

The holy apostles Peter and Paul were honored, following a tradition launched last year, by the celebration of First Vespers, Friday, June 28, at 6 PM at our shrine of St. Peter-in-Gallicantu. The service was presided by Most Rev. Giuseppe Lazzarotto, the new papal nuncio and apostolic delegate.

The celebration began at the bottom of the outdoor stairway. After reading the account of Jesus' arres in the Garden of Gethsemani and his transfer the the house of the High Priest, where Peter followed at a distance, we were able to climb the holy stairway putting our feet where Jesus and Peter themselves walked.



Arriving at the level of the courtyard, we read the account of Jesus' appearance before the High Priest and the denial and repentance of Peter.

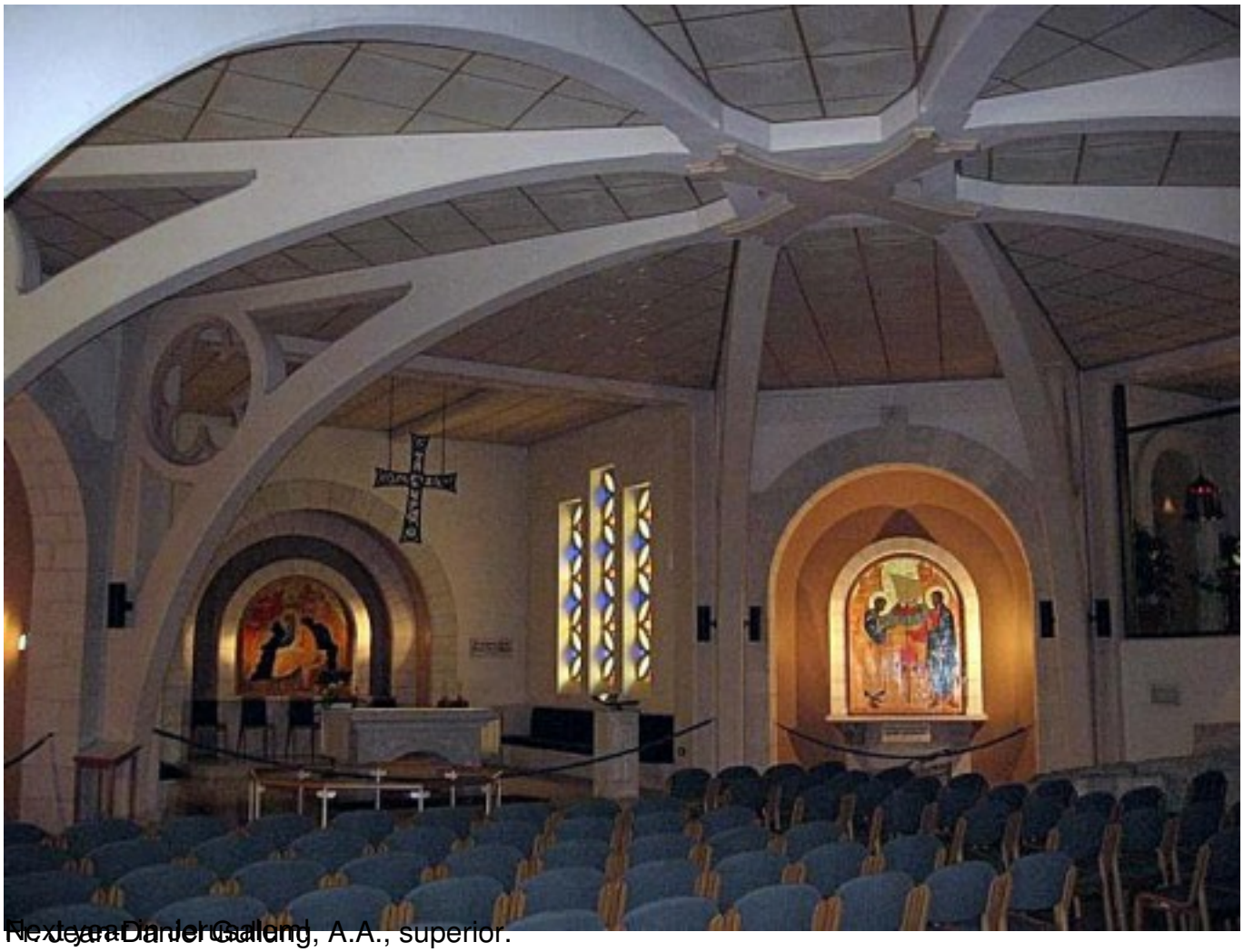
Then, while a group of 16 Italian pilgrims from Rome, here on a four-day retreat, left us to conduct a prayer service in the deep pit cistern, we went into the crypt for a time of meditation before the icons of Peter and Jesus. Fr. Jean Daniel knew the subject so well that he was able to free himself from his text and speak to those gathered from the heart. After a penitential rite and a profession of faith, assured that Jesus looks upon each one of us just as he regarded Peter with such great mercy, we went upstairs to sing Vespers. At his side the nuncio had Msgr. Bathish (the Patriarch General Vicar) and Most Rev. Zerey, the Greek-Melkite Vicar Apostolic. Archbishop Fitzgerald, a member of the Missionaries of Africa and former papal nuncio in Egypt, who currently lives at St. Anne's in Jerusalem, was also present.



The congregation surpassed last year's ---- some one hundred people (including all the monks and nuns from Abu Gosh)---- no doubt due to the fact that this event was announced on the Latin Patriarch's website (site www.lpj.org) with a photo of the holy stairway, indicating that it would be possible to climb it on this occasion. In effect, since March, there is a staircase next to the holy stairway, now rendered inaccessible by a chain-link fence, in order to protect it from those seeking relics/souvenirs and from the inevitable wear and tear that comes with the visit of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year. Likewise, the archaeological area with the grain mill and silos have been secured by a fence.



Our visitors had prepared a wonderful celebration with us and we didn't have to twist arms to get our visitors to stay around for the delicious buffet.



Next year Daniel Gallen, A.A., superior.