

The Marian Pilgrimage: DAY FIFTEEN: Thursday 21 May 2020

Notre-Dame de Paris - France



Notre-Dame de France - England



Introduction: It had been my intention after the Ascension Masses to take the train south to London for a short break. The Coronavirus lock-down has changed many a travel plan.

One of the attractions for me in London is attending Holy Mass at the Church of Notre-Dame de France. It has some wonderfully calm and spiritual qualities, that one can sit, and surrounded by enchanting, and inspiring Church art and be moved to interior thoughts and prayers.

We could hardly ignore the great and magnificent 'big sister', in the heart of Paris, especially after the devastating fire of last year. The restoration work, and the rehabilitation of art works will be a sign of the optimistic resurgence that is at the heart of our Holy Faith.

***'For, with the old order destroyed,
a universe cast down is renewed,
and integrity of life is restored to us in Christ.***

***Therefore, overcome with paschal joy,
every land, every people exults in your praise***

*and even the heavenly Powers, with the angelic hosts,
sing together the unending hymn of your glory..'
as they acclaim:*

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts . . .

Let us proceed in peace:

So first to PARIS:

Notre-Dame de Paris, "Our Lady of Paris"



Notre-Dame de Paris is a medieval Cathedral on the Île de la Cité in the 4th arrondissement of Paris. The cathedral was consecrated to the Virgin Mary and is considered to be one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture. Its

pioneering use of the rib vault and flying buttress, its enormous and colourful rose windows, as well as the naturalism and abundance of its sculptural decoration set it apart from the earlier Romanesque style. Major components that make Notre Dame stand out include one of the world's largest organs, and its immense church bells.

The Cathedral's construction began in 1160 under Bishop Maurice de Sully and was largely complete by 1260, though it was modified frequently in the following centuries.

Notre-Dame suffered desecration during the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century when much of its religious imagery was damaged or destroyed.

Popular interest in the cathedral blossomed soon after the publication, in 1831, of Victor Hugo's novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (better known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*). Thereafter there was a major restoration project between 1844 and 1864, supervised by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

During the Second World War the Allied liberation of Paris in 1944 was celebrated within Notre-Dame with the singing of the Magnificat. In 1963, the Cathedral's façade was cleaned of centuries of soot and grime. Another cleaning and restoration project was carried out between 1991 and 2000.

The Cathedral is one of the most widely recognized symbols of the city of Paris and the French nation. It is the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Paris, containing the *cathedra* of the Archbishop of Paris (Michel Aupetit). Approximately twelve million people visit Notre-Dame annually, making it the most visited attraction in Paris.

Some of the most important relics in Christendom, including the Crown of Thorns, a sliver of the true cross and a nail from the true cross, are preserved at Notre-Dame.

While undergoing renovation and restoration, the roof of Notre-Dame caught fire on the evening of 15 April 2019. Burning for around fifteen hours, the Cathedral sustained serious damage, including the destruction of the flèche (the

timber spire let over the crossing) and most of the lead-covered wooden roof above the stone vaulted ceiling. Contamination of the site and the nearby environment resulted. Following the fire, many proposals were made for modernizing the Cathedral's design. However, on 16 July 2019, the French Parliament passed a law requiring that it be rebuilt exactly as it appeared before the fire. Stabilizing the structure against possible collapse is expected to continue until the end of 2020, with reconstruction beginning in 2021. The Government of France hopes the reconstruction can be completed by spring 2024, in time for the opening of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

With that hopeful prospect we get into our 'chariots', Wonderful in our 'Flying Machines', and wing it across Northern France, back over the English Channel to London.

Here we find to find the wonderfully uplifting and enchanting Church, Notre-Dame de France, just off Leicester Square.

The Church celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2015 and despite not looking like much from the outside is worth a look because the interior is a revelation.

The delightful Church of Notre Dame de France is home to a lovely set of murals by French artist, writer, poet and film maker Jean Cocteau (1889 - 1963).

The church itself is a true haven, located just around the corner from the busy and bustling Leicester Square; you pass beneath the representation of Our Lady of Mercy, that looks down upon visitors from over the main entrance on Leicester Place - and which was carved in 1953 by French sculptor Georges-Laurent Saupique (1889-1961).An aura of tranquil serenity engulfs you, and the stresses and strains of the modern age simply melt away.



INSIDE THE CHURCH

Several eminent French artists were asked to contribute their talents to decorate the interior of the church in such a way as to create a sacred space that would honour France.

One artist who was happy to oblige was Dom Robert, a Benedictine monk of the En Calcat Abbey, who created the beautiful Aubusson tapestry, which can be seen over the altar, and which depicts Paradise on Earth, with a reference to the Creation and to Wisdom. It is truly exquisite.



