

Basilica di San Giuseppe al Trionfale



St Giuseppe al Trionfale is an important early 20th century parish and titular church, and minor basilica, at Via Bernardino Telesio 4/B in the Trionfale quarter, just north of the Vatican. The dedication is to St Joseph.

History

This church was intended as the major centre of devotion to St Joseph in Rome. His cult and present popularity are not ancient in the Church, and so there are only three rather obscure churches dedicated to him in the Centro Storico: San Giuseppe a Capo le Case, San Giuseppe alla Lungara and San Giuseppe dei Falegnami.

The shrine-church for the saint was founded here by St Luigi Guanella, with the active assistance of Pope St Pius X who had a personal devotion to St Joseph. It was begun in 1909 and finished in 1912, the architect being Aristide Leonori. In the latter year a parish was set up, and put in the care of the Servi della Carità (Opera Don Guanella) which is one of the religious congregations that St Luigi founded. They remain in charge.

As part of the project, the saint also founded a free school for poor and vulnerable children in premises next to the church. This still flourishes as the Istituto San Giuseppe al Trionfale, although (as with most Italian schools founded and run by religious for this purpose a hundred years ago) it now caters mainly for children of a higher social status. Poor children in Italy go to the state schools.

The complex was one of the first edifices to be constructed in this suburb. However, it is on a rather narrow street away from the focus of the grid layout which is the Mercato Trionfale to the south (apparently originally intended as an open space, which is seriously lacking around here). Obviously the supervisors of the church project and the planners of the suburb were not co-ordinating their efforts, although whether this was the result of anti-clericalism on the part of the latter is not automatically to be presumed.

There was a major building project in 1956, during which the sanctuary was extended and a new apse was built. The campanile also dates from this project. The apse mosaics were added in 1964.

There was a re-ordering of the sanctuary, semitranspts and side chapels in 1971.

Unfortunately, the wish that the church would become a pilgrimage centre for devotees of St Joseph has not really come about. It is in a rather obscure location, and takes a little searching out to visit. Provision online for potential visitors is poor.

The church was made titular as a diaconate in 1967, and the present cardinal deacon is Severino Poletto.

Exterior

Layout and fabric

This is a large neo-Romanesque edifice, on the basilical plan of a Latin cross although the left hand end of the transept is incorporated into the buildings of the school. (The latter has blocks on both sides of the façade, too.)

The central nave with side aisles has nine bays. There is no proper transept with a crossing, but instead two semitranspts run laterally off the eighth bay to give an overall width here greater than the nave with its aisles. This feature gives the church its Latin cross plan. Then comes a sanctuary of one bay, and an attached semi-circular apse. The sanctuary is flanked by a pair of chapels, opening off the far ends of the side aisles.

The fabric is in red brick. The side walls are undecorated, and rendered in a pale pink. The central nave side walls each have a row of six round-headed windows for the first six bays of the nave (one for each), and then a set of three such windows for the eighth bay (above the semitranssept). The sanctuary bay upper walls have a window on each side.

The church has school buildings abutting it to each side of its street frontage. For this reason, the side aisle walls have fewer windows -four to the right, five to the left. These are recessed within rectangular apertures. Also, oddly, the aisles have two storeys. There is a range running over each church aisle from the street-side blocks, and over the semitranspts, which fit onto the exterior below the central nave walls. These ranges have their own small square windows, visible in the exterior, but the arrangement is invisible inside the church. The ends of the semitranspts have two round-headed windows each.

The nave roof is pitched and tiled, and carries over the sanctuary bay. The apse has its own lower semicircular pitched roof, with ribs in pantiles. The right hand aisle range roof is flat, running over the semitranssept, but the left hand one is also pitched.

Apse

The apse, visible from Via Giovanni Bovio, is embellished. The semicylindrical brick wall is divided into five panels by blind limestone piers, which are flush with the brickwork and which blend into an architrave. Above this is a projecting frieze with an epigraph in applied bronze lettering giving several titles of St Joseph. Above this in turn is a false belvedere, with five sets of three recessed apertures separated by pairs of colonnettes and with the higher parts of the already mentioned piers in between the sets. The roofline above this feature has a strongly projecting cornice.

Above the apse, below the main roof gable, is a tondo containing a white cross.

Campanile

The church is noted for its high-quality peal of eight bells. These are in a campanile not attached to the church, but to the far left hand building of the school which is itself attached to the left hand side of the church.

