

Sant'Eugenio



Sant'Eugenio is a minor basilica, a mid 20th century parish and titular church near the Villa Giulia in the Pinciano quarter. The dedication is to St Eugenius, a 7th century Pope.

History

The church was commissioned as a personal project by Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli), and dedicated to his baptismal patron saint. The funds were taken from gifts which he received on the Silver Jubilee of his episcopate on 13 March 1942. Land was donated by the Knights of Columbus, and construction began in the same year with the excavation of foundations and the the crypt void. The pope laid the dedication stone on 28 June 1943 in the latter. This stone was tratto dalle mistiche oscurità delle grotte vaticane ("pulled from the mystic darkness of the Vatican grottoes") under St Peter's. In other words, it was removed from its context during the archaeological investigations authorized by the pope to investigate the Tomb of St Peter.

The architects were Enrico Pietro Galeazzi and Mario Redini, the former being the representative at Rome of the Knights, and on-site supervision of the structural elements was by Giuseppe Nicolosi.

Unfortunately, the war situation meant that work was stopped in the autumn of 1943 and was not resumed for four years. However it then progressed quickly, and the high altar was finally consecrated by Pope Pius on 2 June 1951. He had already erected the parish, and declared the church to be a minor basilica.

The artists responsible for the decorative elements of the interior were supervised by Aldo Nati. The church amounts to a treasure-house of mid 20th century religious art, at the threshold of a collapse in both the moral confidence and financial resources available to the Roman Catholic Church to sponsor such a project.

In 1949 the pope had also founded the Istituto di Sant'Eugenio as a residential college for newly-ordained young priests, where they could complete their studies and be trained in parochial work. This college occupied a convent attached to the church on its right hand side.

Until 1980, the parish and college were administered by diocesan clergy. However, the college became moribund with the decline in priestly vocations and in that year both the church and the college premises were handed over to Opus Dei. This prelature is still in charge of the parish.

Exterior

The church is built in a style imitating the Baroque, and is one of the great modern domed churches of Rome. The design is amazingly "retro", and the church looks as if it could have been built forty years earlier than it actually was.

The plan is based on a Latin cross inserted within a rectangle. After an entrance foyer there is a central nave of three principal bays, alternating with four shallow sub-bays. The nave has side aisles, off which are three external chapels on each side. There follows a transept of the same width as the nave with its aisles and side chapels, which has a dome over its crossing. The sanctuary has a further shallow sub-bay, and a transverse rectangular apse. The latter is flanked by two chapels, and to the left of the left hand one stands the campanile.

The fabric is in purplish-pink brick, with some architectural details in travertine limestone. The entrance façade is entirely in the latter material. The roofs are pitched and tiled. Those over the ends of the transepts and the sanctuary are also hipped.

The side elevations of the church are interesting. The right hand side is occupied by the college, but the left hand side faces over a sports ground and is well on view.

The three side chapels off the left hand aisle each have a blank back wall, with two vertical grooves running up the fabric near the corners (this design feature is repeated elsewhere, they are called sunk fillets). Each of the niches in between the chapels contains a tall stained glass window. The chapel roofs are hipped.

On the aisle roof behind the chapel is a row of three very unusual pavilions, each with a pitched and hipped roof and with an oculus or round window in its back wall. These pavilions also have the vertical grooves in their back walls. The oculi have dished frames in limestone.

The transept end is in two storeys, separated by an entablature. The lower storey echoes the design of the chapel walls, except that the grooves are further from the corners. The upper one imitates the pavilions, except that the oculus is larger.

Campanile

There is a tower campanile attached to the left hand side of the sanctuary, 33 metres high and not reaching the height of the dome. There is a small gap between it and the transept. It has three storeys, with an entablature separating the first and second storeys in line with that in the transept end wall, and a simple cornice between the second and third storeys in line with the transept end roofline. The bell-chamber has a large round-headed sound-hole on each face, flanked by a pair of grooves again, and a shallow pyramidal cap.

Dome

The dome over the crossing has a circular drum placed on a square attic, which is capped by a shallow tiled roof of twelve triangular pitches meeting at a small lantern. The drum has two storeys. The taller main one

is on a stone plinth, and has twelve large round-headed windows separated by blind brick pilasters supporting an entablature with a projecting cornice. The low second storey has a slightly smaller diameter, and twelve small rectangular windows. A spiral staircase runs up the side from the top left hand corner of the attic, compromising the identity of one of the arched windows.

On top of the lantern is a statue of St Michael the Archangel by Alberto Gerardi. The height is 47 metres.

