

A. The Basilica

St Peter's is probably the most famous church in the world. And now you are here.

For nearly 2000 years Christians have come here to pray. Outside of the Holy Land, St Peter's is the place where, Christians have gathered for prayer over the longest time. First we came to pray at a tomb in a cemetery, (the tomb of the martyred apostle Peter); then to a shrine which enclosed that tomb, and then to the basilica church which was built around the shrine.

By the 15th Century that first church was in a very poor state and it was decided to build a new one, in a new Renaissance style - the St Peter's we see today.

Through all that time the central focus has been that tomb of Peter, because of the continuing significance of Peter for the Church. The building itself reminds of Peter's place in the Church and his ministry.

- Peter is part of the community of the faithful led by Jesus which we see arrayed on the parapets of the church and the Square and that greet us as we came to this holy place (and is further represented in the images of saints that fill the interior of the basilica) - a community of which we too are a part, baptised in the faith of the Apostles confessing and serving the same Lord.
- Peter's dying, like the dying of every Christian, is an imitation of the Lord's death (thus the relics of the Lord's Passion that surround the tomb of Peter) but his and our dying, in Christ, leads to a sharing in the eternal glory of the Risen Lord. Thus the splendour and life of the architecture and art that surrounds the tomb and us.
- Words about Peter are everywhere in the building. At the base of the Dome: 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' On the left hand side of the nave the words translate: 'I have prayed for you O Peter that your faith may never fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers.' And on the right: 'Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'

The Lord gave power and authority in an exceptional degree to Peter and his successors. But that power is also shared



Look around you...

Unless you are very lucky, you are probably sharing this place of pilgrimage with many other people. Are they pilgrims or, by desire or misfortune, are they tourists?

This sheet is designed to help you spend quality time here as a pilgrim, and to engage prayerfully with the reason this place is here.

A Pilgrim's Worksheet for St Peter's Basilica

with every Christian, who shares with the apostles the charge to witness to the Gospel and build up the Church on earth.

B. The Tomb of Peter and the Baldachino

Martyred on the Vatican Hill (to the left of the Basilica, as you face it from St Peter's Square), the apostle Peter was buried in a cemetery. The cemetery was then above ground, but now the entire cemetery is buried under the basilica. It can be visited, but only when special arrangements are made.

Over time the tomb of Peter was incorporated into an oratory; and then into this basilica. The tomb itself is now several metres below the floor of the basilica.

The Confession, the lower area in front of the altar, leads down towards the tomb, as does the entrance to the Vatican Grottoes (see p. 4). The tomb is still some way below the floor, directly below the 9th C. mosaic of Christ Pantocrator, still in place from the earlier basilica. (The silver casket in front of the mosaic is not a reliquary: it holds the *palia*, the symbols of office conferred on new Archbishops each year on 29th June)

The bronze baldachino is the work of Bernini. Begun in 1624 and finished in 1633 it incorporates twisted 'Jerusalem' columns in memory of the columns which were part of the columns that formerly surrounded St Peter's tomb and are now sited elsewhere in the basilica. They are decorated with olive branches and bees (signs of peace and fruitfulness - the bee also being the heraldic device of Pope Urban VIII who commissioned the baldachino!) It also includes angels playfully holding the Papal tiara.

Look at the marble base of the four columns, starting on the left of the tomb. See at the top the face of a young woman. Walk clockwise around the tomb and see the change of expression on her face - she is giving birth!

B. The Chair of Peter

The Chair of Peter is the symbol of the teaching authority of the Pope: a ministry exercised for the sake of the Truth and the fidelity of the Church to God's self-revelation in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.



The symbol of the teaching authority of a bishop is usually his *cathedra*, or chair. The *cathedra* of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, is of course in his Cathedral, the basilica of St John Lateran. This additional 'Chair of Peter' points to the even more exceptional teaching authority of the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter.

By tradition the Chair came with Peter to Rome from Antioch. However, more likely this particular chair was a gift to given in the 9th Century by Emperor Charles Pope John VIII.

