

SCALA SANCTA (HOLY STAIRS)



Consisting of twenty-eight white marble steps, at Rome, near Saint John Lateran; according to tradition the staircase leading once to the praetorium of Pilate at Jerusalem, hence sanctified by the footsteps of Our Lord during His Passion.

The historians of the monument relate that the Holy Stairs were brought from Jerusalem to Rome about 326 by St. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. From old plans it can be gathered that they led to a corridor of the Lateran Palace, near the chapel of St. Sylvester, were covered with a special roof, and had at their sides other stairs for common use. When Sixtus V in 1589 destroyed the old papal palace and build the new one, he ordered the Holy Stairs be transferred to their present site, before the *Sancta Sanctorum* (Holy of

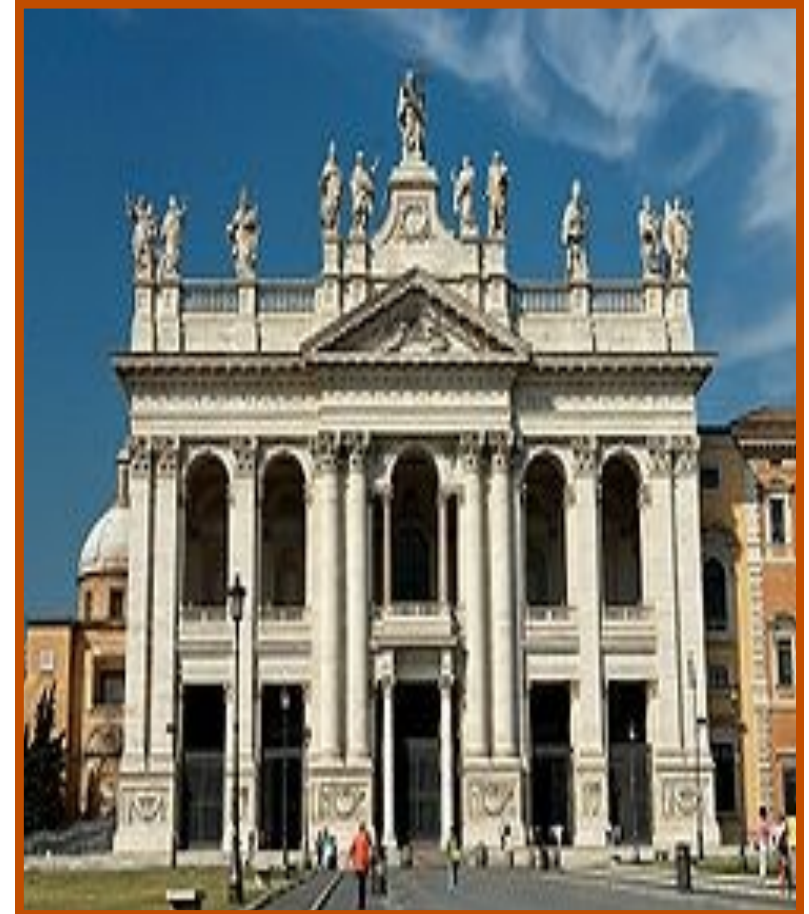
Holies). The latter is the old private papal chapel, dedicated to Saint Lawrence, and the only remaining part of the former Lateran Palace, receiving its name from the many precious relics preserved there. The *Sancta Sanctorum* also contains the celebrated image of Christ, "not made by human hands", which on certain occasions used to be carried through Rome in procession. These holy treasures, which since Leo X (1513-21) have not been seen by anybody, have recently been the object of learned dissertations by Grisar and Lauer.

