

**IL CROCIFISSO LIGNEO
DELLA BASILICA VATICANA**

***THE WOODEN CRUCIFIX
OF SAINT PETER'S BASILICA***



INTRODUCTION

I am grateful to the Fabbrica di San Pietro for having shared this project – the conservation of the great wooden Crucifix in the Vatican Basilica – with the Order of the Knights of Columbus. This is a profoundly venerated sculpture dating from the first decades of the fourteenth century, and, with the exception of the first Holy Year of 1300, it has seen all the Jubilees in history; on the occasion of Pope Francis' *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* it has been returned to the devotion of the faithful in the Chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament. The project presented here is an important achievement in the continuing collaboration that began in 1981, between our Order and the Fabbrica di San Pietro, for the conservation of works of art and faith housed in the Basilica where the Apostle Peter is buried – the first Pope to lead the Church. As we did with *Our Lady of Help*, also in Saint Peter's, the Order of the Knights of Columbus has supported the creation of this volume in order to cast light on the oldest wooden Crucifix in the Basilica, and to publish the details of its conservation, successfully brought to conclusion after more than fifteen months of intense work (July 11, 2015 - September 29, 2016).

In the first part of the book, for the first time ever, the story is told of this venerated sculpture through its seven hundred years of existence. After being subjected to various displacements in both the Old and New Basilica, and having been placed over the altar that now supports the marble sculpture of the *Pietà* by Michelangelo, the Crucifix had remained almost forgotten in the small Chapel of the Relics, beyond the reach of the public.

The pages that follow contain a description of the work's conservation – an excellent procedure from every point of view – which I had occasion to admire several times as the project evolved in the *Sala Capitolare* of the Vatican Sacristy. The various chapters of this book communicate the complexity of the intervention, which depended on the most modern technology and the commitment of professional experts. Finally, the numerous photographs published here convey compelling and remarkable images of each stage of this delicate operation, showing the reader the gradual revelation of this emotionally and spiritually moving sculpture of Christ dying on the Cross.

Thanks to this conservation project, today's pilgrims and those of future generations will once again be able to pray before the Crucifix beside the tabernacle of the Most Holy Sacrament, enlivening their own faith as they contemplate this sculpture in its rediscovered beauty and intact state.

Having supported the conservation of a work of such significance for both faith and art is a reason for all members of the Order of the Knights of Columbus, and their families throughout the world, to feel proud.

Mr. Carl A. Anderson

Supreme Knight of the Order of the Knights of Columbus