Now encased in a glorious reliquary, the work of Bernini, the chair is suspended above statues of four great Doctors of the Church, St Athanasius and John Chrysostom representing the Church in the East and Ambrose and Augustine the Church in the West: they point to the Chair, but do not carry it. Above the Chair is the great Glory window, with, in its centre, the image of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and love. (A copy of the original Chair can be seen in the Basilica's Treasury.)

C. Statue of St Peter

This statue dates from the 13th C. It is much venerated by pilgrims, being one tangible way of showing devotion to St Peter.

One consequence of this devotion is that St Peter's feet have regularly to be replaced!

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that no tempests may disturb us, for you have set us fast on the rock of the Apostle Peter's confession of faith. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



D. Relics of the Passion of Jesus

The relics of the Passion are one of the 'secrets' of St Peter's. Here are held the relics of the Passion: the lance which pierced the Lord's side; a piece of the True Cross; and the veil of Veronica. They are kept in the niches above the massive central piers which support the dome. The head of St Andrew was there too - before being returned to the Orthodox Church by Paul VI in 1964).

The lance is in the aedicule above the statue of the centurion, Longinus; the relic of the Cross above the statue of St Helena; the veil above the statue of St Veronica. The picture here shows the statue of Veronica, and above it the balcony where the relic is kept.

Famously St Peter is believed to have left Rome to avoid his martyrdom. On the road he meets the risen Lord who he asks, 'Quo vadis, where are you going?' 'To Rome', says Jesus, 'to be crucified again'. Peter confronted with his second betrayal of Jesus finds new courage, returns to Rome,



where indeed he was crucified in 64AD, upside down at his request for he said he was not worthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus.

The proximity of the relics of Jesus to the tomb of the martyr, Peter, symbolises the unity between disciple and master, in which love and mercy overcomes all weakness.

St Peter

Peter's original name was Simon. He receives the name by which he is now better known from Jesus who named him 'The Rock' - *kefa* in Aramaic, *Cephas* in Greek and *Petros* in Latin.



He is the first of disciples in the lists of disciples, and is one of the core group of disciples, together with James and John who Jesus invites to be with him at times such as the Transfiguration or in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Again and again, especially in the Gospel of Mark (about which more below), Peter is shown as over-reaching himself or failing to understand or trust Jesus - saying that the horror of the Passion should not befall Jesus; beginning to walk on water but then sinking through a failure to trust; wanting to erect tents on the Mount of the Transfiguration, resists Jesus washing his feet, and falling asleep in Gethsemane. Peter also, famously, betrays Jesus on the night of his arrest despite, hours earlier, assuring Jesus that though everyone else might betray him, he never would.

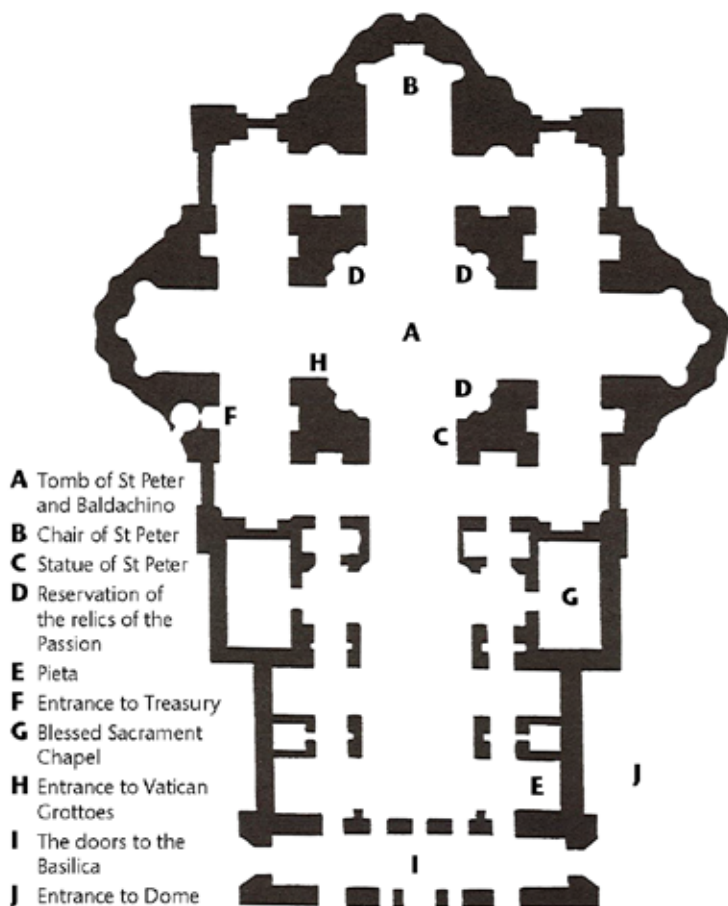
Peter's leadership role is confirmed in the encounters with the risen Lord, most poignantly on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus asks Peter three times 'Do you love me?' Each asking - which seems to exasperate Peter - might be seen as a response to the three-fold betrayal.

