross on which St. Peter was nailed upside down was inserted. The church is located where the Janiculum ends and the Vatican begins.

Near San Pietro in Montorio is the magnificent Paolina Fountain, which Paul V had built in 1612. Water flows from three columns that resemble a river. It comes from Bramario, a place 35 miles from Rome. This water, cascading down, is used to turn millstones and other machines, and it branches out advantageously at various points in the city […].

An unfortunate event

On March 11, we were busy writing and running errands. The episode of getting lost in Rome deserves mention. I went to visit Monsignor Pacca, the domestic prelate of His Holiness. On the way back, I was accompanied by Father Bresciani, having sent Rua to look for Father Botandi at Ponte Sisto. Good Bresciani took me to the Academy of the Sapienza and then pointed out where to go to reach the Quirinal: – *Cross this area, then always keep to the right.* Instead of going right, I went left, so after an hour of walking, I found myself in Piazza del Popolo, almost a mile from home. Poor me! If only I had Rua with me, we could have consoled each other, but I was alone. The weather was cloudy, a strong wind was blowing, and it was starting to rain. What to do? I was reluctant to sleep in the middle of that square, so with all patience, I climbed up to the Pincian Hill, named after the palace of a gentleman called Pincio […]. This hill is not very populated and is not one of the seven hills of Rome […]

St. Andrew of the Valley

On Friday, the 12th, I went to celebrate Mass at St. Andrew of the Valley to distinguish it from other churches dedicated to the same Apostle. The word Valley was added because the basilica is located at the lowest point of Rome and also because of a palace belonging to the Valle family. In ancient times, the church was dedicated to St. Sebastian, who suffered martyrdom here. Nearby, another church dedicated to St. Louis, King of France, was built. But in the year 1591, a wealthy gentleman named Gesualdo had it renovated, completely renewing its design. It is one of the first churches in Rome. Its dome measures 64 palms in diameter, and therefore, after St. Peter's in the Vatican, it is the widest dome of all the others in

the city.
The first chapel on the left upon entering has an iron gate that indicates the point of the sewer where it is believed the body of the martyr *St. Sebastian* was thrown. Almost opposite this church is the Stoppani palace, which served as the residence of Emperor Charles V when he came to Rome, as indicated by an inscription on the wall at the foot of the stairs.

St. Gregory the Great
An hour and a half after noon, with Mr. Francesco De Maistre, our guide, we set off to visit the Church of St. Gregory the Great. It is built on a part of the Caelian Hill, formerly known as *Clivus Scauri*, meaning the descent of Scaurus, and it was the house inhabited by St. Gregory and his followers. He was the one who converted it into a monastery, where he lived until the year 590, initially as a simple monk, then as Abbot. When he was elected pope (in 590), he dedicated that building to the apostle St. Andrew, transforming part of the premises for use as a church. After his death, it was dedicated to him.

It is certainly one of the most beautiful churches in Rome. The first chapel on the left as you enter is dedicated to St. Silvia, the mother of St. Gregory. The last chapel on the right is that of the Sacrament, on whose altar St. Gregory himself celebrated. […]. This altar, venerable for the title and patronage of the holy Pope, became famous throughout the world due to the privileges granted by many popes. *It happened that a monk from the monastery, having been commanded by the saint, offered Mass for thirty consecutive days in suffrage for the soul of a deceased brother, and another monk saw him released from the pains of purgatory.*

Next to this chapel, there is another smaller one, where St. Gregory would retreat to rest. The exact spot where his bed was located is still shown. Nearby is the marble chair on which he sat both when he wrote and when he announced the Word of God to the people.
After passing the main altar, one encounters the chapel that houses a very ancient and miraculous image of the Madonna. It is believed to be the one that the Saint kept in his house, and every time he passed by it, he greeted it saying *“Hail, Mary”.* One day, however, the good Pope, in a hurry due to some urgent matters, did not address the usual greeting to the Virgin as he left. And she gave him this sweet reproach: “*Hail, Gregory*“, with which words she invited him not to forget that greeting which was so pleasing to her.

