

### 13. THE BASILICA OF SAN PIETRO AD ARAM

Tradition has it that the Basilica of San Pietro ad Aram was built on the site where St. Peter celebrated mass for the first time and baptised Saint Candida and Saint Aspreno, the first Neapolitans to convert to Christianity. The word “Aram” comes from “**Ara Petri**”, the stone Peter used as an altar to celebrate mass.

Various bishops like Saint Silvestro I, Saint Pelagio, Saint Gregorio Magno and Saint Nestoriano, an African bishop who landed in Naples with Saint Gaudioso, also celebrated mass on this same stone altar.

The Basilica was used to **house French troops** during the Napoleonic period. It was damaged in the **1980 earthquake** but the people loved the place so much they had it rebuilt.

The huge temple with its ancient stucco work and grooved columns houses some splendid paintings by great artists like **Jusepe de Ribera, Massimo Stanzione, Mattia Preti, Luca Giordano** and **Belisario Corenzio**, and also boasts an antique fresco by **Saint Candida**, recently rediscovered after being lost for centuries.

Tradition has it that Saint Candida lived in the crypt under the church which you went down to from the left transept. An inscription commemorates the finding of her body near an old well. She decided to be buried in the same place as six other martyrs, whose names are unknown.

The hypogeum was finally closed after the 1980 earthquake. Despite this, the cult of the lost souls is still popular. We can see this from the way people cover and hide the skulls behind wooden panels to form proper loculi and pin their **requests for grace** on them.