The present church replaces a nineteenth century church on the same site, which was built on what had been a former panorama – its distinctive round shape is repeated in the present building. The result is an idiosyncratic, powerful and attractive church, showing the influence of the Liturgical Movement. The circular interior is surrounded by an ambulatory, divided from the central space by an arcade of stone Tuscan columns. The ceiling is coffered, with columns embracing a central roof-light. The altar is located to the east side of the space, raised on a dais. A pair of original polygonal stone ambos carved by a sculptor from the École des Beaux-Arts sit to either side of the sanctuary, lightly incised with depictions of the Evangelists (north) and Prophets (south). Seating is provided by plain timber pews. At the centre of the chapel is the Lady altar, with Mosaic of the Nativity frontispiece by Russian artist Boris Anrep. The font is located in the baptistery to the south side, drum-shaped with relief decoration on a semi-circular step against a fluted apsidal backdrop. There are screens to the north and south of the altar and in the baptistery, pierced with circular and cross motifs. The Lady Chapel is located to the north of the main altar, and is enclosed by a glass screen. It is oval on plan, and top-lit, and the three walls are decorated with murals by Cocteau; to the west is the Annunciation, to the rear north wall is the crucifixion (signed and dated by Cocteau), and to the east wall is The Assumption. Cocteau painted the murals between November 3rd and 11th 1959.

At the time he was hugely popular and he had to be protected from over inquisitive journalists as he arrived at the church to begin work at 10am each day. He would always begin by lighting a candle before the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes; and, having done so, he would set to work.

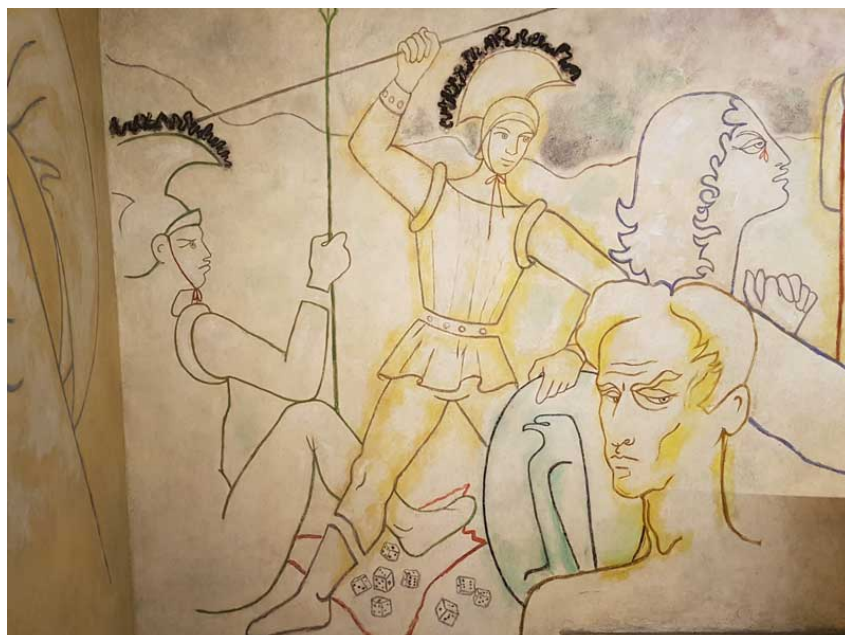
THE LADY CHAPEL AND JEAN COCTEAU



A CAMEO BY JEAN COCTEAU

To the left, two Roman soldiers are rolling dice to see who will get Jesus's garments, whilst John clasps his hands in anguished prayer, another jewel-like tear sparkling from his eye.

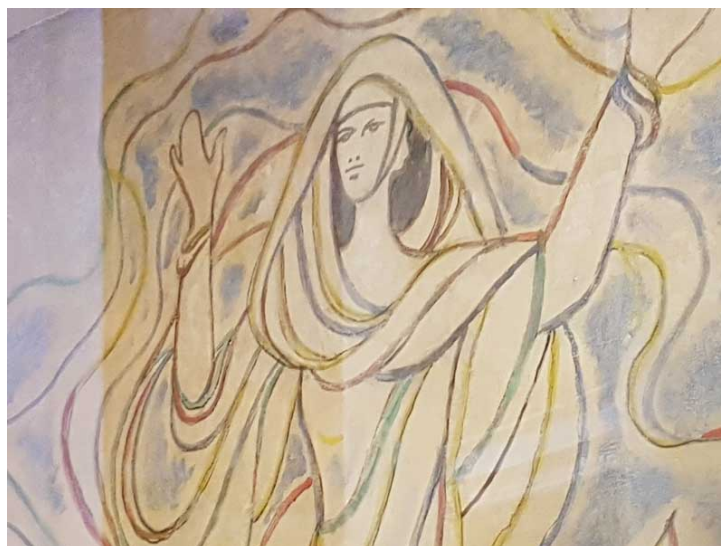
Beneath Jean Cocteau has painted himself into the grouping. His face looks away from grouping, and he wears an expression that is difficult to read - suggesting either puzzlement or sorrow, or, perhaps a combination of the two.



THE ANNUNCIATION



The Assumption



Witnesses described hearing Cocteau talk to his subjects as he painted them, engaging, as the notice in the church so wonderfully puts it, "...in a real dialogue with the wall of the chapel."

Indeed, when he had completed his task, he lamented that he was truly sorry to leave behind the chapel wall which, he observed, "has drawn me into another world."

Another world!

Alleluia! Amen!