In another chapel, the statue of St. Gregory stands out, a work designed and directed by Michelangelo Buonarroti. The Saint is seated on a throne with a dove near his ear, recalling what Peter the Deacon, a relative of the Saint, asserts, namely that whenever Gregory preached or wrote, a dove always spoke to him in his ear. In the centre of the chapel is a large marble table on which the Pope would offer food to twelve poor people every day, serving them with his own hands. One day, an angel in the form of a young man sat at the table with the others, and then suddenly disappeared. From then on, the Saint increased the number of the poor he fed to thirteen. Thus, this is how the custom of placing thirteen pilgrims at the table that the Pope serves by his own hand every Holy Thursday originated. Above the table is inscribed the following distich: "*Here Gregory fed twelve poor; an angel sat at the table and completed the number to thirteen.*"

Saints John and Paul

Exiting this church and turning right, one encounters that of Saints John and Paul. Emperor Jovian allowed the monk St. Pammachius to build it in 400 in honour of these two martyr brothers. It was built over their dwelling, precisely where they suffered martyrdom. It was later restored by Pope St. Symmachus around 444 […] Upon entering, a majestic building appears. In the middle, an iron gate marks the place where the saints were killed. Their bodies, enclosed in a precious urn, rest under the main altar. In the adjacent chapel, under the altar, the body of Blessed Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionists, is kept, to whom the church is entrusted. This servant of God is from Piedmont, born in Castellazzo in the diocese of Alexandria. He died in 1775 at the age of 82. The many miracles that occur in Rome and elsewhere through his intercession have led to the growth of the congregation of the Passionists, so named because of the fourth vow they take, namely to promote veneration for the passion of the Lord.

One of those religious, a Genoese, Brother Andrew, after accompanying us to see the most important things in the church, took us to the convent, a beautiful building that houses about eighty fathers, mostly from Piedmont.
– *This*, Brother Andrew told us, *is the room where our holy Founder died*. We entered and, in devout recollection, admired the place from which his soul departed to go to heaven.
– *There is the chair, the clothes, the books, and other objects that were used by the Blessed. Everything is kept under seal and is distributed as relics to the Christian faithful.*
That room is now a chapel where Mass is celebrated.

Arches of Constantine and Titus

After greeting the courteous Brother Andrew, we set off towards St. Lawrence in Lucina. But after a little while, we found ourselves under the Arch of Constantine. It has been preserved almost intact. An inscription from the Senate and the Roman people indicates that it was dedicated to Emperor Constantine on the occasion of the victory over the tyrant Maxentius. This Emperor, having become a Christian, had a statue placed on the arch with a cross in hand in memory of the cross that appeared to him before the army, to remind the whole world that he professed the religion of the Crucified Jesus.

After walking a bit further, there is another arch, the Arch of Titus. There are three arches in Rome, and that of Titus is the oldest and most elegant. It is adorned with bas-reliefs that commemorate the various victories achieved by that brave warrior: among them is carved the candelabrum of the Temple of Jerusalem in memory of the fall of that city and its temple. Under this arch passed the famous *Via Sacra*, one of the oldest in Rome, so named because sacred things were carried upon it every month to the Fortress, and the Augurs walked along it to receive their responses.

Upon arriving at *St. Lawrence in Lucina*, we could not enter due to the work being done there […] This church is one of the largest parishes in Rome and was erected by Sixtus III with the consent of Emperor Valentinian in honour of St. Lawrence the martyr. To distinguish it from other churches erected to this deacon, it was named in Lucina either after the holy martyr of that name or perhaps from the place that was called as such. Attached to this church towards the street is the Ottobuoni palace, built around the year 1300 over the ruins of a large ancient building called the *Palace of Domitian*. Being tired and with lunchtime approaching, we returned home […].

