

From the Diary of Bishop John Francis Norton – 1925

Inscription....

*Diary kept for my dearest Mother
on the P. & O Steamer “Mongolia”
by John F. Norton
With the Australian National
Pilgrimage to Rome & Lourdes 1925.*

21st May Ascension Thursday

There was a Church very near us, so I had no difficulty in finding my way there to say Mass. Dr Mannix said Mass on the principal altar, at which a number of the pilgrims attended. The rest went to the Cathedral which is situated near their hotels. The Church was full of people hearing Mass and after the Archbishop’s Mass, there was a children’s Mass attended by a large number of boys and girls in charge of Sisters of Charity. The children sang their hymns very well, and one of the tunes was the same as that which we sing “Holy God, we praise Thy name”.



When Mass was over we went for a motor drive to two neighbouring towns - Arles and Nimes. The road was not very interesting, but there was a beautiful perfume of wild thyme filling the air during the first four miles of the journey. After some miles we halted to inspect one of the most precious Roman ruins in Europe. It is called the Pont du Garde and is a wonderful system of three tiers of arches, by which the Romans carried water across the valley of the Garde. The arches are quite perfect, and would serve now their original purpose - a wonderful tribute to the building genius of the Romans. Our journey was continued until we reached Arles. It contains many places of interest for it was founded by the Romans, but what everyone wants to see is the famous Roman temple and amphitheatre. Both are quite perfect. We climbed up the banks of seats and looked down on the perfect oval of the arena. The next building resembled the Colosseum days of the persecutions for the slaughtering of Christians.

Looking down on it now, one could hardly conjure up the vision of what that great theatre must have been like when it was crowded with men and women eager to see the sight of blood that the Pagan Romans loved. In that arena before us the gladiators fought each other “to make a Roman holiday”, or worse still the Christians were torn to pieces by wild beasts. Nowadays it is sometimes used for bull fighting, as in Spain.

We then drove on to Nimes. It is famous for Roman remains, and has its amphitheatre not in as good a condition of preservation as that in the previous town, but still a wonderful ruin after nearly two thousand years.