College

The college is arranged around a cloister or cortile to the right of the church. There is no wing on the street side, which is instead occupied by a screen wall rendered in a dark red and pierced by three identical arches. These have Doric impostes supported by engaged travertine pillars, and have their archivolts rendered seamlessly with the surrounding walling. The middle arch contains the entrance, with an iron grille displaying the Keys of St Peter in the tympanum. The two side arches each have a smaller round-headed window inserted; these apertures are not glazed, but have grilles and open into the cloister walk behind the wall.

Above the arches is an odd glass screen, topped by a cornice on the same line as the surrounding screen wall. The cornice is supported by six Doric pillars in travertine, one at each end of the screen and four in two separated pairs within it.

The cloister is rectangular, with arcaded walks on three sides having arches springing from free-standing Doric limestone pillars. The far side is occupied by the sacristy corridor. The college buildings are in two wings in the form of an L, occupying the far and the right hand sides of the cloister.

There is an interesting free-standing little shrine-chapel in the courtyard, which is actually the church's baptistery. It bears a mosaic depicting The Proclamation of the Dogma of the Assumption by Pope Pius XII, by Josef Oberberger of Munich in Germany.

Façade

The two-storey gabled entrance façade is entirely in travertine limestone ashlar, with the walling having wide joints horizontally giving a striped effect. The façade is slightly higher than the central nave roof behind, and is approached by a short flight of steps which reminds the visitor that there is a crypt.

The central nave frontage is brought forward from those of the side aisles, and the entrance zone of the first storey of this is brought forward in turn. This occupies half the width of the central nave frontage, and amounts to a shallow propylaeum. It has a pair of derivative Corinthian pilasters on plinths at its corners, supporting the central section of the entablature dividing the storeys. The main entrance has a simply molded doorcase, above which is an inscription *Opus iustitiae pax* ("Peace is the work of justice"). Over this in turn is a relief carving of six angels adoring the Sacred Initials (IHS) with cross and nails, by Alessandro Monteleone.

The zones of the central nave frontage of the first storey which flank the propylaeum are in the same style, with a pair of pilasters at the outer corners.

The side aisle frontages each have a smaller entrance, with a doorcase matching that of the main entrance. Above this is a high relief statue of an allegorical virtue by Monteleone. Justice is to the left, and Peace to the right. A further pair of pilasters occupies the far corners.

The capitals of these pilasters (there are a total of six in the façade) contain carvings of angels bearing papal emblems, and are worth a look. They bear the entablature which separates the storeys, and which is stepped in five separate lengths. These bear a single epigraph: *Deo sacrum in hon[ore] S[ancti] Eugenii I, Pius XII Pont[ifex] Max[imus] Romanus A[nno] D[omini] MDCCCCL* ("Sacred to God in honour of St Eugene I, Pius XII greatest Roman high priest, AD 1950").

The second storey of the façade, fronting the upper part of the central nave, has three separate vertical design elements separated by slight gaps. The central zone contains a large round-headed window which is recessed within a large rectangular aperture rather like a doorcase, with a balustraded balcony in front of it. The vertical zones on either side have high relief sculptures of the Evangelists (two in each, one above the other) carved by Francesco Nagni. The composition is crowned by a blank triangular pediment -the cornice of this is actually in three separate sections, corresponding to the three zones just mentioned.

Concave sweeps, with very small volutes at their ends, join the outer edges of the aisle rooflines and the pediment. Apart from these miserable volutes, the façade is a very successful and enjoyable neo-Baroque ensemble.

Interior

Nave

The side entrances lead into small lobbies giving access to the side aisles. The main entrance leads into a separate shallow entrance bay, over which is a gallery supported by a pair of free-standing Corinthian columns in polished travertine limestone. The counterfaçade window has stained glass, depicting Pope Pius XII Visits the Tiburtino Quarter by Lorenzo Michele Gigotti.

The nave has three main bays, with a pair of side chapels off each. There are a total of six of these chapels. However, the principal bays are separated by four narrow sub-bays with one next to the entrance bay and another just before the transept. These sub-bays exist because of the very unusual design of the colonnades separating the central nave from the aisles. There are four transverse rectangular open kiosks on each side, each supported by a pair of free-standing Corinthian columns matching those at the entrance. These support a full entablature, which runs round three sides of each kiosk and over archways giving access to the side chapels to connect with the entablatures of the neighbouring kiosks to give a continuous run of entablature round the interior. The frieze of this has a mosaic epigraph.