St. Mary of the Angels

[…] On March 13, the Lenten station was at St. Mary of the Angels, and we went there both to gain the plenary indulgence and to pray to God for our house. This church is distinguished from another with the same name with the addition of the Baths of Diocletian because it is built on the site where the famous baths of Emperor Diocletian once stood. The supreme pontiff Pius IV commissioned Michelangelo Buonarroti, who with his immense genius was able to transform part of those superb buildings into a church. In one of the halls of the baths, there was already a small church dedicated to St. Cyril the Martyr. This was enclosed in the new church, which the Pope dedicated to St. Mary of the Angels, to please the Duke and King of Sicily, a devoted servant of the Angels, who greatly assisted in its

construction.

On the day of the Lenten station, the church is adorned with special elegance, and the most significant relics are exposed for public veneration. In a chapel next to the main altar, there was a reliquary with many relics, among which we noted the bodies of St. Prosper, St. Fortunatus, St. Cyril, as well as the heads of St. Justin and St. Maximus, martyrs, and many others. Having thus satisfied our devotion, we arrived home around six, quite tired and with a good appetite.

St. Mary of the Oak

On Sunday, March 14, we celebrated at home, then we went to visit an oratory, according to the indications given by Marquis Patrizi. The church where the young people gather is called St. Mary of the Oak. Here is its origin, which dates back to the time of Julius II. An image of Mary had been painted on a tile by a certain Battista Calvaro, who placed it above an oak tree in his vineyard in Viterbo. This image remained hidden for sixty years until, in 1467, it began to manifest with many graces and miracles, so that the faithful who went to visit it, with their offerings, raised a church and a monastery. Pope Julius II wished that there would also be a temple dedicated to Mary of the Oak in Rome, which is the one we are talking about.

Upon entering the church and arriving in the spacious sacristy, we were delighted by the sight of about forty young boys. Due to their lively behaviour, they resemble very much the mischievous boys from our oratory. Their sacred functions are all performed in the morning. Mass, confession, catechism, and a brief instruction are what is done for them […]

After noon, the youth go to St. John of the Florentines, another oratory where there is only recreation without church functions. We went there and saw about a hundred young people having a great time. Their games were *tombola* (a raffle) and *campana* (hopscotch), known to us as well. They also play a game called "*buco*," which consists of five fairly large holes into which two chestnuts or something else are placed. From a distance of six paces, a ball is rolled. Whoever manages to get it into one of the holes wins what is inside. We were very sorry that they had nothing but recreation. If there were a priest among them, he could do good for their souls, as there is a great need for it. It saddened us even more because we found them well-disposed. Several were pleased to talk with us, kissing the hands of both me and Rua, who, against his will, was forced to agree […]

Upon returning home, we received a visit from Monsignor *Merode*, the Chamberlain of His Holiness. After some pleasantries, he announced to me that the Holy Father was inviting me to preach the spiritual exercises to the female inmates in the prisons near *St. Mary of the Angels at the Baths of Diocletian*. Every desire of the Pope is a command for me, and so I accepted with true pleasure […]

At the women's prison

At two in the afternoon, I went to see the superior of the prison to arrange the day and time to begin the preaching. She told me:
– *If it is good for you, you can start right away, as the women are in church and there is no one to preach.* So I started immediately, and the week was almost entirely dedicated to this ministry. The correctional facility is called *"At the Baths of Diocletian"* because it is located in the same place where the baths of that famous emperor were. There were 260 inmates housed there, guilty of serious crimes and sentenced to prison […]. The exercises went satisfactorily. The simple and popular preaching that we use among ourselves proved fruitful in this prison. On Saturday, after the last sermon, the mother superior announced to me with great pleasure that none of the inmates had failed to approach the Sacraments.

