

# Visit to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome (also in 3D)

*The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome is a prominent church for the city, located in the Castro Pretorio district, on Via Marsala, across the street from Termini Station. It serves as both a parish church and a cardinal title, with the Central Headquarters of the Salesian Congregation adjacent to it. Its patronal feast is celebrated on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Its proximity to Termini makes it a visible landmark for those arriving in the city, with the gilded statue on the bell tower standing out on the horizon as a symbol of blessing for residents and travellers alike.*

## **Origins and History**

The idea of building a church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus dates back to Pope Pius IX, who laid the first stone in 1870 for a building initially intended to honour St Joseph. However, by 1871, the pontiff decided to dedicate the new church to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was the second major church dedicated to the Sacred Heart after the one in Lisbon, Portugal, begun in 1779 and consecrated in 1789, and predating the famous *Sacré-Cœur* in Montmartre, Paris, France, which was started in 1875 and consecrated in 1919.

Construction began under difficult circumstances: with Rome's annexation to the Kingdom of Italy (1870), work halted due to lack of funds. It was only through the intervention of St John Bosco, at the Pope's invitation, that construction definitively resumed in 1880, thanks to his tireless efforts to collect donations across Europe and gather resources for the building's completion. The architect commissioned was Francesco Vespignani, then "Architect of the Sacred Palaces" under Leo XIII, who saw the project through. The consecration

took place on 14 May 1887, marking the end of the first construction phase.

From its inception, the church has served a parish function: the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio was established on 2 February 1879 by the vicarial decree "*Postremis hisce temporibus*". Later, Pope Benedict XV elevated it to the dignity of a minor basilica on 11 February 1921, with the apostolic letter "*Pia societas*". More recently, on 5 February 1965, Pope Paul VI established the cardinal title of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio. Among its titular cardinals are Maximilien de Fürstenberg (1967–1988), Giovanni Saldarini (1991–2011), and Giuseppe Versaldi (from 2012 to the present). The cardinal title strengthens the basilica's ties to the papal Curia, helping to maintain focus on the importance of devotion to the Sacred Heart and Salesian spirituality.

## **Architecture**

The façade is in the Neo-Renaissance style, with sober lines and balanced proportions typical of Renaissance revival in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century ecclesiastical architecture. The bell tower, conceived in Vespignani's original design, remained incomplete until 1931, when the imposing gilded statue of the Sacred Heart blessing was placed atop it, donated by Salesian alumni in Argentina. Visible from afar, it serves as an identifying feature of the basilica and a symbol of welcome for those arriving in Rome via the nearby railway station.

The interior follows a Latin cross plan with three naves, separated by eight columns and two grey granite pillars supporting round arches, and includes a transept and central dome. The central nave and side aisles are covered with coffered ceilings, decorated with lacunae in the central register. The proportions are harmonious. The central nave's width of approximately 14 metres and length of 70 metres create a solemn spaciousness, while the granite columns, with

their pronounced veining, lend an air of solid grandeur.

The central dome, visible from the interior with its frescoes and lacunae, draws in natural light through base windows and adds verticality to the liturgical space. The side chapels house paintings by the Roman artist Andrea Cherubini, featuring devotional scenes in keeping with the dedication to the Sacred Heart.

Beyond Cherubini's paintings, the basilica preserves various sacred artworks: wooden or marble statues depicting the Virgin Mary, patron saints of the Salesian Congregation, and charismatic figures like St John Bosco.

### **The Rooms of St John Bosco in Rome**

A site of great historical and devotional value is the "Little Rooms of Don Bosco" at the rear of the basilica, where St John Bosco stayed during nine of his twenty visits to Rome. Originally two separate rooms—a study and a bedroom with a portable altar—they were later combined to accommodate pilgrims and prayer groups, forming a living memorial to the founder of the Salesians. Personal items and relics recalling miracles attributed to the saint during that period are preserved here. This space was recently renovated and continues to attract pilgrims, inspiring reflection on Bosco's spirituality and dedication to young people.

The basilica and adjacent buildings are owned by the Salesian Congregation, which has made it one of its key centres in Rome. Since Don Bosco's time, the building next to the church housed the Salesian community and later became home to schools, oratories, and youth services. Today, alongside liturgical activities, the complex hosts significant work with migrants and disadvantaged youth. Since 2017, it has also served as the Central Headquarters of the Salesian Congregation's governance.

