

Easter Sunday at the Vatican: He is risen, Alleluia!!

Happy Easter and many blessings from Rome!!

Easter morning:

The sound of people making their way to St. Peter's Square outside our hotel windows at the Palazzo Cardinal Cesi just after 6 a.m. "encouraged" us to skip breakfast and head out earlier than we had planned. We approached the piazza only to discover that the quickly-growing queues were not allowed to enter until 8 a.m. Hurry up and wait, right? That's exactly what we did for over an hour.

I had to keep looking up at the basilica dome and the statues of the apostles in an attempt to not think about the enormous number of people crowding in around us. When security finally started letting people in at 7:55, there was an enormous crush with the massive crowds trying to get into single opening metal detectors from every possible direction. It was overwhelming to say the least.

Once through, we worked our way to the reserved area where our early start gained us chairs on the center aisle. We were not as close as during the Wednesday audience, but we were indeed lucky to get seats at all, considering the enormous crowds on this bright and sunny Easter morning.

There were people of all ages and races, speaking so many different languages, many carrying banners and flags. There were nuns in religious habits of all styles, and priests and seminarians in cassocks and religious robes from many different orders among the crowds.

The liturgical practice with Msgr. Guido Marini for those participating that morning began at 8:30. The choirs also started warming up.

During the three hours that we waited in queues and at our seats for the 10:15 Mass, I could see people in every corner and from every angle of St. Peter's Square. It was truly a representation of the Universal Church. Fox News later estimated the crowds to number 150,000, but my friends who work at the Vatican said that it could have easily been over 250,000. (Next Sunday's numbers for the canonizations of Popes John Paul II and John XXIII could be well over one million in attendance.)

The rosary and processions of the Swiss Guard:

Around 9:45, greetings for Easter were extended over the speakers throughout the piazza, with an invitation to join in the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary in Latin. Perhaps you could not see this on EWTN's live broadcast, but midway through the second mystery, music was heard in the distance growing louder and louder. After the next Ave Maria, the rosary stopped completely as we could see the Swiss Guard

marching in formation in full ceremonial attire, led by their corps of musicians into the piazza from the Santa Anna Gate. It was spectacular for those able to see and hear.

After they took their places to the left side facing the altar, the recitation of the rosary resumed. But wait... more music was soon heard and more Swiss Guards marching in formation processed through St. Peter's Square to the right side facing the altar. It was magnificent!!

The rosary was never finished, as the cues on timing must have gotten mixed, and Mass was about to start. Those near the front definitely had a treat in witnessing this twice-annual solemn procession of the Swiss Guard, done only on Christmas and Easter.



Pope Francis on the steps before the altar at the beginning of Mass.

A "small world" story:

Ironically, my husband and I were seated at Mass next to two teens from another high school named for my school's patron, Archbishop John Carroll. It was not until Holy Communion when I saw and greeted a young man wearing a "Bishop Carroll High School" jacket, that one of the young men next to us told me they were part of that Canadian school's band, and were traveling and performing in various Italian towns.

Popemobile ride through the piazza:

After Mass, the Holy Father hopped on the Popemobile for a fast loop around St. Peter's Square. They were being very time-conscious since he had to be up on the high balcony over the basilica for the 12 noon Urbi et Orbi ("To the city and to the world") message and blessing which was broadcast across the globe.



I went to the back of the seated area, facing the standing-only sections, to get this photo which really shows the huge crowds spread throughout St. Peter's Square. Notice that Pope Francis is riding in a completely open jeep, even the front windshield is down flat.



From the front of my section facing the altar area and basilica.



Pope Francis looked so tiny when he came out onto the balcony over St. Peter's Basilica for the Urbi et Orbi message and blessing. It put into better perspective how truly massive is this largest church in the world. I also realized how it must have looked when he was presented to the crowds gathered there after his election last

March.

Heading home:

We are heading back to Maryland on Easter Monday after 12 amazing days in Italy. I so enjoyed sharing the daily “Buon giorno, Italia” journal and photos from the first week with my students.

During the days that followed, my husband and I extended for five extra days near the Vatican after they departed. We kept busy with special tours, Vatican events, good food and wine, and some once-in-my-lifetime opportunities. I have lots of photos and great stories to share with you after the jet lag wears off.

Arriverderci, Roma!! We loved every minute!!