Introduction: A Sacred Journey with Deep Roots

In a fast-paced world, filled with noise and distractions that pull us away from what truly matters, the Catholic Church invites us to reclaim traditions rich in spiritual meaning. One such tradition is the **practice of visiting seven churches**, especially on **Holy Thursday**, though it can also be done at other times of the year as an act of devotion.

This pilgrimage is not just a ritual—it is a **profound experience of faith**, an encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, and an act of reparation for the sins of the world. But where does this practice come from? What does it symbolize? And most importantly, how can we live it out authentically today?

Origin and History: From Jerusalem to the Present Day

The tradition of visiting seven churches traces its roots back to **4th-century Jerusalem**, where pilgrims would follow the footsteps of Jesus during His Passion. St. Jerome and St. Sylvia of Aquitaine documented how the faithful would journey through holy sites, meditating on each station of the Via Crucis.

However, the practice as we know it today took shape in **16th-century Rome**, promoted by **St. Philip Neri**, the "Apostle of Joy." He organized nighttime walks with his disciples, visiting the **seven major basilicas of Rome** (St. Peter's, St. Paul Outside the Walls, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, St. Lawrence, Holy Cross in Jerusalem, and St. Sebastian). The goal was to **accompany Jesus in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane**, recalling His words: *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation"* (Matthew 26:41).

Over time, this devotion spread throughout the Catholic world, adapting to local traditions while preserving its **essence of adoration, penance, and spiritual communion**.

Theological Meaning: The Seven Churches as a Path of Conversion

It is no coincidence that the number is **seven**. In Scripture, seven symbolizes **fullness and covenant** (the seven days of creation, the seven sacraments). By visiting seven churches, the faithful undertake a **complete spiritual journey**, uniting their hearts with Christ in His Passion.

Each stop can be associated with **a moment from Jesus' agony**, following this traditional

structure:

1. **Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane** (Meditation on surrendering to God's will).
2. **Jesus Before Annas** (Reflection on injustice and betrayal).
3. **Jesus Before Caiaphas** (Contemplation of false accusations and slander).
4. **Jesus Before Pilate** (Meditation on human cowardice and fear of truth).
5. **Jesus Before Herod** (Reflection on indifference and contempt for the sacred).
6. **Jesus Crowned with Thorns and Condemned to Death** (Contemplation of redemptive suffering).
7. **Jesus Carries the Cross and Dies on Calvary** (Adoration of Christ's infinite love).

Additionally, the seven churches can be seen as a **representation of the Seven Last Words of Christ**, or even as an **inner pilgrimage**, where each church symbolizes a virtue to cultivate or a sin to overcome.

Practical Guide: How to Live This Devotion Deeply

To ensure this practice does not become a mere formality, it is essential to **prepare the heart**. Here is a step-by-step guide:

1. Spiritual Preparation

- **Sacramental Confession**: Purify the soul before beginning (1 John 1:9).
- **Clear Intention**: Offer the pilgrimage for a specific purpose (conversion, reparation, world peace).
- **Inner Silence**: Avoid distractions; bring a rosary or prayer journal.

2. Structure for Each Church Visit

At each church, follow this outline:

- **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament**: Kneel before the Eucharist (if exposed).
- **Scripture Reading**: A passage related to the corresponding station.
- **Personal Prayer**: Intimate dialogue with God.
- **Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be**: For souls in need.

3. Recommended Prayer for Each Church

"Lord Jesus, in this holy place, I adore You and thank You for Your sacrifice. Help me to live

with love and courage, as You did. May this visit bring me closer to conversion. Amen."

4. Application in Daily Life

- **Reparation**: Offer small sacrifices for those who do not believe.
- **Frequent Communion**: Strengthen your union with Christ.
- **Concrete Charity**: Visit the sick or needy as an extension of your pilgrimage.

Relevance Today: Why Practice This Now?

In an age where **faith is weakening and the world cries out for hope**, this devotion is an **antidote to indifference**. It reminds us that:

- **We are not alone**: Christ walks with us.
- **Suffering has meaning**: When united with Christ's, it saves souls.
- **The Church is family**: Visiting multiple parishes strengthens ecclesial communion.

Conclusion: A Journey That Transforms

Visiting seven churches is not just a beautiful tradition—it is a **living act of love**, a way to **"stay with Him one hour"** (Matthew 26:40). In a world that forgets God, this pilgrimage is a **silent cry of faith**, a way of saying: *"Lord, here I am; I will not abandon You."*

I invite you to embrace this devotion with fervor, not only during Holy Week but **whenever your soul needs to reconnect with its Savior**. May each step through those sacred thresholds be an **embrace of Christ's heart**, which longs so deeply for our companionship.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Will you accept the challenge of walking with Him?