Two episodes

A pleasant episode occurred to the Holy Father this week. Count Spada went to visit him, and this conversation ensued:
– *Holiness, I would like to ask you for a memento of this visit.*
– *Ask for whatever you want, and I will try to satisfy you.*
– *I would like something extraordinary.*
– *Well, go ahead and ask.*
– *Holiness, I would like your snuffbox as a keepsake.*
– *But it is full of very poor quality tobacco.*
– *It doesn't matter. I will cherish it dearly.*
– *Take it, I gladly give it to you as a gift.* Count Spada left happier with that snuffbox than with a great treasure. It is simple, made of buffalo horn, joined with two brass rings, and is worth no more than four coins, but it is very precious because of its origin. The good count shows it to his friends as an object worthy of veneration […]

Another anecdote was told to me about this venerable Pontiff. Last year, while the Holy Father was traveling through his states, he found himself near Viterbo. A girl with a bundle of wood, seeing that the papal carriage had stopped, thought that those gentlemen wanted to buy her bundle. She ran towards them:

– *Sir*, she said to the Holy Father, *buy it, the wood is very dry.*
– *We do not need it*, replied the Pope.
– *Buy it, I will give it to you for three baiocchi.*
– *Take the three baiocchi and keep your bundle.* The Holy Father gave her three *scudi*, then prepared to get back into the carriage. But the girl wanted the Holy Father to take her bundle.
– *Take it, you will be happy; there is plenty of room in your carriage.* While the Pope and his court laughed at such a deal, the girl's mother, who was working in a nearby field, rushed over shouting:
– *Holy Father, Holy Father, forgive her; this poor girl is my daughter. She does not know you. Have pity on us, for we are in great misery.* The Pope added another six *scudi* and continued on his way […]

St. Paul Outside the Walls
On Sunday, March 22, Don Bosco went to the Cardinal Vicar, the Most Eminent Costantino Patrizi […] After leaving the Vicariate, he wandered to St. Paul Outside the Walls to venerate the tomb of the great Apostle of the Gentiles and admire the wonders of that immense temple. After a mile of walking, he arrived at the famous place called **Ad Aquas Salvias**, where St. Paul shed his blood for Jesus Christ. Right at this point, where there are three miraculous springs of water, which gushed from the ground where the saint's severed head made three leaps, a church has been built. Don Bosco also prayed in the nearby church of **Sancta Maria Scala Coeli**, octagonal in shape, built on the cemetery of St. Zenon, a tribune who suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, along with 10,203 of his comrades […]

The Colosseum
On March 23, his astonished gaze contemplated the gigantic ruins of the Flavian amphitheatre or Colosseum, oval in shape with a 527-meter external circumference, and still standing fifty meters high in some places. In its time of splendour, it was covered in marble, adorned with colonnades, hundreds of statues, obelisks, and bronze chariots. Inside it supported immense terraces all around, which could hold about 200,000 people, to witness the fights of wild beasts and gladiators, and the slaughter of thousands and thousands of martyrs. Don Bosco entered the arena of the shows, which measures 241 meters in circumference […]

St. Clement
On the 24th, Don Bosco went to the Basilica of St. Clement to venerate the relics of the fourth pope after St. Peter, and those of St. Ignatius the martyr, Bishop of

Antioch, as well as to admire the architecture of the ancient three-nave church. In the middle nave, in front of the Altar of the Confession, a white marble enclosure delineates the choir for the minor clergy. It is equipped with two pulpits, one for the singing of the Gospel, near which rises the small column of the paschal candle, and the other for the reading of the epistle. Next to the latter was the lectern for the singers and readers of the prophecies and other books of scripture. Around the apse are the seats of the priests, and at the back in the centre on three steps, the episcopal chair […].