### **Devotion to the Sacred Heart and Liturgical Celebrations**

The dedication to the Sacred Heart of Jesus translates into specific devotional practices. The liturgical feast of the

Sacred Heart, celebrated on the Friday following the octave of Corpus Christi, is observed with solemnity in the basilica, featuring novenas, Eucharistic celebrations, Eucharistic adoration, and processions. Popular piety surrounding the Sacred Heart—widespread since the 19<sup>th</sup> century with its approval by Pius IX and Leo XIII—finds a focal point here in Rome, drawing the faithful for prayers of reparation, entrustment, and thanksgiving.

For the 2025 Jubilee, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus has been granted the privilege of a plenary indulgence, like all other churches on the *Iter Europaeum*.

We recall that to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between the European Union and the Holy See (1970–2020), a project was undertaken by the Delegation of the European Union to the Holy See and the 28 Embassies of individual member States accredited to the Holy See. This project consisted of a liturgical and cultural itinerary in which each Country designated a church or basilica in Rome with which it had a special historical, artistic, or pilgrim hospitality connection. The primary goal was twofold: on one hand, to foster mutual understanding among European citizens and encourage reflection on shared Christian roots; on the other, to offer pilgrims and visitors a means of discovering lesser-known or particularly meaningful religious spaces, highlighting the Church's connections with all of Europe. Broadening the perspective, the initiative was later revived as part of the jubilee routes linked to the Rome 2025 Jubilee, under the Latin name "*Iter Europaeum*," incorporating the itinerary among the official pilgrim paths of the Holy City. The *Iter Europaeum* includes stops at 28 churches and basilicas in Rome, each "adopted" by an EU member State. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was "adopted" by [Luxembourg](#). The churches of the *Iter Europaeum* can be viewed [HERE](#).

## **Visiting the Basilica**

The Basilica can be visited in person or virtually.

For a 3D virtual tour, click [HERE](#).

For a guided virtual tour, follow these links:

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [History](#)
3. [Façade](#)
4. [Bell Tower](#)
5. [Central Nave](#)
6. [Inner Façade Wall](#)
7. [Floor](#)
8. [Columns](#)
9. [Central Nave Walls](#)
10. [Ceiling 1](#)
11. [Ceiling 2](#)
12. [Transept](#)
13. [Stained Glass Transept](#)
14. [High Altar](#)
15. [Presbytery](#)
16. [Dome](#)
17. [Don Bosco Choir](#)
18. [Side Naves](#)
19. [Confessionals](#)
20. [Right Side Nave Altars](#)
21. [Side Nave Frescoes](#)
22. [Left Nave Small Domes](#)
23. [Baptistery](#)
24. [Left Side Nave Altars](#)
25. [Left Nave Small Dome Frescoes](#)
26. [Sacristy](#)
27. [Don Bosco's "Little Rooms" \(previous version\)](#)
28. [Don Bosco Museum \(previous version\)](#)

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio is an example of Neo-Renaissance architecture tied to historical events marked by crises and revivals. The

combination of artistic, architectural, and historical elements—from granite columns to painted decorations, from the famed bell tower statue to Don Bosco's Little Rooms—makes this site a destination for spiritual and cultural pilgrimage. Its location near Termini Station renders it a welcoming symbol for those arriving in Rome, while pastoral work for the young continues to embody the spirit of St. John Bosco: a heart open to service, formation, and lived spirituality. A must-visit.

---

## **The title of Basilica for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome**

On the centenary of the death of Fr Paul Albera it was highlighted how the second successor of Don Bosco realised what could be described as a dream of Don Bosco. In fact, thirty-four years after the consecration of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which took place in the presence of the by now exhausted Don Bosco (May 1887), Pope Benedict XV – the pope of the famous and unheard of definition of the First World War as 'useless slaughter' – conferred on the church the title of Minor Basilica (11 February 1921). Don Bosco had "given his soul" (and his body too!) for its construction in the last seven years of his life. He had done the same in the previous twenty years (1865-1868) with the construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, Turin, the first Salesian church elevated to the dignity of a minor basilica on 28 June 1911, in the presence of the new Rector Major Fr Paul Albera.

### **Discovery of the request**

But how did this result come about? Who was behind it? We now know for sure thanks to the recent discovery of the typewritten draft of the request for this title by Rector Major Fr Paul Albera. It is included in a booklet commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Sacred Heart published in 1905 by the then Rector Fr Francesco Tomasetti (1868-1953). The typescript, dated 17 January 1921, has minimal corrections by the Rector Major but, what is important, bears his handwritten signature.

