



Feast of the Dedication of the Basilicas of Sts Peter and Paul

Vox Populi

16 November 2023

Earlier this year our World Youth Day pilgrims were fortunate to visit and spend time in prayer in the Basilicas of Sts Peter and Paul in Rome.

St Peter and St Paul offered us different but distinctive and captivating examples of Christianity. St Peter was the unassuming fisherman, entrusted by Jesus to found His Church – a rock of integrity. St Paul was the fervent missionary and prolific writer, who ignited the world with his faith and dedication to spreading the Gospel.

St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City is probably the most famous church in Christendom. Massive in scale and a museum of art and architecture, it began on a much humbler scale. Vatican Hill was a simple cemetery where believers gathered at Saint Peter's tomb to pray after he was martyred. In 319, Constantine built a basilica on the site that stood for more than a thousand years until, despite numerous restorations, it threatened to collapse. In 1506, Pope Julius II ordered it razed and reconstructed, but the new basilica was not completed until 1626 when it was dedicated by Urban VIII. Millions of pilgrims and tourists visit St Peter's every year including the tomb of St Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, which is directly below the high altar.

St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls stands near the Abazia delle Tre Fontane, where Saint Paul is believed to have been beheaded. The largest church in Rome until St. Peter's was rebuilt, it was also originally built by the emperor Constantine, though it was destroyed by fire in 1823. Donations from around the world made its reconstruction possible and the new basilica was consecrated by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

During the pilgrimage visit to St Paul's in July, Bishop Anthony recounted to the pilgrims the story of the young Aboriginal boy, Francis Xavier Conaci, who left Western Australia in 1849 to study with the Benedictines. He died in 1853 and is buried in the Basilica.

The Mass of Thanksgiving of Australia's first saint, St Mary of the Cross MacKillop was held at St Paul's Outside the Walls on 17 October 2010.