Don Bosco proceeded from there to the Church of the Four Crowned Martyrs to visit the tombs of the martyrs Severus, Severinus, Carpophorus, and Victorinus, who were killed under Diocletian. He then passed to St. John in front of the Latin Gate, near which stands a chapel on the spot where St. John the Evangelist was immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil. From there he made his way to the little church of **Quo Vadis**, so named because at that point the Lord appeared to St. Peter as he was leaving Rome to escape persecution:
– *Lord, where are you going?* exclaimed the astonished Apostle. And Jesus replied:
– *I come to be crucified again.* St. Peter understood, and returned to Rome where martyrdom awaited him. From this little temple, Don Bosco retraced his steps, after taking a look at the Appian Way, along which many mausoleums from pagan times can be counted, recalling the end of every human greatness.

Don Bosco… Salesian!
A charming scene occurred on the morning of March 25. Don Bosco, having crossed the Tiber, saw about thirty boys having fun in a small square. Without hesitation, he went among them, who, having suspended their games, looked at him in wonder. He then raised his hand holding a medal between his fingers, and exclaimed:
– *There are too many of you, and I regret not having enough medals to give one to each of you.* Gathering courage, they stretched out their hands and shouted loudly:
– *It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter… to me, to me!* Don Bosco added:
– *Well, since I don't have one for everyone, I want to give this medal to the best one. Who among you is the best?*
– *It's me, it's me! they all shouted together.* He continued:
– *How can I decide if you are all equally good? Then I will give it to the most mischievous! Who among you is the most mischievous?*
– *It's me, it's me!* they responded with deafening shouts.
The Marquis Patrizi and his friends, at a certain distance, smiled, moved and astonished to see Don Bosco treating those boys whom he had met for the first

time, so familiarly, and exclaimed:
– *Here is another St. Philip Neri, a friend of youth.* Don Bosco indeed, as if he were an old friend of those children, continued to ask them if they had already attended Mass, which church they usually went to, and if they frequented the oratories that were in those areas […] The dialogue was lively. Don Bosco, after encouraging them to always be good Christians, promised that he would pass through that square again and would give a medal to each one. Then, affectionately bidding them farewell, he returned to his companions showing the medal. He had given nothing to the boys, yet he had left them happy.

St. Stephen in the Round
On March 26, Don Bosco returned to the Caelian Hill in the spacious church of St. Stephen in the Round, named for its shape. The circular cornice is supported by 56 columns. All around the walls are painted scenes of the atrocious tortures with which the martyrs were torn apart. It is adorned with mosaics from the 7th century, representing Jesus crucified, with some saints, and preserves the bodies of two confessors of the faith: St. Primus and St. Felician. From there, Don Bosco passed by St. Mary in Domnica, or *alla Navicella*, for a marble boat that stands in the square in front. It has three naves divided by 18 columns and contains mosaics from the 9th century. Among these, the Virgin is in the place of honour among many angels, and at her feet kneels Pope Paschal […]

Meanwhile, the Holy Father had expressed the desire for Don Bosco to attend the devout and magnificent spectacle of the Holy Week functions in the Vatican. He then entrusted Monsignor Borromeo with the task of inviting him in his name and procuring him a place from which he could comfortably attend the sacred rites. The monsignor searched for him all day without success. Finally, at a very late hour, the messenger found him at the De Maistre house where he had returned after a day of visits. Announcing that he came on the Pope's orders, he was introduced and then he presented Don Bosco with the invitation letter, with which he was permitted to receive the blessed palm from the very hands of the Pope. Don Bosco read it immediately and exclaimed that he would go with great pleasure.

Don Bosco's Roman Easter. Palm Sunday
On Sunday, March 28, with the cleric Rua, he entered the Basilica of St. Peter long before the functions began. Count Carlo De Maistre accompanied him to his place, in the diplomatic gallery. He was very attentive as he knew the importance of the Church's ceremonies. Next to him was a Protestant English *milord*, amazed at such

solemnity. At a certain point, a singer from the Sistine Chapel performed a solo so well that Don Bosco was moved to tears, and that *milord* turning to him, exclaimed in Latin, as he did not know how to make himself understood in another language:
– *Post hoc paradisus!* That gentleman, after some time, converted to Catholicism and not only that, but he became a priest and bishop. After blessing the palms, the diplomatic corps took turns passing before the Pontiff, and each ambassador and minister received the palm from his hands. Don Bosco and the cleric Rua also knelt at the feet of the Pope and received the palm. This is what Pius IX wanted: was not Don Bosco an ambassador of God? The cleric Rua, having returned to the Rosminians, gave his to Father Pagani, who greatly appreciated it […]

