

WEEKEND

Europe



PHOTOS BY SUZANNE MORPHET/Special to Stars and Stripes

The entrance to the Chapel of Zeno in the Basilica di Santa Prassede shows Jesus and his apostles in the outer arch. The inner arch includes Pope Pascal's mother, Theodora. The chapel was built as a funerary chapel in her honor. It is considered to contain the best Byzantine-era mosaics of all of Rome's early churches.

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I began at Santa Pudenziana, not far from the convent where I was staying. Its plain exterior belies its attractive, fourth-century apse, with what's thought to be the oldest surviving Christian fresco in Rome. St. Peter — the very first pope — is thought to have lived for several years in a house where the church stands now.

Up the street looms the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, one of four major churches in Rome and with a dome that's strikingly similar to St. Peter's Basilica. Inside, a gold-embossed ceiling is impressive; the gold is apparently the first that Columbus brought back from America.

Across the piazza and down a narrow side street, the Basilica di Santa Prassede gets few visitors. Yet it's a veritable feast of medieval art. In early Christian churches, glass tiles impressed with gold leaf were used to create pictures and patterns. The mosaics at Santa Prassede glitter in the dim light.

The church of San Pietro in Vincoli was harder to find, but when I did, I came face to face with Moses, or at least Michelangelo's sculpture of the Old Testament leader and prophet. I thought Moses had trouble keeping his tribes in line, but you wouldn't want to tangle with this Moses. He's all rippling muscle.

For my next church I hopped onto the subway. San Giovanni in Laterano (St. John's in Lateran) is on the outskirts of Rome. Yet it is this church — not St. Peter's — that is the official seat of the pope. It's an enormous edifice, made more imposing by larger-than-life-size statues of Christ and his apostles peering down from on high. Inside, the amount of mosaic and marble is simply astonishing.

Nine hours after beginning, I ended my self-guided tour atop the Spanish Steps at Trinità dei



Rome's earliest churches had plain exteriors but spectacular mosaics on the walls inside, such as this one of Jesus and his apostles at Santa Prassede, originally built in the fifth century.

Monti with its twin bell towers. Evening vespers were underway and the church was filled with worshippers singing a joyful "Hallelujah!" A white-robed priest walked down the aisle flinging holy water over their heads.

I couldn't get close to Daniele da Volterra's painting "Descent from the Cross," but the sun was streaming through a window at

the back, illuminating Mary's sorrowful face and the limp body of her dead son in da Volterra's "Deposition."

When I felt a drop of holy water on my forehead I realized I was experiencing what I had come to Rome looking for — faith and art mixed together in all their glory.

Suzanne Morphet is a freelance writer who lives in Victoria, British Columbia.



Mass is underway on a Sunday morning at Santa Pudenziana church in Rome. The fresco in the fourth-century apse is thought to be the oldest surviving Christian fresco in Rome.

KNOW & GO

Tour info

Presto Tours' Early Bird Vatican Tour begins at 8 a.m. and includes the Vatican Museums, Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica. Group size is 15 or fewer. Cost is 79 euros per person (about \$100). Website: prestotours.com.

Papal audience

See the pope Wednesday mornings from 10:30-noon in St. Peter's Square (at Castel Gandolfo in August) and Sundays at noon. Tickets for the Wednesday audience can be obtained from the American Catholic Church in Rome. See santasusanna.org. No tickets are necessary for the Sunday blessing.

Accommodations

I stayed at Casa Il Rosario, a convent guesthouse run by the Dominican Sisters of Charity and booked through Monastery Stays. My large, clean room came with a private bathroom. The convent has a shaded garden and rooftop terrace for guests. My single room with breakfast cost 70 euros per night. Website: monasterystays.com.

Food

A food tour with Eating Italy, run by former Philadelphia Kenny Dunn, introduces guests to authentic Roman eateries, a wine cellar in a former synagogue, an artisanal gelateria and, yes, another church. Santa Maria della Scala once operated a pharmacy for the pope, and you can still see and smell old medicinal potions. Tour costs \$103 per adult. Website: eatingitalyfoodtours.com.

— Suzanne Morphet



Bob and Lorraine Huffaker

For more information and a listing of this weekend's walks, go to stripes.com/go/volksmarch

VOLKSMARCH

Next Thursday is the Fourth of July, and we would like to wish you a happy one! It's fun to cook out on the grill for the holiday, but it's even better when someone else does the cooking. Head to a volksmarch and let a club do the cooking and cleaning up afterwards!

The official countdown has begun for the 38th annual Stuttgart volksmarch. Only four weeks remain to get ready for this big event. You do have it marked on your calendar, don't you? If not, mark it down for July 27 and 28.

Of course, for any walk to be successful, a lot of volunteer help is needed. If you plan to attend the walk, why not help out and volunteer a few hours? No experience is needed and all help welcomed. For more information about volunteering, contact Melissa at volunteers@sgawc.org.

Bob attended this walk two years ago and had a great time. The route was hilly, but not too bad. As nice as the walk was, the best time was spent at the start with the great members of the SGAWC. Good food, good friends and good volksmarching stories make a wonderful combination.

If you can get off work next Wednesday, July 3, the walk in Bad Dürkheim should be fun. Be sure to try a little bit of the local wine. The start and finish is at the Weingut Kurt Lang.

Not too far from the Kaiser-slautern Military Community is the event in Schwollen, near Baumholder. The walk offers routes from six to 50 kilometers, which start at 6 a.m. both Saturday and Sunday. It also has a unique prize in a gemstone elephant. The flier shows a different design from the elephant we picked up at a walk in the area a few years ago. You can also choose other B-medal animals if you are not interested in an elephant. Perhaps one of last year's swans is more to your liking.

The walk in Wiesbaden Sunday will be in the Klarenthal district on the west side of town. Start the six- and 10-kilometer routes between 7 a.m. and 2 p.m., and the 20-kilometer route between 7 a.m. and noon. Finish time for all routes is 5 p.m. The start is at the Sophie-und-Hans-Scholl-Schule on Geschwister-Scholl-Strasse 10. This event is for IVV credit only.

E-mail volksmarch information to two.walkers@yahoo.com. Mail brochures to Bob and Lorraine Huffaker, CMR 460, Box 278, APO, AE, 09752.