

# Notre-Dame de Paris

By Sandra Garant

Imagine waiting in line to enter a church! That might happen if you are going to Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, France.

Paris is the capital of the European country of France. The Seine River separates the city into two sections called the Right Bank and the Left Bank. You won't find Notre Dame Cathedral on the Right or the Left Bank. It's in the middle of the Seine River on the island called Ile de la Cité.



Bishop Maurice de Sully chose to build the cathedral around the area of two other very old churches that were badly damaged. Workers began building Notre Dame in 1163 A.D. The cathedral was almost completed a hundred years later — but not by the same workers who began it!



*Let's go inside this world famous cathedral . . .*

## Inside the Cathedral

Enter through the large carved wooden doors on the right. This entry is called St. Anne's Portal. The sculptures in stone above the doors show the Blessed Virgin seated on a throne with the Christ Child in her lap. The king of France, the bishop, and the clergy are offering the new cathedral to the Mother of God.

Close by your left, a very modern sign reminds you to be silent because you are entering a house of God.

Once inside, pause for a minute to let your eyes get used to the darkness. Candles and some electric lights are everywhere, but the cathedral is huge. The ceiling is very far away. Columns rise up to meet it and suddenly spread out to form the vaulted ceiling.

Moveable wooden "fences" mark the center of the cathedral and prevent visitors from disrupting the Mass. Mass is celebrated daily in the cathedral in this central area even though visitors continue walking up and down the side aisles. People admire the stained glass windows, the statues, the many side chapels, and the architecture.



At the side chapels, pause to light a small candle and pray. Drop a ten franc coin into the offering box. Which of the many chapels will you choose? Perhaps you will kneel in front of the chapel dedicated to the Little Flower or the one dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, but there are many others. King St. Louis ordered the chapels built to serve as meeting places for different guilds.

A medieval guild was a formal organization of merchants or craftsmen, which sought to maintain high standards and protect the interests of the members. The king wanted the guilds to meet in the cathedral to remind them to consider their spiritual welfare along with their financial welfare. Profit from your work, but let the presence of Christ permeate your workday and your trading.

As you continue to walk, you will probably pass by people waiting for the sacrament of reconciliation. Look at the sign in front of the room to see which languages the confessor can speak. The confessional is a small room with transparent walls set inside a side chapel.

Instead of a Crucifix behind the main altar, you see an empty gold cross. At the foot of the cross is a statue of Mary with the precious body of her Son Jesus half resting on her lap. He has just been lowered from the cross, and Mary's sorrow is overwhelming, but she still looks heavenward with great faith.

*Let's visit the treasury, or Le Trésor . . .*

## Le Trésor

A trcsor is a treasury, which is where valuable things are kept for safety. How did the valuable things get into the treasury? Kings, bishops, guilds, and wealthy laypeople would donate items. The goldsmiths' guild must have been especially generous!

What kinds of valuable things are now kept in the treasury of Notre Dame? One of the first treasures you see as you enter is a large book called the Graduel de Notre Dame de Paris. It is open to a page showing three paintings, one of which is an illuminated letter E. A gradual (the English spelling of the French word "graduel") is a book that contains the music and words that the choir sings during the Mass.



In another showcase are beautifully decorated floral vestments. Napoleon III gave them to Notre Dame in 1856 when his son Eugene was baptized at the cathedral.



Further on stands a statue of silver. A silversmith created this statue of Mary and the Child to commemorate the end of a Jubilee Year in 1826. Mary and Jesus are both looking downwards. His hair seems quite curly.

What else is in the treasury? Beautifully decorated and jeweled monstrances, crucifixes, and reliquaries surround you. Chalices of silver and gold look too intricate to have ever been used. In another showcase, you find the linen tunic of St. Louis, the only canonized king of France. Parts of the tunic are missing because they were cut to use as relics.

There are other items in the Treasury, and people continue to donate wonderful things. Perhaps the most famous item is the Crown of Thorns. Actually there are two reliquaries for the Crown. One is shaped like a crown with four kings seated below. Another shows the world as a golden ball with the cross, a person representing faith, and a lion at the top of the ball, which is supported by three angels.