Don Bosco as a *caudatario*

Cardinal Marini, one of the two assistants to the throne, took Don Bosco on as a *caudatario* so that he could attend all the functions of Holy Week. Thus, in violet vestments, he stood almost beside the Pope the whole time, and was able to enjoy the Gregorian chants and the music of Allegri and Palestrina.
On Holy Thursday, Cardinal Mario Mattei, being the oldest of the suburbicarian bishops, officiated instead of the dean cardinal who was impeded. Don Bosco followed the Pontiff, who was carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession to the Pauline chapel, to place it inside the specially prepared urn. He accompanied him to the Vatican loggia from which the Pope blesses Rome and the world. He attended the washing of the feet performed by the Pontiff on thirteen priests, and participated in their commemorative dinner, served by the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The *Urbi et Orbi* blessing

[…] On April 4th, the artillery salutes from Castel S. Angelo announced Easter day. Pius IX descended into the Basilica around ten for the pontifical mass. Immediately after, preceded by a procession of bishops and cardinals, he went to the Loggia for the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. Don Bosco, with Cardinal Marini and a bishop, remained for a moment near the windowsill covered by a magnificent drape, on which three golden Papal Tiaras had been placed. The cardinal said to Don Bosco:
– *Observe what a sight!* Don Bosco looked around the square with astonished eyes. A crowd of 200,000 people was packed with their faces turned towards the Loggia. The roofs, windows, and terraces of all the houses were occupied. The French army filled part of the space between the obelisk and the steps of St. Peter’s. The battalions of the papal infantry were lined up to the right and left. Behind them were the cavalry and artillery. Thousands of carriages were stopped on both sides of the square, near Bernini’s porticoes, and at the back near the houses. Especially

on those for hire stood groups of people who seemed to dominate the square. There was a loud chatter, the stomping of horses, an incredible confusion. No one can imagine such a spectacle.

Trapped

Don Bosco, who had left the Pope in the Basilica while he was venerating the significant relics, believed that he would take a while to appear. Absorbed in contemplating so many people from every nation, he did not notice the approach of the gestatorial chair on which the Pope was seated. He found himself in a difficult position. Squeezed between the chair and the balustrade, he could barely move. All around him cardinals, bishops, ceremonial attendants, and seat attendants were crowded, so he could see no way to get out. Turning his face to the Pope was inappropriate, turning his back to him was uncivil and remaining in the centre of the balcony was ridiculous. Unable to do better, he turned sideways. Then the tip of one of the Pope's feet came to rest on his shoulder.

At that moment, a solemn silence reigned over the great square so that one could hear even the buzz of a fly. The horses themselves stood still. Don Bosco, completely unperturbed, attentive to every little detail, observed that a single neigh, and the sound of a clock striking the hours, could be heard while the Pope recited the customary prayers. Meanwhile, seeing that the floor of the Loggia was strewn with leaves and flowers, he bent down, and picking up some flowers, he placed them between the pages of the book he was holding. Finally, Pius IX stood up to give his blessing. He opened his arms, raised his hands to heaven, stretched them over the multitude that bowed their heads, and his voice, singing the formula of the blessing, resonant, powerful, solemn, could be heard beyond Piazza Rusticucci and from the attic of the palace of the writers of the Civiltà Cattolica.