The ceiling of the central nave is a barrel vault, running from the counterfaçade to the transept. Each facing pair of kiosks are joined by a pair of transverse ribs in limestone, while the rest of the vault is rendered in a cream colour. Adjoining pairs of kiosks on each side are also joined by a longitudinal arch, which frames a vaulted void beyond over the aisle which is lit by an oculus or round window. This void is the interior of one of the aisle pavilions that you saw in the exterior.

The floor is of high quality, in white marble slabs enlivened with strips of yellow bordered by red. The central nave floor has a longitudinal row of three round gratings inserted into its major axis, which light the crypt. These gratings are high quality figurative castings in bronze, executed by Giovanni Nicolini Juniore, Renato Brozzi and Giuseppe Persichetti. The last-named also executed the holy water stoups.

Side aisles

As mentioned, the side chapels are entered via archways flanked by limestone pilasters. They are separated by stained glass windows depicting holy popes; there are a total of fourteen of these windows in the church, executed by Giulio Cesare Giuliani to designs by his daughter Laura Giuliani and Maria Letizia.

The Stations of the Cross are in bronze, and are a very impressive set. One to four are by Attilio Torresini, five to seven by Alfredo Biagini, eight to ten by Antonio Berti and eleven to fourteen by Giacomo Manzoni, Il Manzù. The majority of these are in the side aisles, below the stained glass windows just mentioned.

Below them are confessionals with carpentry by F. Loreti.

Right hand nave side chapels

The chapel dedicated to St Frances Xavier Cabrini has a depiction of The Apotheosis of St Frances Xavier incorporating a statue of the saint, a work by Pericle Fazzini.

The chapel dedicated to St Francis of Assisi was decorated by Domenico Rambelli, with an altar in red marble and a bronze statue of the saint. The candlesticks are in the form of Franciscan friars. In between these two chapels, the stained-glass window shows Pope Gregory VII Hildebrand.

The chapel dedicated to St Agnes was decorated by Venanzo Crocetti, and shows The Apotheosis of St Agnes with angels and allegorical virtues.

Left hand nave side chapels

The chapel dedicated to St Nicholas of Flüe (a Swiss saint) was decorated by Corrado Vigni. There is Alpine scenery behind the chapel of the saint, and scenes from his life on the altar frontal.

The chapel dedicated to St Catherine of Siena was decorated by Giorgio Quaroni. The white marble bas-relief altarpiece St Catherine's Vision of the Crucified is by Enrico Castelli.

The chapel dedicated to St Philip Neri contains an impressive bronze altarpiece statue of the saint by Francesco Messina. Unusually, the saint is shown in recollection when about to say Mass. The matching set of six altar candlesticks in the form of choirboys are also by Messina.

In between the chapel entrances are three stained glass windows, depicting the saintly popes Marcellus I, Sylvester I and Damasus.

Transept

The transept has a dome over the crossing, with pendentives springing from square limestone Corinthian piers. The ends to left and right of the dome have barrel vaults, and each has a chapel. The entablatures of the central nave are continued around the transept, and finally meet at the aedicule of the high altar.

There is an oculus or round window with stained glass over each of the chapel altars, one featuring The Holy Spirit and the other, The Sacred Head of Christ.

The dome, pendentives and vaults lack decoration, and the former only has twelve wide ribs meeting at the oculus. These ribs are doubled, in limestone (the rest of the décor is in cream render, as with most of the interior).

Chapel of Our Lady of Fátima

The left hand end of the transept contains the chapel of Our Lady of Fátima, which was donated by the Republic of Portugal and designed by Luiz Benavente.

The massive altarpiece has the theme of Our Lady of Fátima Venerated by Angels and Saints, and has the children who had the first vision depicted at the bottom. Our Lady is depicted as a statue fixed to the wall, sculpted by Leopoldo de Almeida, and the fresco work is by Martins Barada. The saints depicted separately are the most famous Portuguese ones: SS Anthony of Padua, Nuno Álvarez Pereira, Elizabeth of Portugal and John of God.

The altar frontal depicts The Annunciation, and is a work in fibreglass appliqué by Jorge Barradas from Lisbon.

The flanking stained-glass windows depict Popes St Martin I and St Hormisdas.

To the right of the altar is a funerary monument to Arnaldo Mengarini 1951, one of the founders of the engineering firm Ravello e Mengarini which was involved in the basilica's construction and who died suddenly during it. The design of the monument is by Mario Rellini.