After describing Don Bosco's work and the unceasing activity of the parish, probably taken from the old file, Fr Albera addresses the Pope in these terms

"While the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is growing and spreading all over the world, and new Churches are being dedicated to the Divine Heart, also through the noble initiative of the Salesians, as in S. Paolo in Brazil, in La Plata in Argentina, in London, in Barcelona and elsewhere, it seems that the primary Church-Sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, where such an important devotion has an affirmation so worthy of the Eternal City, deserves special distinction. The undersigned, therefore, having heard the opinion of the Superior Council of the Pious Salesian Society, humbly begs Your Holiness to deign to grant the Church-Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Castro Pretorio in Rome the Title and Privileges of a Minor Basilica, hoping that this honourable elevation will increase devotion, piety and every catholic beneficial activity".

The request, in its final draft, signed by Fr Albera, was most likely sent by the procurator Fr Francesco Tomasetti to the Sacred Congregation of the Brevi, which welcomed it. He quickly drew up the draft of the Apostolic Brief to be kept in the Vatican Archives, had it transcribed by expert calligraphers on rich parchment and passed it on to the Secretariat of State for the signature of the the one in charge at the time, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

Today, the faithful can admire this original of the granting of the requested title nicely framed in the sacristy of the Basilica (see photo).

We can only be grateful to Dr Patrizia Buccino, a scholar of archaeology and history, and Salesian historian Fr Giorgio Rossi, who spread the news. It is up to them to complete the investigation begun by searching the Vatican Archives for the entire correspondence which will also be made known to the scientific world through the well-known Salesian history magazine "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane".

### **Sacred Heart: a national basilica with an international reach**

Twenty-six years earlier, on 16 July 1885, at the request of Don Bosco and with the explicit consent of Pope Leo XIII, Archbishop Gaetano Alimonda, Archbishop of Turin, had warmly urged the Italians to participate in the success of the "noble and holy proposal [of the new church] calling it a national vow of the Italians".

Fr Albera in his request to the pontiff, after recalling Cardinal Alimonda's pressing appeal, recalled that all the nations of the world had been asked to contribute economically to the construction, decoration of the church and annexed works (including the inevitable Salesian oratory with a hospice!) so that the Church-Sanctuary, as well as a national vow, had become a "worldwide or international manifestation of devotion to the Sacred Heart".

In this regard, in a historical and ascetical paper published on the occasion of the 1st Centenary of the Consecration of the Basilica (1987), the scholar Armando Pedrini described it as: "A church that is therefore international because of the catholicity and universality of its message to all peoples", also in consideration of the Basilica's "prominent position" adjacent to the acknowledged internationality of the railway station.

Rome-Termini is therefore not only a large railway station with problems of public order and a difficult scene to manage, often mentioned in the newspapers and like many railway



stations in many European capitals. But it is also home to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And while in the evening and at night time the area does not convey security to tourists, during the day the Basilica offers peace and serenity to the faithful who enter it, stop there in prayer, receive the sacraments.

Will the pilgrims who will pass through the Termini railway station in the not too distant holy year (2025) remember this? All they have to do is cross the street... and the Sacred Heart of Jesus awaits them.

PS. In Rome there is a second Salesian parish basilica, larger and artistically richer than the Sacred Heart one: it is the Basilica of St John Bosco at Tuscolano, which became such in 1965, a few years after its inauguration (1959). Where is it located? Obviously in the Don Bosco district (a stone's throw from the famous Cinecittà studios). While the statue on the bell tower of the basilica of the Sacred Heart dominates the square of Termini station, the dome of the basilica of Don Bosco, slightly lower than St. Peter's, however, overlooks it directly, albeit from two extreme points of the capital. And since there is no two without three, there is a third splendid Salesian parish basilica in Rome: that of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, in the Appio-Tuscolano district, next to the large Pio XI Institute.

**Apostolic Letter entitled *Pia Societas*, dated 11 February 2021, by which His Holiness Benedict XV elevated the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the rank of Basilica.**

Ecclesia parochialis SS.mi Cordis Iesu ad Castrum Praetorium in urbe titulo et privilegiis Basilicae Minoris decoratur.

Benedictus pp. XV

Ad perpetuam rei memoriam.

