

## **Touring the Vatican Without Taking a Step**

Virtual Images Bring Rome to Your Home

ROME, JULY 27, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).- Nothing can compare to a visit to Rome to admire the Sistine Chapel in person, or feel the "embrace" of the colonnade surrounding St. Peter's Square.

But a two-year project accomplished by students of the Villanova University of Pennsylvania can bring part of the "Rome experience" into your home.

The Sistine Chapel, St. Paul's Outside the Walls, St. John Lateran and St. Peter's are all available for viewing virtually at the Vatican web site.

St. Peter's is the last to have been posted; the Sistine Chapel went up in March. St. Paul's was the first to be made available, in 2008, and St. John Lateran was completed last November.

The 360-degree images can be zoomed and rotated so that viewers have the sense of being within the rooms, even if, as Chad Fahs, a digital media expert in Villanova's Communication Department, affirmed, "Being in the Sistine Chapel is an experience that's difficult to describe, much less re-create on a two-dimensional screen."

"This Virtual Reality Tour is likely the closest anyone has come to simulating the experience," he said.

Immersed in the sacred

Paul Wilson, a faculty member in Villanova's

Communication Department and one of the leaders of the virtual tour project, suggested that the virtual tour in some respects gives insights that are difficult to achieve in person.

“This is one of the most innovative explorations of a work of art to date,” he asserted. “It will change forever the way artists and historians can view the amazing work and mind of Michelangelo -- his attention to detail, social commentary and sense of humor.”

To create the tours, several thousand digital photographs were taken with an advanced motorized camera rig and then digitally stitched together, color-corrected and post-processed by Villanova team members to create a virtual panorama in a three-dimensional projection.

Tour visitors can zoom in for high-resolution views of the interiors.

“The artwork present in places of worship aims to immerse the visitor in a sacred reality and the Sistine Chapel is pre-eminent in this tradition,” said Frank Klassner, an associate professor in Villanova’s Computing Sciences Department and a leader on the project. “Our team is grateful to have played a small part in maintaining this tradition using the power of the Internet and modern immersive technology.”

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On the Net:

St. Peter's:

[www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san\\_pietro/vr\\_tour/index-en.html](http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_pietro/vr_tour/index-en.html)

Sistine Chapel:

[www.vatican.va/various/cappelle/sistina\\_vr/index.html](http://www.vatican.va/various/cappelle/sistina_vr/index.html)

St. John Lateran:

[www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san\\_giovanni/vr\\_tour/Media/VR/Lateran\\_Nave1/index.html](http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_giovanni/vr_tour/Media/VR/Lateran_Nave1/index.html)

St. Paul's Outside the Walls:

[www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san\\_paolo/vr\\_tour/index-it.html](http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/vr_tour/index-it.html)

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