



September 24
Ephesus



**WISH YOU
WERE HERE**



Ephesus:

On Paul's Second Missionary Journey 49-51 AD), he leaves Priscilla and Auila in Ephesus. On his Third Missionary Journey (AD 52-57), Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years. St. Paul preached at the Great Theater in Ephesus.

He wrote 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus. So many people convert that the silversmiths who manufacture idols start a riot.

While in Rome in 60/61 AD, Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus.

**“...Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit.”
(Ephesians 2:8,9)**



Our first port stop was the cosmopolitan Greek island of Mykonos. We docked and explored the port city nearby and headed off to Kusadasi (Turkey) to visit the holy house at mountaintop of the Our Blessed Mother in Ephesus (Turkey). Through the port of Kusadasi, we arrived in the place where the Blessed Virgin Mary took safe refuge, with the Beloved Disciple John, during a time of great persecution for all who believed in Jesus Christ.

Ephesus was an Ancient Greek City on the coast of Ionia, and it is considered to be one of the most magnificent and sophisticated ancient cities around the globe that harbors one of the seven wonders of the world, the temple of Artemis, derived from the ancient cult of Anatolian mother goddess Cybele. Established in 6000 BC, Ephesus was one of the 12 cities of the Ionian union. It's now in Turkey, but it was a crucial religious center for both paganism and Christianity.



KUSADASI and the HOUSE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Ephesus took a new meaning for Christians as it was assumed that Virgin Mary had spent the latter years of her life in this region. It is believed that Mary, our blessed Mother, had spent her last years here on top of the mountain, following Jesus' instruction to John the evangelist to keep safe and look after his Mother. Mary considered it to have been her final home, and it has become a place of pilgrimage.

In 1824, a German nun who lay on her deathbed had visions of a little Stonehouse. She insisted that the apostle John built a house and sheltered the Blessed Mother in her final years of her earthly life. Although the nun had never traveled beyond her own countries, borders, sister Ann Catherine Emmerich described the scene in detail – including the small house, a freshwater spring, and nearby tombs – to a well-known scribe named Clemens Brentano. In 1852, the story was published, which inspired several members of the Catholic Church to search for the site. In 1881, a curious French priest discovered a site matching the description in Bretano's book. In addition, that kicked off a long and complicated process of acquiring, excavating, studying, and many believed, restoring, what was to be the house of the Virgin Mary.

In 1957, the Vatican formalized this recognition. To this day, it is a pilgrimage site for those who seek refuge.

As I was concelebrating Mass with Fr Vincent at the chapel where our Blessed Mother lived, I felt the presence of our Blessed Mother, as if she was telling me that she really was there, and she was there during her last years of earthly life. As we celebrated the votive Mass of the Feast of the Assumption at the chapel there, our Blessed Mother, as if revealing to me, whispered that although she was there physically (in hiding from the early persecutors of Christianity at that time), her heart has always been with all her Son's disciples, and in Jerusalem, and particularly, her own hometown in Nazareth – where she couldn't be at that time. This moment was, for me, particularly powerful in this pilgrimage – and it had answered so many questions I have in my heart about our Blessed Mother's final years on earth, her apparitions (bilocation) to a few of Jesus' disciples, her Assumption into heaven, and her love for her all her children and Israel. I felt the Blessed Mother's maternal and powerful care and love on that mountain where she walked her final days with so many Christians; our Blessed Mother assures us that she continues to treasure and keep each one of us in her heart.

St. Paul and Ephesus

Another reason why Ephesus is significant to Christianity is that the apostle Paul lived, preached and wrote extensively while he was here, including his letter to the Corinthians.

Ephesus was one of the most important cities in the ancient world, and the Bible reflects its significance, especially in the New Testament. The best scripture passage that highlights the Ephesian civilization is Acts 19, where St. Paul's ministry in Ephesus is described in detail.



Acts 19:23-41 (The Riot in Ephesus)

This section describes a major event in Ephesus where Paul's preaching about Jesus and the rejection of idols caused a significant stir among the locals, especially those who made a living from the worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana, in Roman mythology).

Ephesus was home to the great Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This Temple was central to Ephesian religious and economic life. Paul's preaching directly threatened the local economy, which depended on the production of silver idols of Artemis. A silversmith named Demetrius stirred up the craftsmen and the population against Paul, fearing that the new Christian teachings would cause the decline of the worship of Artemis and hurt their business.