In its new site the Scala Sancta is flanked by four other stairs, two on each side, for common use, since the Holy Stairs may only be ascended on the knees, a devotion much in favor with pilgrims and the Roman faithful, especially on Fridays and in Lent. Not a few popes are recorded to have performed this pious exercise; Pius IX, ascended the Holy Stairs on 19 Sept., 1870; Pius VII, 2 Sept., 1817 granted those who ascend the stairs in the prescribed manner an indulgence of nine years for every step. Finally Pius X, on 26 Feb., 1908, granted a plenary indulgence to be gained as often as the stairs are devoutly ascended after confession and communion. Imitations of the Scala Sancta have been erected in various places, as in Lourdes and in some convents of nuns, and indulgences are attached to them by special concessions. *(excerpted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org>; www.newadvent.org)

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Dedication of the Archbasilica of Our Savior

FEAST: November 9th



***Church of Saint John Lateran
(Cathedral of the Church of Rome, Italy)***

THE PAPAL ARCHBASILICA OF SAINT JOHN LATERAN ***ROME, ITALY***

*The Papal Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran, is the cathedral of the Church of Rome, Italy, and the official ecclesiastical seat of the Bishop of Rome, who is the Pope.

It is the oldest and ranks first among the four Papal Basilicas or major basilicas of Rome. It claims the title of ecumenical mother church (mother church of the whole inhabited world) among Catholics. The current archpriest of St. John Lateran in Agostino Vallini, Cardinal Vicar General for the Diocese of Rome. The President of the French Republic, currently Nicola Sarkozy, is *ex officio* the "first and only honorary canon" of the basilica, a title inherited from the Kings of France, who have held it since Henry IV.

An inscription on the façade, *Christoi Salvatori*, indicates the church's dedication to "Christ the Saviour", for the cathedrals of all patriarchs are dedicated to Christ Himself. As the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome, containing the papal throne (*Cathedra Romana*), it ranks above all other churches in the Catholic church, including Saint Peter's basilica in the Vatican. For that reason, unlike all other Roman Basilicas, it holds the title of *Archbasilica*. The cathedral itself is located within the city of Rome in the Italian Republic. However it has been granted a special extraterritorial status as a property of the Holy See. This is also the case with several other buildings after the solving of the Roman Question with the Lateran Treaty. The Lateran basilica is adjacent to the Lateran Palace.

Most Catholics think of St. Peter's as the pope's main church, but they are wrong. St. John Lateran is the pope's church, the cathedral of the diocese of Rome where the bishop of Rome presides.

The first basilica on the site was built in the fourth century when Constantine donated land he had received from the wealthy Lateran family. That structure and its successors suffered fire,

earthquake and the ravages of war, but the Lateran remained the church where popes were consecrated until Pope Gregory XI returned from Avignon in the fourteenth century to find the church and the adjoining papal palace in ruins.

Pope Innocent X commissioned the present structure in 1646. One of Rome's most imposing churches, the Lateran has a towering façade crowned with 15 colossal statues of the Fathers of the Church: Christ, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist and 12 doctors of the Church.

Inside, there is a medieval canopy glinting its gold leaf over the high altar, housing its statues of Saint Peter and Paul, statues which double as reliquaries, containing as they do the skulls of those two tireless apostles who founded the Church in Rome. The marble high altar rests the remains of the small wooden table on which, according to tradition, Saint Peter himself used to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

COMMENT: Unlike the commemorations of other Roman churches (St. Mary Major, August 5, Sts. Peter and Paul, November 18), this anniversary is a feast. The dedication of a church is a feast for all its parishioners. St. John Lateran is, in a sense, the parish church of all Catholics, for it is the pope's parish, the cathedral church of the Bishop of Rome. This church is the spiritual home of the people who are the Church.

QUOTE: "What was done here, as these walls were rising, is reproduced when we bring together those who believe in Christ. For by believing they are hewn out, as it were, from mountains and forests, like stones and timber; but by catechizing, baptism, and instruction they are, as it were, shaped, squared and planed by the hands of the workers and artisans. Nevertheless, they do not make a house for the Lord until they are fitted together through love" (St. Augustine, *Sermon 36*).