

July 1, 2016 - Jerusalem

Tuesday evening, June 28, a hundred guests gathered at the bottom of the holy staircase outside the Assumptionist shrine of St. Peter-in-Gallicantu in Jerusalem to begin the celebration of First Vespers on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. Fr. Jean Daniel Gullung, AA, rector of the shrine, opened the ceremony which was presided by the Most Rev. Joseph Jules Zerey, the Greek Melkite Catholic archbishop and Vicar apostolic of Jerusalem. Rev. Msgr Matteo de Mori, First secretary of the apostolic nunciature of Jerusalem, and the Very Rev. Charles Galichet, Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Abu Gosh, attended the service as did the two Benedictine communities of the city.

A piece that completes the work of Fr. Boubet, AA, builder of the current church

After the introduction, the congregation climbed the stairs (used by Jesus himself the night of Holy Thursday after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemani) and entered the church in order to sing the psalms. The blessing of the new mosaics took place at the end of the Vespers service.

These mosaics complete the work of Fr. Etienne Boubet (1865-1934), who built the actual church in 1931 on the slope of Mt. Sion; the church walls are decorated with mosaics. The new mosaics depict Christ on the Cross surrounded by the Blessed Virgin and St. John at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:26). Contrary to the original mosaics, fixed directly to the wall, Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and St. John were attached to separate supports that will be fixed to the walls of the Church. *«This work will bear witness to the Extraordinary Year of Mercy, which has particular meaning for our shrine, since it recalls Our Lord's gaze on Peter, a gaze of mercy and forgiveness »,* noted the shrine's director in the letter of invitation.

The work was entrusted to the *Mosaic Center* of Jericho, under the direction of Mr. Osama Hamdan, who was also present that evening. The mosaics, once blessed, were temporarily placed on wooden stands at the back of there church; once final touches have been made, it will be receive a permanent place in the shrine.

The church of St. Peter-in-Gallicantu is known for its wealth of mosaics and icons, helping pilgrims and visitors to reflect on the figure of St. Peter and his relationship with Christ. *"This is a very important Church,"*
explained Fr. Gullung,
"because it recalls two key Gospel events. In my opinion, it is very important. Here Peter experienced the mercy of Christ in spite of his denial. This is the message associated with the very name of the church, which underscores the universality of God's mercy"
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Thomas Charrière (Source: Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem)