

St.Peter's Basilica



The Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican (Italian: Basilica Papale di San Pietro in Vaticano), or simply Saint Peter's Basilica (Latin: Basilica Sancti Petri), is a church of the Italian High Renaissance located in Vatican City, an independent microstate enclaved within the city of Rome, Italy. It was initially planned in the 15th century by Pope Nicholas V and then Pope Julius II to replace the ageing Old St. Peter's Basilica, which was built in the fourth century by Roman emperor Constantine the Great. Construction of the present basilica began on 18 April 1506 and was completed on 18 November 1626.[2]

Designed principally by Donato Bramante, Michelangelo, and Carlo Maderno, with piazza and fittings by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, St. Peter's is one of the most renowned works of Italian Renaissance architecture[3] and is the largest church in the world by interior measure.[note 1] While it is neither the mother church of the Catholic Church nor the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome (these equivalent titles being held by the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome), St. Peter's is regarded as one of the holiest Catholic shrines. It has been described as "holding a unique position in the Christian world",[4] and as "the greatest of all churches of Christendom." [3][5]

OVERVIEW OF ST. PETER'S BASILICA

Overview

St. Peter's is a church built in the Renaissance style located in the Vatican City west of the River Tiber and near the Janiculum Hill and Hadrian's Mausoleum. Its central dome dominates the

skyline of Rome. The basilica is approached via St. Peter's Square, a forecourt in two sections, both surrounded by tall colonnades. The first space is oval and the second trapezoidal. The façade of the basilica, with a giant order of columns, stretches across the end of the square and is approached by steps on which stand two 5.55-metre (18.2 ft) statues of the first-century apostles to Rome, Saints Peter and Paul.[10][11]

The basilica is cruciform in shape, with an elongated nave in the Latin cross form but the early designs were for a centrally planned structure and this is still in evidence in the architecture. The central space is dominated both externally and internally by one of the largest domes in the world. The entrance is through a narthex, or entrance hall, which stretches across the building. One of the decorated bronze doors leading from the narthex is the Holy Door, only opened during jubilees.[10]

The interior dimensions are vast when compared to other churches.[2] One author wrote: "Only gradually does it dawn upon us – as we watch people draw near to this or that monument, strangely they appear to shrink; they are, of course, dwarfed by the scale of everything in the building. This in its turn overwhelms us." [12]

Status

St. Peter's Basilica is one of the papal basilicas (previously styled "patriarchal basilicas") [note 2] and one of the four Major Basilicas of Rome, the other Major Basilicas (all of which are also Papal Basilicas) being the Basilicas of St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, and St. Paul outside the Walls. The rank of major basilica confers on St. Peter's Basilica precedence before all minor basilicas worldwide. However, unlike all the other Papal Major Basilicas, it is wholly within the territory, and thus the sovereign jurisdiction, of the Vatican City State, and not that of Italy.[14]

It is the most prominent building in the Vatican City. Its dome is a feature of the skyline of Rome and covers an area of 2.3 hectares (5.7 acres). One of the holiest sites of Christianity and Catholic Tradition, it is traditionally the burial site of its titular, St. Peter, who was the head of the twelve Apostles of Jesus and, according to tradition, the first Bishop of Antioch and later the first Bishop of Rome, rendering him the first Pope. Although the New Testament does not mention St. Peter's martyrdom in Rome, tradition, based on the writings of the Fathers of the Church,[clarification needed] holds that his tomb is below the baldachin and the altar of the Basilica in the "Confession". For this reason, many Popes have, from the early years of the Church, been buried near Pope St. Peter in the necropolis beneath the Basilica. Construction of the current basilica, over the old Constantinian basilica, began on 18 April 1506 and finished in 1615. At length, on 18 November 1626 Pope Urban VIII solemnly dedicated the Basilica.[2]

St. Peter's Basilica is neither the Pope's official seat nor first in rank among the Major Basilicas of Rome. This honour is held by the Pope's cathedral, the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, the mother church of all churches in communion with the Catholic Church.

SAINT PETER'S BURIAL SITE

History

After the crucifixion of Jesus, it is recorded in the Biblical book of the Acts of the Apostles that one of his twelve disciples, Simon known as Saint Peter, a fisherman from Galilee, took a leadership position among Jesus' followers and was of great importance in the founding of the Christian Church. The name Peter is "Petrus" in Latin and "Petros" in Greek, deriving from *petra* which means "stone" or "rock" in Greek, and is the literal translation of the Aramaic "Kefa", the name given to Simon by Jesus. (John 1:42, and see Matthew 16:18)

Catholic tradition holds that Peter, after a ministry of thirty-four years, travelled to Rome and met his martyrdom there along with Paul on 13 October 64 AD during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. His execution was one of the many martyrdoms of Christians following the Great Fire of Rome. According to Jerome, Peter was crucified head downwards, by his own request because he considered himself unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.[23] The crucifixion took place near an ancient Egyptian obelisk in the Circus of Nero.[24] The obelisk now stands in St. Peter's Square and is revered as a "witness" to Peter's death. It is one of several ancient Obelisks of Rome.[25]

PLAN TO REBUILD

Rebuild

By the end of the 15th century, having been neglected during the period of the Avignon Papacy, the old basilica had fallen into disrepair. It appears that the first pope to consider rebuilding or at least making radical changes was Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455). He commissioned work on the old building from Leone Battista Alberti and Bernardo Rossellino and also had Rossellino design a plan for an entirely new basilica, or an extreme modification of the old. His reign was frustrated by political problems and when he died, little had been achieved.[24] He had, however, ordered the demolition of the Colosseum and by the time of his death, 2,522 cartloads of stone had been transported for use in the new building.[24][note 3] The foundations were completed for a new transept and choir to form a domed Latin cross with the preserved nave and side aisles of the old basilica. Some walls for the choir had also been built.[32]inished product was then hauled to its final location and erected.