His leadership comes into its own in the days and years following the Ascension of the Lord. A particular crisis of decision for the Church was how to receive into its number non-Jewish Christians, and how to help Jewish Christians adapt to a life in Christ which did not rely on the Temple cult and purity laws. The New Testament gives us more evidence of the way these issues were confronted by St Paul, and yet in the Acts of the Apostles it is Peter who witnesses that 'all things are clean' and who baptises the first Gentiles (Acts 10.16).

Peter served as a missionary in Greece (enjoyed particular prestige in Corinth) and in Asia Minor - to which his First Letter was addressed.

He made his home in Rome, and by tradition it was there that the Gospel of Mark was written, based on Peter's recollections of Jesus and his ministry.

The two letters of Peter were written from Rome (the first saying it was written from 'Babylon' - a reference to Rome's being a place of exile, and a secular seat of power which is contrasted with the power, the Kingdom of God.



- A** Tomb of St Peter and Baldachino
- B** Chair of St Peter
- C** Statue of St Peter
- D** Reservation of the relics of the Passion
- E** Pieta
- F** Entrance to Treasury
- G** Blessed Sacrament Chapel
- H** Entrance to Vatican Grottoes
- I** The doors to the Basilica
- J** Entrance to Dome

Confessions are heard in the chapel to the right of the tomb of Peter. There are usually be priests on duty able to hear confessions in English.



E. The Treasury

The Treasury offers many reminders of the history of St Peter's from before the Renaissance church we see today. Of particular note are the 4th century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus; the 6th Century jewelled cross of Justin II; the dalmatic worn by Emperor Charlemagne at his coronation in the old St Peter's on Christmas Day 800AD; and one of the pillars which stood at the altar of St Peter in the old church, one of a set supposedly brought to Rome by the Emperor Constantine from the Temple of Jerusalem (the style of the pillar is echoed in the bronze pillars of Bernini's great baldachino).

Well worth the entry price, the visit offers a break from the church, and a chance to better appreciate the extraordinary history of this place

G. Blessed Sacrament Chapel

Other key parts of the Basilica focus on martyrdom and the Passion, and on death. The Blessed Sacrament Chapel, of course, is one of those places where we can pray, reminded of the Sacrifice of Christ - his offering his life to the Father, his body broken, his blood shed at the Cross and re-presented to us in sacramental form in Holy Communion.

But Christ's Sacrifice is only able to be shared with us because he is risen, and the food and drink of Holy Communion is given us that we might share still more fully in the life of the Risen Lord, fulfilling God's hope for us.

Other statues and 'paintings'

The classical interior of the Basilica is alive with colour and figurative decoration. The piers of the church are adorned with niches containing statues of saintly founders of religious orders - look out for Benedict, Dominic and Francis, Ignatius of Loyola, John Bosco and others (These niches are now all full. Statues of more recent saintly founders as are now placed in niches outside the church.)

Over the altars are placed paintings from the Vatican's own collection. Or rather, over the altar are placed mosaic copies of paintings from the collection which were being damaged because of the humid conditions in the basilica. The mosaic copies were made on site, by the Vatican studios, established in 1576.



Choose a painting or a statue that speaks to you, and somewhere to stand, a little out of the way but where you can still see it clearly, and spend some time praying the painting/statue. What does the image 'say'? Where does it connect with your life, with your hopes and fears and longings? Bring your thoughts and feelings in prayer to God.