Pia Societas sancti Francisci Salesii, a venerabili Servo Dei Ioanne Bosco iam Augustae Taurinorum condita atque hodie per dissitas quoque orbis regiones

diffusa, omnibus plane cognitum est quanta sibi merita comparaverit non modo incumbendo actuose sollerterque in puerorum, orbitate laborantium, religiosam honestamque institutionem, verum etiam in rei catholicae profectum tum apud christianum populum, tum apud infideles in longinquis et asperrimis Missionibus. Eiusdem Societatis sodalibus est quoque in hac Alma Urbe Nostra ecclesia paroecialis Sacratissimo Cordi Iesu dicata, in qua, etsi non abhinc multos annos condita, eximii praesertim Praedecessoris Nostri Leonis PP. XIII iussu atque auspiciis, christifideles urbani, eorundem Sodalium opera, adeo ad Dei cultum et virtutum laudem exercentur, ut ea vel cum antiquioribus paroeciis in honoris ac meritorum contentionem veniat. Ipsemet Salesianorum Sodalium fundator, venerabilis Ioannes Bosco, in nova Urbis regione, aere saluberrimo populoque confertissima, quae ad Gastrum Praetorium exstat, exaedificationem inchoavit istius templi, et, quasi illud erigeret ex gentis italicae voto et pietatis testimonio erga Sacratissimum Cor Iesu, stipem praecipue ex Italiae christifidelibus studiose conlegit; verumtamen pii homines ex ceteris nationibus non defuerunt, qui, in exstruendum perficiendumque templum istud, erga Ssmum Cor Iesu amore incensi, largam pecuniae vim contulerint. Anno autem MDCCCLXXXVII sacra ipsa aedes, secundum speciosam formam a Virginio Vespignani architecto delineatam, tandem perfecta ac sollemniter consecrata dedicataque est. Eamdem vero postea, magna cum sollertia, Sodales Salesianos non modo variis altaribus, imaginibus affabre depictis et statuīs, omnique sacro cultui necessaria supellectili exornasse, verum etiam continentibus aedificiis iuventuti, ut tempora nostra postulant, rite instituendae ditasse, iure ac merito Praedecessores Nostri sunt" laetati, et Nos haud minore animi voluptate probamus. Quapropter cum dilectus filius Paulus Albera, hodiernus Piae Societatis sancti Francisci Salesii rector maior, nomine proprio ac religiosorum virorum quibus praeest, quo memorati templi Ssmi Cordi Iesu dicati maxime augeatur decus, eiusdem urbanae paroeciae fidelium fides et pietas foveatur, Nos supplex rogaverit, ut eidem templo

dignitatem, titulum et privilegia Basilicae Minoris pro Nostra benignitate impertiri dignemur; Nos, ut magis magisque stimulos fidelibus ipsius paroeciae atque Urbis totius Nostrae ad Sacratissimum Cor Iesu impensius colendum atque adamandum addamus, nec non benevolentiam, qua Sodales Salesianos ob merita sua prosequimur, publice significemus, votis hisce piis annuendum ultro libenterque censemus. Quam ob rem, conlatis consiliis cum VV. FF. NN. S. R. E. Cardinalibus Congregationi Ss. Rituum praepositis, Motu proprio ac de certa scientia et matura deliberatione Nostris, deque apostolicae potestatis plenitudine, praesentium Litterarum tenore perpetuumque in modum, enunciatum templum Sacratissimo Cordi Iesu dicatum, in hac alma Urbe Nostra atque ad Castrum Praetorium situm, dignitate ac titulo Basilicae Minoris honestamus, cum omnibus et singulis honoribus, praerogativis, privilegiis, indultis quae aliis Minoribus Almae huius Urbis Basilicis de iure competunt. Decernentes praesentes Litteras firmas, validas atque efficaces semper exstare ac permanere, suosque integros effectus sortiri iugiter et obtinere, illisque ad quos pertinent nunc et in posterum plenissime suffragari; sicque rite iudicandum esse ac definiendum, irritumque ex nunc et inane fieri, si quidquam secus super his, a quovis, auctoritate qualibet, scienter sive ignoranter attentari contigerit. Non obstantibus contrariis quibuslibet.

Datum Romae apud sanctum Petrum sub annulo Piscatoris, die XI februarii MCMXXI, Pontificatus Nostri anno septimo.

P. CARD. GASPARRI, a Secretis Status.

\*\*\*

The parish church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at Castrum Praetorium in the city is honoured with the title and privileges of a Minor Basilica.

Pope Benedict XV

For perpetual remembrance.

The Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, founded in Augusta Taurinorum by the Venerable Servant of God John Bosco and now spread throughout diverse regions of the world, is well known to all for the great merits it has acquired—not only by diligently and zealously devoting itself to the religious and moral education of orphaned and labouring children, but also by advancing the Catholic cause both among Christian populations and in distant and arduous missions among unbelievers. In this Our Beloved City, the members of the same Society also serve the parish church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, where, though established not many years ago by the command and under the auspices of Our illustrious predecessor Pope Leo XIII, the urban faithful, through the work of these same members, are so fervently trained in divine worship and the praise of virtue that it may even rival older parishes in honour and merit.

The founder of the Salesian Society himself, the Venerable John Bosco, began the construction of this church in a new district of the City, renowned for its wholesome air and dense population, near Castrum Praetorium. As if raising it in fulfilment of the Italian people's vow and as a testimony of devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, he diligently collected funds chiefly from the faithful of Italy; yet pious individuals from other nations were not lacking, who, inflamed with love for the Most Sacred Heart, contributed generously to the building and completion of this church. In the year 1887, the sacred edifice, designed according to the splendid plan of the architect Virginio Vespignani, was finally completed and solemnly consecrated and dedicated.

Afterwards, with great diligence, the Salesians adorned it not only with various altars, skilfully painted images and statues, and all the furnishings necessary for sacred worship, but also enriched it with adjoining buildings for the proper education of youth, as our times demand. Our predecessors rightly and justly rejoiced at this, and We too approve with

no less satisfaction.

Wherefore, since Our beloved son Paul Albera, the present Superior General of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, in his own name and that of the religious under his care, has humbly besought Us that the honour of the aforesaid church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus may be greatly enhanced, and the faith and piety of the faithful of the urban parish may be fostered, and that We may deign in Our kindness to bestow upon the same church the dignity, title, and privileges of a Minor Basilica; We, desiring to further stimulate the faithful of this parish and of Our whole City to more fervent worship and love of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to publicly signify the benevolence with which We regard the Salesians for their merits, have willingly and gladly resolved to grant these pious requests.

For this reason, having consulted with Our Venerable Brothers the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church assigned to the Congregation of Sacred Rites, by Our own initiative, with certain knowledge and mature deliberation, and by the fullness of apostolic authority, We, by the tenor of these present Letters and in perpetuity, honour the aforesaid church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, located in this Our Beloved City near Castrum Praetorium, with the dignity and title of a Minor Basilica, together with all and singular the honours, prerogatives, privileges, and indults which by right belong to other Minor Basilicas of this Beloved City.

We decree that these present Letters shall always be firm, valid, and effective, and shall perpetually obtain their full and complete effects, and shall fully avail those to whom they pertain now and hereafter; and thus it is to be judged and defined in due form, and anything to the contrary, attempted by any authority, knowingly or unknowingly, is hereby declared null and void.

Notwithstanding any contrary provisions.

Given at Rome, at St Peter's, under the Fisherman's Ring, on the 11th day of February 1921, in the seventh year of Our Pontificate.

P. Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State.

---

## Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome

*In the twilight of his life, obeying a wish of Pope Leo XIII, Don Bosco took on the difficult task of building the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Castro Pretorio in Rome. To complete the gigantic undertaking he spared no tiring journeys, humiliations, sacrifices, shortening his precious life as an apostle of youth.*

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus dates back to the beginnings of the Church. In the early centuries, the Holy Fathers invited people to look at the pierced side of Christ, a symbol of love, even if it did not explicitly refer to the Heart of the Redeemer.

The earliest references found are from the mystics Matilda of Magdeburg (1207-1282), St Matilda of Hackeborn (1241-1299), St Gertrude of Helfta (ca. 1256-1302) and Blessed Henry Suso (1295-1366).

An important development came with the works of St John Eudes (1601-1680), then with the private revelations of the Sisters of the Visitation, St Margaret Mary Alacoque, spread by St Claude de la Colombière (1641-1682) and his Jesuit brethren.

At the end of the 19th century, churches consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus spread, mainly as churches of expiation. With the consecration of mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through Leo XIII's encyclical, *Annum Sacrum* (1899) the cult was

greatly extended and strengthened with two more encyclicals to come later: *Miserentissimus Redemptor*(1928) by Pius XI and especially *Haurietis Aquas*(1956) by Pius XII.