Chapel of SS Peter and Paul

The right hand transept end contains a chapel dedicated to SS Peter and Paul, which was donated by the government of Lebanon and had its decoration supervised by Aldo Nati. The altar is in red marble, and the frontal contains a square cavity containing a gilded monstrance with angels. Above the mensa is a stone revetment containing a square bronze relief plaque with a portrait of Pope Pius XII, and with an epigraph along its top: Roma felix, quae duorum principum es consecrata glorioso sanguine ("Happy Rome, who are consecrated by the glorious blood of two princes").

The main altarpiece painting of The Princes of the Apostles is by Francesco Perotti. It is flanked by frescoes by Marcello Avenali which depict scenes from the lives of the two apostles. St Peter is to the left, and St Paul to the right -the main scene in the latter is his beheading.

The two flanking stained glass windows depict Popes St Leo IV and St Agatho.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is paved in dark green marble, including the access steps which have a slight bow curve. Three steps run to a landing on which balustrades in yellow Siena marble stand, leaving a wide central gap. Five further steps follow. The church's main crypt lies beneath. In the floor, lighting the crypt, are two circular bronze gratings by Persechetti depicting scenes from the lives of SS Peter and Paul.

The side walls have two cantorie or balconies, with balustraded frontals on corbels.

The high altar is in an aedicule of Classical form, with a pair of Corinthian pilasters in polished travertine supporting a triangular pediment. The capitals bear Eucharistic symbols. Within is a backdrop in green marble, curved as a segment of a cylinder. On the latter is suspended a monumental bronze effigy of Pope St Eugene by Attilio Selva. The inscription on the frieze of the aedicule reads Salus et refugium, meaning "Salvation and refuge".

The altar frontal is in gilded bronze, and depicts The Deposition. It is by Selva also.

The apse has a short barrel-vault, followed by a tympanum above the aedicule. Both are frescoed by Ferruccio Farazzi, the theme being The Triumph of the Cross and the Instruments of the Passion. This is a very successful work in the Baroque style. Pope Pius XII is among the persons represented in it.

A large suspended crucifix has a bronze corpus.

Sanctuary chapels

The sanctuary is flanked by a pair of self-contained chapels, each on a square plan with a little cupola.

The Blessed Sacrament altar is to the right, and is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The frescoes are by Bruno Saetti, the glass candlesticks are from Murano and the altar frontal has a mosaic of The Last Supper.

The chapel of St Joseph is to the left, with its walls completely covered by frescoes executed by Gisberto Ceracchini. The main altarpiece scene shows St Joseph in Glory, with his marriage to Our Lady depicted below. The main side wall frescoes show The Angelic Instruction to Marry Our Lady and The Escape into Egypt.

Sacristy

A pair of doorways flanking the altar of SS Peter and Paul give access to a pair of vaulted corridors which run down the sides of the sacristy and meet at its back end. Here there is a fresco of the heraldry of Pope Pius by Francesco Bencivenga, and a bust of him by Guarino Roscioli.

Access to the sacristy is by another two doors halfway down its sides. The triangular pedimented altar aedicule is in walnut wood, as are the cupboards, and both are by the carpenter F. Conti. The altarpiece is a

painting of the Mother and Child accompanied by angels. Two bronze grilles are by Pietro De Laurentiis, one showing angels and the other sheep.

The sacristy is sometimes used as a chapel for the saying of Mass.

Baptistery

The right hand corridor leading from the Chapel of SS Peter and Paul also gives access to the Baptistery, which is a free-standing edifice in the cloister of the college. The entrance is opposite the door to the sacristy in that corridor.

There is a little vestibule before the actual baptistery, which is on a Greek cross plan with the cup-shaped marble font placed centrally. In the floor of the vestibule is an ancient mosaic containing a representation of a dove. The walls of the baptistery have a set of frescoes showing Old Testament scenes prophetic of baptism, by Giovanni Brancaccio. The font has an impressive bronze cover with reliefs of New Testament scenes relating to baptism, with a finial in the form of The Baptism of Jesus with Angels. This work is by Giovanni Prini.

Crypt

The crypt altar has its frontal made up of the dedication stone blessed in 1943 by Pope Pius XII. It bears a long inscription in Latin praising him, and mentioning his promotion of the archaeological investigations under St Peter's.

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated:

Weekdays 7:25 (8:00 Saturdays), 13:15 (not Saturdays or in August), 19:00;

Sundays and Solemnities 9:30, 11:00, 12:10, 13:10 (not August), 17:30 (not August), 19:00.

On two Saturdays in the month Mass is celebrated in the Extraordinary Form at 8:00.

The Solemnity of St Eugenius is on 2 June.

Location:

Address: Viale delle Belle Arti 10

Coord: [41°55'39.8"N 12°28'13.8"E](#)

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia Page](#)

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