Spending time in quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is always time well spent. Time spent in such prayer here has the additional blessing of giving us a chance to sit down, and to get away from the crowds of tourists that so often fill St Peter's. Try not to be distracted by any that wonder into the chapel by design and mistake. Here you are with the Lord: try to keep your heart and mind focussed on him, and his call to you.

May you have more and more grace and peace as you come to know our Lord more and more.

By his divine power, he has given us all the things we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God himself, who has called us by his own glory and goodness. In making these gifts, he has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them you will be able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice. But to attain this, you will have to do your utmost yourselves, adding goodness to the faith you have, understanding to your goodness, self-control to your understanding, patience to your self-control, true devotion to your patience, kindness towards your fellow-men to your devotion, and, to this kindness, love.

From the 2nd letter of St Peter 1:2-7

H. The Vatican Grottoes

Descending to the Grottoes gives you the best view of the tomb of St Peter, and you can also visit the graves of many other Popes, including Ss John XXIII and Paul VI. Here too is the tomb of Pope Hadrian IV, the only English Pope, so far!

The usual exit from the Grottoes brings you to the stairs (or lift) to the Dome. After a visit to the Dome, or if you choose not to go to the Dome, retrace your steps to the portico in front of the Basilica to admire the great Doors to the church.

I. Doors to the Basilica

Care is always given to the design of the entrance to a great building.

The vast numbers of visitors to St Peter's these days means that the function of the portico is less about providing a noble entrance and more about crowd control. It is also, in consequence, somewhat difficult to get to all of the doors to see them - but the effort is worthwhile.

On the far left are the doors of death, including panels showing the death of Jesus and the Virgin, and Pope John XXIII.



The next door is the Door of Evil and God and shows images of martyrdom and on the Good

door ministering of the Gospel - including Vatican II!

The central doors are the most ancient, from the 15th century and show scenes from the lives of Peter and Paul.

To the right of it is the Door of Sacraments, illustrated below by the panel for the Sacrament of Marriage.

The last door on the right is the Holy Door, unsealed in a Jubilee Year as a sign of God's mercy and love.



J. Dome

Ascending the dome may seem a very touristy thing to do - but it does give you the chance to closely inspect the inside of the dome, and to get great views out over St Peter's Square and Gardens. On the roof is also a very good religious souvenir shop and a cafe.



The Holy Door

Outside of Jubilee Years and Holy Years the Holy Doors of the great Basilicas - St Peter's, St John Lateran - the Cathedral church of Rome, St Mary Major's and St Paul outside the Walls. Later of Rome are sealed. The door is closed and locked, and the entrance bricked up and plastered over.

Yet the love and mercy of God is shared with us always. It is not rationed, and kept stored away only to be shared with us on exceptional occasions.

In Holy Years the Holy Doors are a particular reminder of what is always there for us, but which, perhaps, we do not always notice. In the Jubilee Year we have the opportunity to pause and make a symbolic re-entrance into the Lord's presence in the sanctuary of the Church.

Opening of the Holy Door(s)

Pope Francis wrote:

'I have chosen the date of 8 December (to open the door) because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the



Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelisation that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father's love in the world.'

Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 4

What memories do you have of Vatican II?

If none, try and talk with someone who does.

'We recall the poignant words of Saint John XXIII when, opening the Council, he indicated the path to follow: "Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity ... The Catholic Church, as she holds high the torch of Catholic truth at this Ecumenical Council, wants to show herself a loving mother to all; patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness toward her separated children."' Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 4

*What aspect of Church life needs refreshing in our day?
What aspect of your life remains in need of the mercy and love of God?*

This worksheet is one of a series prepared to accompany times of pilgrimage in the UK and overseas.

The prayer on page 2 is from the *Roman Missal*. English translation of *The Roman Missal* © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation. All rights reserved. The scripture quotations are from the *Jerusalem Bible* © 1966 by Darton Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd. Copyright on image of Pope Francis opening the Holy Door is unknown. Other texts, illustrations and layout are © Allen Morris, 2014, 2015. For more information email: allenmorris@rcdow.org.uk