In Don Bosco's time, after the construction of the Termini railway station by Pope Pius IX in 1863, the neighbourhood began to be populated, and the surrounding churches could not serve the faithful adequately. This led to the desire to build a church in the area, and it was initially planned to dedicate it to St Joseph, who was appointed as the patron saint of the Universal Church on 8 December 1870. After a series of events, in 1871 the pope changed the patronage of the desired church, dedicating it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and it remained in the planning stage until 1879. Meanwhile, the cult to the Sacred Heart continued to spread, and in 1875, in Paris, on the city's highest hill, Montmartre (Mount of Martyrs), the foundation stone was laid for the church of the same name, *Sacré Cœur*, which was completed in 1914 and consecrated in 1919.

After the death of Pope Pius IX, the new Pope Leo XIII (as Archbishop of Perugia he had consecrated his diocese to the Sacred Heart) decided to resume the project, and the foundation stone was laid on 16 August 1879. Work stopped shortly afterwards due to a lack of financial support. One of the cardinals, Gaetano Alimonda (future archbishop of Turin) advised the Pope to entrust the enterprise to Don Bosco and, even though the pontiff was initially hesitant knowing the commitments of the Salesian missions inside and outside Italy, he made the proposal to the Saint in April 1880. Don Bosco did not think twice and replied: "The Pope's wish is a command for me: I accept the commitment that Your Holiness has the goodness to entrust to me." When the Pope warned him that he could not support him financially, the Saint only asked for the apostolic blessing and spiritual favours necessary for the task entrusted to him.



## Laying the foundation stone of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Rome

On his return to Turin, he wanted the Chapter's approval for this undertaking. Of the seven votes, only one was positive: his... The Saint was not discouraged and argued: "You have all given me a resounding *no* for an answer, and that is fine, because you acted with all the prudence needed to make serious, major decisions such as this. However, were you to give me a yes answer, I can promise you that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will supply the funds to build the Church, He will pay off our debts, and He will even give us a handsome bonus as well." ([MB XIV,580](#)). After this speech the vote was repeated and the results were all positive and the main boon was the Hospice of the Sacred Heart which was built next to the church for poor and abandoned boys. This second hospice project was included in an Agreement made on 11 December 1880, which guaranteed the perpetual use of the church to the Salesian Congregation.

Acceptance caused him grave worries and cost him his health, but Don Bosco, who taught his sons work and temperance and said it would be a day of triumph when it was said that a Salesian had died on the battlefield worn out by fatigue, preceded them by example.

The building of the Church of the Sacred Heart at the Castro Pretorio in Rome was done not only out of obedience to the Pope but also out of devotion.

Let us take up one of his talks on this devotion, made during a "good night" to his pupils and confreres only a month after his acceptance, on 3 June 1880, the eve of the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

"Tomorrow, my dear children, the Church celebrates the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is necessary that we too, with great effort, try to honour him. It is true that the external solemnity moves to Sunday; but tomorrow let us begin



to celebrate in our hearts, to pray in a special way, to make a fervent communion. Then on Sunday there will be music and the other ceremonies of external worship which make Christian feasts so beautiful and majestic.

Some of you will want to know what this feast is and why the Sacred Heart of Jesus is especially honoured. I will tell you that this feast is nothing other than to honour with a special remembrance the love that Jesus brought to mankind. Oh the great, infinite love that Jesus brought us in his incarnation and birth, in his life and preaching, and particularly in his passion and death! Since then the seat of love is the heart, so the Sacred Heart is venerated as the object that served as a furnace to this boundless love. This veneration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, that is, of the love that Jesus showed us, was of all times and always; but there was not always a feast specially established to venerate it. How Jesus appeared to Blessed Margaret a feast manifested to her the great good that will come to mankind by honouring His most loving heart with special worship, and how the feast was therefore established, you will hear in the sermon on Sunday evening.

Now let us take courage and each one do his best to correspond to so much love that Jesus has brought us". ([MB XI,249](#))

The church was completed for worship seven years later, in 1887. On 14 May of that year Don Bosco attended the consecration of the Church with great emotion, solemnly presided over by the Cardinal Vicar Lucido Maria Parocchi. Two days later, on 16 May, he celebrated the only Holy Mass in this church, at the altar of Mary Help of Christians, interrupted more than fifteen times by tears. They were tears of gratitude for the divine light he had received: he had understood the words of his dream when he was nine: "In good time you will understand everything!" A task completed amidst many misunderstandings, difficulties and hardships, but crowning a life spent for God and the young, rewarded by the same Divinity.

A video was recently made about the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. We offer it to you below.