

Sacro Cuore Immacolato di Maria



Sacro Cuore Immacolato di Maria (Sacred Immaculate Heart of Mary) is a minor basilica, a parish and titular church dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The postal address is Via del Sacro Cuore di Maria 5 in the Pinciano quarter, but the main entrance is on the Piazza Euclide. The Euclide metro station is adjacent.

History

This large but badly-proportioned church, with its generous floorspace but mean elevation, witnesses to the sad history of its construction.

The project to build a spectacular church in the neo-Classical style with a soaring dome, as a centrepiece for the suburb of Pinciano north of the Villa Borghese, was begun in 1923 to a design by Armando Brasini. It would have been a worthy rival in grandeur of Gran Madre di Dio, just north-west across the river. Brasini planned a truly enormous central dome, inspired by that of Santa Maria ad Martyres (Pantheon). This would have been 52 metres across and 97 metres high, covering a huge circular nave with a total of fourteen chapels and side altars.

The foundation stone was laid in 1924, and the project put in the care of the Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, usually known as the Claretians after the founder St Anthony Mary Claret.

Funds were promised from various Italian communities in Canada, but financial trouble for the project began when that country was badly hit by the Great Depression after 1929. Also a proper (and belated) survey of the geological nature of the site was only made in 1927, and two years later a set of reports confirmed fears that the ground was unsuitable to support a massive church without prohibitively expensive piling. Brasini was forced to re-design the dome, making it much smaller but still high at 85 metres. This revised design was published in 1931, and work began in 1932 by the firm Fratelli Ciardi. Thirty-four reinforced concrete piles had to be inserted into the ground to give a stable foundation.

The completion of the crypt in 1934 allowed the parish to be erected in 1936, but in the same year the project was suspended. Apparently the destruction wrought on the Claretians in the Spanish Civil War meant that they could not justify the attention needed. The crypt chapel was consecrated and used as the parish church, and could have stayed that way.

However for fourteen months from April 1939 there was another effort, and the monumental entrance propylaeum together with the curvaceous outer walls and their embellishing columns were completed. Then the contractor abandoned the project after disputes with the parish.

After that, nothing happened until 1948 when the Claretians made a renewed commitment to completion. Brasini revised his plans yet again, with a second reduction in the size of the dome. Also, the second storey elevation of the nave and transepts had to have their design simplified as funds dried up, with more red brick and less stone. The portion of the drum that had been completed was given a flat roof with a shallow octagonal saucer dome in 1951, which proved the end of hopes for building any further. Brasini continued with the interior decoration until 1955, and work stopped again.

After another hiatus, the Claretians and the Diocese decided that spending money on the provision of a proper dome could not be justified, especially as modern suburbs were springing up requiring new churches. As a result, it was declared that the church would be regarded as complete and so it was consecrated on 1 May 1959, when Pope St John XXIII also elevated it to the rank of a Minor Basilica.

The miserable end to the project must have been a serious personal blow to Brasini, who was still alive at the time.

The church was made titular by Pope Paul VI in February 1965, with Ángel Herrera Oria as the first cardinal priest. The present incumbent is Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja S.J., appointed in 1994.

Exterior

The plan of the church is quite complex. The basic unit is a Greek cross, with the dome at its centre, inserted into a circle of lower elevation (this circle marks the proposed enormous dome on the first plans drawn up in 1923). The midpoints of the façades of the ends of the cross touch the circumference of the circle. The nave arm of the cross is taken to the entrance by an extension of lower elevation (converting the cross from Greek to Latin). Between the arms of the cross, on the other side of the circumference of the circle, are four side chapels with an octagonal plan and having one tiny dome each on their flat roofs. The presbytery extends for a short distance at a lower level from the end of its cross arm, to meet a five-sided apse which is surrounded by an ambulatory.

A glance at the aerial photos on the [info.roma](#) external link, or at Google Earth, may help to elucidate this.

The entrance façade and the lower, first storey exterior walls are as originally designed by Brasini. The entrance is through a Doric propylaeum in white travertine limestone with a strongly bowed frontage and supporting a triangular pediment. There are six columns in the round, and the central pair with the corresponding section of entablature and pediment are recessed. This recessed section of pediment bears a dedicatory inscription and a Papal coat-of-arms. The pediment as a whole is oversized, and the outer corners (rather bizarrely) are brought forward and supported by another pair of columns. If you go to the other side of the piazza, you will see the second storey of the church rising above the propylaeum, in red brick. Each gable end of the cross has the same style, comprising an arched window breaking into a blank triangular pediment and with four shallow rectangular brick pilasters decorating the wall below. The short drum of the dome is behind, with a wire guard fence around its edge. The shallow octagonal saucer dome is not visible from ground level.

The two sides of the church are identical in design. The side chapels are embellished with more Doric pillars in the round (the exterior of the church has twenty-eight of these in total), which support protruding cornices. The chapels nearest the entrance also have an aggressive sloping buttress each. In between the side chapels the curving brick wall of the main body of the church can be seen, decorated with shallow rectangular Doric pilasters in travertine supporting a stone architrave. The frieze above is in brick, and the cornice in stone again. The gable end of the second-storey cross above was to have the same sort of design, instead of being in brick.

Interior

The space has the shape of a Greek cross inscribed in a circle, with a large narthex inside the entrance and the four side chapels being separate units. The chapels on the right are dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament and St Joseph, while those on the left are to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and Our Lady of Pompeii (after a shrine near the famous ancient Roman city). This last chapel has some of Brasini's original architectural sketches, including the four colossal statues of the Evangelists proposed on the ends of the Greek cross outside.

Over the main altar is a mosaic of Our Lady displaying her Immaculate Heart, and being venerated by two life-sized angels in marble.

In the baptistery, which is just inside the entrance on the left, there are modern paintings by the Armenian artist Gregorio Sciltian (1900-1985). In the crypt is another series of works by a Claretian called Fulgenzio Martinez, depicting New Testament scenes. His permanent Christmas crib here was inaugurated in 1966.

Access

Information about the opening times of this church has proved elusive.

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated:

Weekdays 7:00, 8:00, 11:00, 18:30;

Sundays and Solemnities 8:30, 10:30, 12:00, 18:30, 20:00.

Info:

Address: Piazza Euclide 5, 00197 Roma

Phone: 06 80 70 359

Location:

Coord: 41°55'38.8"N 12°28'52.3"E

The feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (a Solemnity in this church) is celebrated on the Saturday following the second Sunday after Pentecost. It is the last festal celebration in the Paschal cycle. The feast of St Anthony Mary Claret is celebrated on 24 October, also as a Solemnity.

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[English Wiki Page](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

(The parish website has been flagged up as hosted by a server compromised by malware, so Wikia will not accept links to it. If you search "sacro cuore" "basilica senza cupola", you will find links to an interesting article on the church's architectural history, with illustrations of the original mighty proposal. Otherwise, the website is of no interest as it has no photos or descriptions of the church.)