In A.D. 80, the Roman Emperor Vespasian built an amphitheater as a monument to Roman greatness. He also built it to impress, amaze, and awe people with its beautiful stone arches, valuable decorations, and the incredible entertainment it provided. No one knows how much this huge, oval building cost to build, but we do know that the cost was enormous. Let’s consider all the interesting things that took place at the Colosseum in Rome, Italy.

The Colosseum was used mainly for public entertainment. Animals such as elephants, hippos, ostriches, bears, alligators, and lions were forced to fight each other. Once the spectators grew tired of the bloody, exhausted animals, archers would shoot them with their bows and arrows. Also, the central arena of the Colosseum could be flooded for fake sea battles to take place. These sea battles, also called naumachias, would go on until one or both armies were completely destroyed. The battles often included theatrical props for the enjoyment of the crowd.

The most popular type of entertainment that took place at the Colosseum was gladiator fights. Gladiators were trained men who usually fought each other to the death. There were many different types of gladiators including a heavily-armed Samnite gladiator, an almost-naked Retiarius gladiator, a Secutor gladiator whose method was to chase his opponent, and a Thracian gladiator who used weapons from an area in northern Greece. Usually two different types of gladiators fought each other. Occasionally gladiators were forced to fight blind, wearing helmets with no eyeholes.

At this bloody, brutal place, it is estimated that 700,000 people died. All gladiator fights ended with the death of one or both gladiators unless the crowd said differently. A gladiator’s dead body was then dragged out of the arena. Criminals were forced to fight each other and Christians were eaten alive by wild animals. The center of the arena was covered in sand that soaked up blood and could easily be raked over after a fight.

After being used until the 6th century A.D., the Colosseum began falling apart. Natural forces such as strong winds and rain destroyed the structure. As the Colosseum was neglected, thieves stole valuable decorations like statues and artwork. Sadly, the Colosseum was used as a bullfighting ring, a garbage dump, a hideout for outlaws, a factory, and much more. Finally, in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some small repairs started taking place on the Colosseum. It wasn’t until the 1990’s that a huge multimillion-dollar project was started to repair as much as possible.

Today the Colosseum is the most popular tourist attraction in Rome. Millions of visitors marvel at its beauty. In 2003 alone, 2.5 million people visited the Colosseum. However, all this human traffic causes wear to floors and stairways. As visitors walk through the now-silent Colosseum, they can imagine the cheering spectators, roaring animals, and fighting gladiators. Visitors can also pay tribute to the thousands of people who died there.

Learning about the Colosseum and what took place there is very interesting. But more importantly, learning about what took place at this magnificent building can help make us thankful for all the Christians who willingly gave their lives for Christ there and all around the world.
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