The crowd responded with an immense ovation. Then Cardinal Ugolini read the Brief of the plenary indulgence in Latin, and immediately after, Cardinal Marini repeated it in Italian. Don Bosco had knelt, and when he got back up, the papal procession had already disappeared. All the bells were ringing in celebration, the cannon thundered from Castel Sant'Angelo, and the military bands sounded their trumpets. Cardinal Marini, accompanied by the attendant, descended and went towards his carriage. As soon as it moved, Don Bosco felt a wave of nausea from the motion that turned his stomach. Unable to resist any longer, he expressed his discomfort to the cardinal. By his advice, he got into the carriage with the coachman, but the malaise did not diminish, so he got down to walk on foot. Being in a violet robe, he

would have been an object of wonder or mockery if he had crossed Rome like that. Therefore, the secretary kindly got down from the carriage and accompanied him to the palace […].

The memory of the Pope

On April 6th, Don Bosco returned for a private audience with Pius IX along with the cleric Rua and the theologian Murialdo, admitted to the Vatican through the intercession of Don Bosco himself. They entered the antechamber at nine in the evening, and immediately Don Bosco was introduced. As soon as the Pope saw him, he said with a serious face:

– *Abbot Bosco, where did you go on Easter day during the papal blessing? There, in front of the Pope, with your shoulder under his foot as if the Pontiff needed to be supported by Don Bosco.*

– *Holy Father,* he replied calmly and humbly, *I was caught by surprise and I ask for forgiveness if I offended you in any way!*

– *And you also add the affront of asking me if you offended me?* Don Bosco looked at the Pope and thought he was pretending: a smile seemed to appear on his lips. *But what made you think of picking flowers at that moment? It took all of Pius IX's seriousness not to burst out laughing. […]*

– *Now, Most Blessed Father,* Don Bosco pleaded, *please suggest a maxim that I can repeat to my young people as a reminder of the Vicar of Christ.*

– *The presence of God!* replied the Pope. *Tell your young people to always regulate themselves with this thought!… And you have nothing to ask me? Surely you desire something as well.*

– *Holy Father, Your Holiness has deigned to grant me what I asked for, now I have nothing left but to thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

– *Yet, yet, you still desire something.* Thereupon Don Bosco stood there as if suspended without saying a word. The Pontiff added:

– *How could that be? Do you not wish to make your young people happy when you return to them?*

– *Holiness, yes.*

– *Then wait.* A few moments earlier, the theologian Murialdo, the cleric Rua, and Don Cerutti from Varazze, Chancellor in the Archdiocesan Curia of Genoa, had entered that room. They were astonished by the familiarity with which the Pope treated Don Bosco and what they saw at that moment. The Pope had opened the chest, taken out a handful of gold coins, and without counting them, handed them to Don Bosco saying:

– *Take these and then give your boys a good snack*. Everyone can imagine the

impression that this act of kindness from Pius IX made on Don Bosco, who, with great affection, also addressed the ecclesiastics who had arrived, and blessed the crowns, crucifixes, and other objects of devotion presented to him, and gave everyone a commemorative medal.

The educational challenge of Don Bosco

Among the cardinals who came to pay their respects there was His Eminence Tosti, at whose invitation he had spoken to the young people of the San Michele Hospice. Satisfied with Don Bosco's courtesy, since it was time for his walk, he wanted to have him as a companion, so both got into the carriage. They began to talk about the most suitable system for the education of young people. Don Bosco had come to believe that the students of that hospice did not have familiarity with their superiors, rather, they feared them. This was rather unpleasant, since the educators were priests. Therefore, he said:

– You see, Eminence, it is impossible to educate young people well if they do not have confidence in their superiors.

– But how, the cardinal replied, can this confidence be gained?

– By making sure they come close to us, removing any reason that drives them away.

– And how can we do to bring them closer to us?

– By approaching them ourselves, trying to adapt ourselves to their tastes, making ourselves similar to them. Do you want us to try? Tell me: where in Rome can we find a good number of boys?

– In Piazza Termini and in Piazza del Popolo, replied the cardinal.

– Well then, let's go to Piazza del Popolo.

