

## San Luigi Gonzaga



**San Luigi Gonzaga** is an earlier 20th century parish church in the Parioli quarter, to the south-east of the Acqua Acetosa train station. The dedication is to St Aloysius Gonzaga.

### History

The church began as the chapel of an enclosed monastery of Polish Discalced Carmelite nuns. The full title of their congregation is "The Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Order of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel". The Discalced Carmelite nuns had been re-established in Poland in the 19th century with the help of Belgian communities, and the leading proponent was Mother Edwiga della Croce Wielhorska. A Polish noblewoman from a wealthy family, she had entered the Carmel at Carcassonne in France in 1857, but after profession went home to found a Carmel at Posen in Prussia (now Poznań). This community was expelled by the Prussians in 1875, and found a refuge in Cracow where it survives after many tribulations.

The Roman outreach was an initiative of Abbess Jadwiga. She purchased the church and convent of Santa Brigida a Campo de' Fiori in 1889, and paid for a complete restoration from her personal fortune. The Carmelite nuns were here until 1930, when they moved out and the complex was returned to the Bridgettine Order (the original owners).

Meanwhile, the nuns had built themselves a new convent in the Parioli quarter. This was begun in 1929, and finished in the following year. It occupied a restricted site, on a single city block. The architect was Enrico Castelli (this is his only church in Rome), and he designed the edifice in a neo-Baroque style which the Italians call barocchetto.

Back then, the quarter was just beginning its suburban development and the convent was surrounded by fields. Tragically, however, from mid-century the surrounding area was filled with apartment blocks which overlooked the convent from all sides. This was serious for the nuns, since papal enclosure meant that they did not leave the premises except in an emergency. The rather small garden lost all of its privacy.

As a result, the nuns decided to build another new convent in a more suitable location, Santa Maria Regina Carmeli. This was completed in 1957, and the nuns moved out.

The complex was bought (or rented) by the Comboni Missionaries (Missionarii Comboniani Cordis Iesu), which established their Rome headquarters here. They had been founded by St Daniel Comboni of Verona in 1867, principally for missionary work in Africa.

However, the Generalate did not stay here for long, it seems that the arrangement was only meant to be temporary. The Missionaries were building a large new headquarters for themselves in the Ardeatino quarter, and when this was completed in 1963 they moved out.

Finally the convent was sold to the Diocese to become the center of a new parish. This was set up in 1963, its territory being taken from those of Sacro Cuore Immacolato di Maria and San Roberto Bellarmino. This is a late date for the establishment of a parish in the inner suburbs, and it is likely that it would not have been founded at all if matters had been delayed by a decade or more.

In 2012 the heart of St Aloysius was solemnly enshrined in the church, which is thus now a Roman shrine to the saint (his body is in Sant'Ignazio di Loyola a Campo Marzio).

## **Exterior**

As a former convent chapel which is an integral part of the convent it was built for, the church is not easy to spot. It is an integral part of the convent, which is symmetrical about its major axis.

The aisleless nave is almost square in plan, and has a pair of external side chapels adjacent to its near corners. From these, two wings reach the street with quarter-circle curved frontages creating little courts either side of the church. The actual church frontage is occupied by an ancillary block which looks as if it was intended to be the accommodation for the chaplain to the nuns. The actual main convent accommodation is in two wings flanking the separate sanctuary, also almost square but narrower than the nave.

The former convent garden is to the left of the complex, and is now occupied by a hard-surface football pitch.

The fabric is in brick, rendered throughout in a creamy white. The roofs are pitched and tiled; the sanctuary roof is lower than the nave one. The church lacks windows -apart from the one in the façade, there seemed to have been only a round one in the back wall of the sanctuary which is now blocked.

### Façade

As mentioned, a flat-roofed two-storey block is attached to the actual frontage of the church. This has a single entrance with a triangular pediment, flanked by a pair of thin vertical windows in the first storey which is replicated in the second storey above. The roofline is occupied by an entablature with a dedicatory inscription bearing witness to the original owners: In onore di Maria Regina del Carmelo e di San Luigi Gonzaga. Unusually, this entablature does not occupy the entire width of the roofline but the architrave is extended on each side to top a further four narrow windows (two by two) occupying the outer corners.

The actual frontage of the church peeps over this block. It is simple, having a large round window in a molded frame and a molded gabled roofline (no pediment).

## Interior

The small interior is a restrained study in imitation Baroque, with architectural details in a mid grey on a creamy white background. This colour scheme contrasts with the floor in red marble.

The nave and sanctuary are both roofed by a single cross-vault. The sanctuary is entered through a triumphal arch the piers of which have their capitals replaced by a molded entablature which runs round the nave interior.

The heart of St Aloysius is in one side chapel. The other contains a depiction of St Thomas by Kiko Argüello, executed in 1993.

The re-arranged sanctuary now has a free-standing altar in the form of a ribbed red marble vase. Behind to the right is a picture of St Aloysius nursing a plague sufferer, and to the left is the tabernacle in a red marble semi-column attached to the wall. Above on the far wall is a high-relief sculpture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on a gold mosaic background.

## Access

The church is open 7:30 to 12:00 and 16:30 to 20:00 daily.

## Liturgy

Mass is celebrated in the church;

Weekdays 8:00 (not summer), 19:00;

Sundays and Solemnities 9:00, 10:30, 12:00 (not summer), 19:00.

There is Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on Thursdays from 18:00 until Mass.

## Location:

Address: Via di Villa Emiliani 15

Coord: [41°55'45.3"N 12°29'24.3"E](#)

## External links

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[Official diocesan web-page](#)

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