A massive uproar ensued, and the crowd gathered in the theater of Ephesus, shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" for hours. This theater, still standing today, was a major public space in the city and could hold up to 25,000 people. The riot shows how intertwined religion and economy were; and this passage gives us a glimpse into the tension between the new Christian faith and the established pagan traditions in Ephesus, reflecting broader challenges faced by early Christians in the Greco-Roman cities.

St. John, Ephesus, and the Book of Revelation

There were two major players (Apostles) of the early church that evangelized Asia Minor (particularly, this part which is in modern-day Turkey): St. Paul and St. John, the Apostles. St. John addresses the church of Ephesus in the Book of Revelation, specifically in Revelation 2:1-7. In this passage, Jesus speaks to the church through John, commending them for their strengths but also issuing a stern warning.

Jesus speaking through John, praises the church of Ephesus for their hard work, perseverance, and refusal to tolerate wickedness. The church is acknowledged for testing false apostles and for enduring hardships without growing weary (Revelation 2:2-3). The church is further praised for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans, a heretical group whose teachings were considered immoral and idolatrous (Revelation 2:6).

Despite their dedication, the church is rebuked for having “forsaken the love” they had at first. This is often interpreted as a loss of their initial passion and devotion to Christ and one another (Revelation 2:4).

Jesus urges the Ephesians to repent and return to their original love and zeal. He warns that if they do not repent, He will remove their “lampstand”, meaning they will lose their place and influence as a church (Revelation 2:5). But finally, through John – Jesus promises a reward to those who overcome: They will be granted access to the “tree of life” in the paradise of God, symbolizing eternal life (Revelation 2:7).

For us pilgrims, we are invited to reflect at that “forsaken love” and zeal we have that used to burn in our hearts. We may get discouraged by those people around us and diminished the fire and love of faith in our hearts; but the Lord reminds us to always keep the fire of His Word – the one that guides us, the lamp upon our feet, to be kept burning for us and for others to see. We are promised a life of meaning throughout and beyond our pilgrim way.

Why didn't Paul write a letter to the Athenians?

During our pilgrim-visit to Ephesus, I wondered to myself: why was there a letter to the Ephesians and non-existent one to the Athenians? As I reflected on this, my guess is that several factors might have been the cause:

1. **St. Paul's experience in Athens:** Paul's visit to Athens is recorded in Acts 17, where he delivers his famous speech at the Areopagus. While he engaged with the philosophers and intellectuals of the city, his message about the resurrection was met with mixed reactions. Some moved him, while others expressed mild interest, saying that they would hear him again later (Acts 17:32). Only a few people became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris (Acts 13:34). Compared to cities like Corinth or Ephesus, Paul's ministry in Athens had less success, and this might have diminished the need for a follow-up letter.
2. **Lack of a Strong Church Presence:** Unlike Corinth, Ephesus, or Philippi, where Paul established strong and growing Christian communities, Athens did not appear to have a substantial Christian congregation during Paul's time. Since his efforts in Athens led to only a small number of converts, there may not have been a large enough Christian community to warrant a letter.
3. **Athens as a Center of Intellectualism:** Athens was known for its philosophical traditions, and the intellectual climate there was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. While Paul attempted to contextualize the Gospel for his Athenian audience, his message about the resurrection did not align well with their worldview. The philosophical culture of Athens may have been less receptive to Paul's teachings compared to other cities that were more open to forming Christian communities.

Reading

“From now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:16-17).

Reflecting on St. Paul with Pope Benedict XVI

“St. Paul did not think of Jesus in historical terms, as a person of the past. He certainly knew the great tradition of the life, words, death and Resurrection of Jesus, but does not treat all this as something from the past; he presents it as the reality of the living Jesus. For Paul, Jesus’ words and actions do not belong to the historical period, to the past. Jesus is alive now, he speaks to us now and lives for us. This is the true way to know Jesus and to understand the tradition about him. We must also learn to know Jesus not from the human point of view, as a person of the past, but as our Lord and Brother, who is with us today and shows us how to live and how to die” (General Audience, Oct. 8, 2008).

Prayer

Dear St. Paul, pray that we may have the eyes to see Christ’s presence in our midst and be attentive to our need to be present to him. And hear all the desires of my heart. Amen.

Our Father ...

Hail Mary ...

Glory Be ...

St. Paul the Apostle, pray for us!