The cardinal gave the order to the coachman. As soon as they arrived, Don Bosco got out of the carriage, and the prelate stayed to observe him. Seeing a group of young boys playing, he approached them, but the mischievous ones ran away. Then he called them with good manners, and after some hesitation, they came closer. Don Bosco gave them some little gifts, asked about their families, inquired what game they were playing, and invited them to continue, first stopping to watch them, then starting to take part. Then others, who had been watching from afar, rushed in from all corners of the square around the priest, who welcomed everyone lovingly and had a kind word and a little gift for all. He asked if they were good, if they said their prayers and if they went to confession. When he wanted to leave, they followed him for quite a distance, only leaving him when he got back into the carriage. The cardinal was amazed.

– *Did you see?*
– *You were right!* exclaimed the cardinal […]

The final visits
Don Bosco's final visits were reserved for the Confession of St. Peter and the Catacombs. After praying in the Basilica of St. Sebastian, having seen two of the arrows that wounded the holy tribune and the column to which he was tied, he descended into the underground galleries that housed the bones of thousands and thousands of martyrs, and where for many nights St. Philip Neri kept vigil in prayer. He then went to the nearby Catacombs of St. Callistus. There he was awaited by the Knight G. B. De Rossi, who had discovered them, to whom he had been introduced by Monsignor di San Marzano.
Anyone who enters those places feels such emotion that it stays with them for a lifetime. Don Bosco was absorbed in holy thoughts while walking through those undergrounds, where the first Christians, through Mass, communal prayers, the singing of psalms and prophecies, the Eucharistic Communion, and listening to bishops and popes had found the necessary strength to face martyrdom. It is impossible to contemplate with dry eyes those loculi that had enclosed the bloodied or burned bodies of so many heroes of faith, the tombs of fourteen popes who had given their lives to testify to what they taught, and the crypt of St. Cecilia.

Don Bosco observed the ancient frescoes depicting Jesus Christ and the Eucharist and the images representing the marriage of the Blessed Virgin Mary with St. Joseph, the Assumption of Mary into heaven, the Mother of God with the Child in her arms or on her knees. He was enchanted by the sense of modesty that shone in these images, in which primitive Christian art had managed to reproduce the incomparable beauty of the soul and the highest ideal of moral perfection that should be attributed to the Virgin. There were also other figures of saints and martyrs. Don Bosco exited the catacombs at 6 in the evening. He had entered at 8 in the morning […]

Towards home
On April 14th, Don Bosco left Rome with the cleric Rua, happy that the foundations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales had been laid […] He then took a hired carriage, made a brief stop in the town of Palo where he found the innkeeper perfectly free from fever: his healing had been instantaneous. He would never forget the incident, and around 1875 or 76, having arrived in Genoa for business reasons, he wanted to continue his journey to Turin. He asked and learned by

telegraph that Don Bosco was at the Oratory, so he went there. Yet, on that day he was having lunch at Mr. Carlo Occelletti. He then went there to find him, making endless festivities. Mr. Occelletti always remembered with great pleasure the story he heard about that healing. Arriving in Civitavecchia and having visited the papal delegate, Don Bosco went to the port to embark.

The waves this time were calm and the weather was beautiful, so he was able to disembark in Livorno, spend time with some friends, and visit some churches. Resuming the sea at dusk, Fr. Rua recalls how the ship arrived in the port of Genoa at the rising of a splendid dawn that illuminated the magnificent panorama of the superb city. As soon as Don Bosco set foot on land, he went to the college of the Artigianelli, where Don Montebruno and Mr. Giuseppe Canale were waiting for him. After noon, he boarded a train. While crossing the city, he experienced a pleasant surprise. When the bells rang for the *Angelus*, many people in the streets and squares uncovered their heads, and the porters had also risen from their benches to recite the prayer. He recounted this several times for the edification of his students. He arrived in Turin on April 16th, welcomed by the young people with such celebration and affection that no father could wish for more from his own children.