*Let's climb to the top of Notre-Dame . . .*

## Going Up

Do you have the stamina to climb to the top of Notre-Dame? Let's go! Actually, first you must wait patiently in line. Although anyone may enter the cathedral itself free of charge, you must pay about 40 francs or almost \$6 to climb the towers of the cathedral.

We have paid the admission price, so let's begin climbing. Don't try to race up quickly. You will be climbing sixty-nine meters, which is about 230 feet high.

The stone steps are heavily worn away in the center. They almost appear to be bent. The stairs are spiral and rather dizzying if you look up at how much further you must go. Here and there narrow vertical openings in the tower let in air and light. The walls are very thick.

Soon you arrive at the gift shop in a room of the north tower. Here you can pause to catch your breath and perhaps buy a souvenir to remember this climb. But let's continue climbing.



The stairs seem to be getting smaller. Watch your step. It's a long way to the bottom. Suddenly you come out into the open air and are face to face with chimeras on the open gallery.

Chimeras are ornamental and fantastical creatures. They are not functional like gargoyles, which were designed to drain rainwater off the buttresses and various levels of the roof. These chimeras are not medieval at all having been added to the cathedral in the mid 1800's during a badly needed restoration.

Now cross the Chimeras' Gallery and look up. You still have the south tower to climb. Go up a short flight and enter into the belfry. Duck your head so you don't bang it against the low opening. Place your hand carefully on one of the mas-

sive wooden structural beams. Although the beams show signs of age, they are still sturdy. The engineering design is practical and yet beautiful.



Climb the narrow wooden staircase up to the bell called “Emmanuel, Ludovic, Marie-Therese”. The bell is huge and very heavy. The clapper of the bell has worn away deep valleys in the sides of the metal.

Exit the belfry and continue up the last and smallest flight of stairs at the top of the south tower. Watch out for people climbing down. You will have to squeeze past each other. From the top of the south tower, you have a magnificent view of the cathedral square. Look for the point Ground Zero from which all distances in Paris are measured. It’s marked with a metal plaque.

You will also be able to look down on the flying buttresses. Imagine rainwater rushing down the center hollows of the buttresses away from the cathedral and out of the gargoyles’ open mouths.

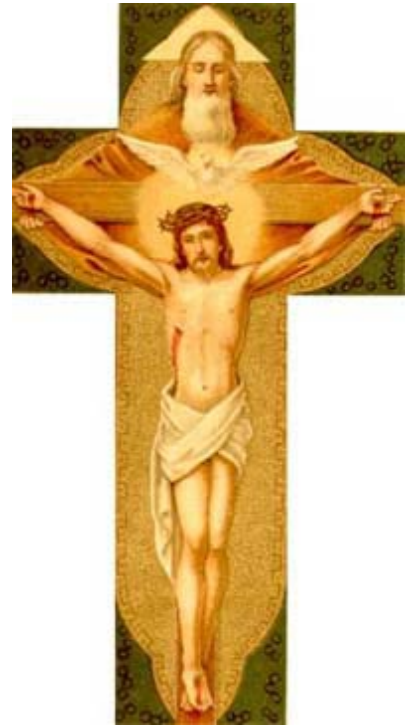
From your viewpoint, you can also see Sacré-Coeur, the cathedral dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the far distance on the hill of Montmartre. The gray green waters of the Seine River flow down below at your feet.

Fortunately, climbing down is easier than climbing up because now it is time to yield your place to the next group of pilgrims.

*Let’s see the Notre Pere, the Our Father . . .*

## Notre Père

Notre Père  
qui es aux cieux,  
que ton nom soit sanctifié,  
que ton règne vienne,  
que ta volonté soit faite  
sur la terre comme au ciel.  
Donne-nous aujourd'hui  
notre pain de ce jour.  
Pardonne-nous nos offenses,  
comme nous pardonnons aussi  
à ceux qui nous ont offensés.  
Et ne nous soumets pas à la tentation,  
mais délivre-nous du mal.  
Amen.



Do you recognize any of the words? “Ciel” is similar to ceiling. It means Heaven. “Donne” is similar to donate, meaning give.