There is a short square tower on the building's flat roof, which is in blank brick topped by a platform with a slightly overhanging edge cornice in limestone. On this is an open metal bell-cage surmounted by a low pyramidal cap in copper with a strongly overhanging cornice and supporting a

little limestone pedestal. On this stands a statue of St Joseph.

The cap cornice bears an epigraph which is a prayer to St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church.

Façade

The two-storey gabled entrance façade is slightly set back from the street frontage, and is accessed by a flight of steps. Unfortunately, the narrowness of the street means that it is difficult to view properly. It is rendered in pale peach, with the architectural details in white, and has a dado in limestone.

The first storey has six Composite pilasters in shallow relief, standing on very tall plinths which are part of the dado. Two pairs flank the main entrance, and the other two are at the outer corners. Apart from those nearest the entrance, these pilasters are doubletted (made to look as if the main one is partly hiding another one). They support a full entablature, the frieze of which bears a dedicatory inscription: Anno salutis Deo, in honorem S[ancti] Ioseph, A[d] F[inem] MDCCCCXII.

Two string courses cross this storey, but duck behind the pilasters. The lower one is about halfway up, and is unmolded. The upper one is at the level of the bases of the pilaster capitals, and has a thin molding along its centre which is a continuation of the astragals of the capitals. The wall panels created by the pilasters and these string courses are each given a frame in a slightly lighter peach hue than the main areas of render.

The main and aisle entrances are of the same design, although the former is bigger. Each has an archivolt over it in high relief, sheltering a tympanum with a mosaic and springing from a pair of corbels bearing impostes. On top of each arch is a little carved finial involving volutes. The central mosaic is of St Joseph holding the Christ Child, and the other two are of angels in adoration. Above the aisle entrances are dedicatory inscriptions on rectangular marble tablets with frames surmounted by devices with volutes and acanthus leaves.

The wooden doors of the main entrance are worth noticing. They have two vertical rows of five square panels, and each panel has a carved circular shield with boss. They are early 16th century, and came from Milan Cathedral.

The flat aisle rooflines are concealed by solid parapets above the entablature, with dwarf pilasters.

The second storey has four pilasters in the same style as those below, supporting an entablature with a dentillate projecting cornice and a triangular pediment. In the pediment is the coat-of-arms of Pope St Pius X. In the centre of the storey is an arcade row of three stained-glass windows separated by half-round columns with Corinthian capitals and with molded archivolts. Between these and the crowning entablature is a row of decorative swags in between the pilaster capitals.

Interior

Nave

The interior is sumptuously decorated in a traditional Baroque style, and does not look 20th century at all.

The central nave has nine bays. The first six are separated from the aisles by colonnades of Corinthian columns in pinkish-grey Baveno granite with gilded capitals, five on each side (the same stone was used for the columns at San Paolo fuori le Mura). They support a horizontal entablature, with a frieze in yellow Siena marble and a strongly projecting cornice which has dentillations and egg-and-dart molding. This runs round the entire interior.

On the counterfaçade the entablature is supported by four pilasters in the same style, the outer pair being folded into the corners. There are three stained glass windows here, depicting Blessed Pope Pius IX, Pope St Pius X and Pope Benedict XV. Above the windows is a fresco of angels.

All the column and pilaster capitals in the church are Corinthian, and are gilded.

The seventh nave bay has a small triumphal arch inserted under the entablature on each side, flanked

by shallow pilasters and bounded by a pair of square piers. The eighth bay has a rectangular void under the entablature on each side, leading into the semitranspts, and a matching pair of square piers is on the far side of these. The ninth bay is now part of the sanctuary, and has a screen wall on each side panelled in yellow and pink marbles. This wall separates the bay from the side chapel at the far end of the aisle, and it does not go up as far as the entablature. Instead it is topped by a balustrade, with a gap above this.

Above the main entablature, the nave side walls have two rows of decorative panelling separated by another entablature. The lower, main one has wide panels with backgrounds in green and white frames, and these feature swags, ribbons, candlesticks and winged putto's heads as well as portrait busts of saints in tondi. The upper, shallower one has rosettes and strigillate decoration. These two rows of panels conceal the upper storeys over the side aisles.

The upper nave side walls have round-headed windows, six on each side, which contain clear stained glass with vine-scroll patterns. They have roll-molded archivolt supported by Doric pilasters and grey marble, and are separated by panels with flower-and-vase decorations. The spandrels above the archivolt, just below the ceiling, have frescoes of angels bearing epigraphs.

The flat wooded square-coffered ceiling is sumptuously carved, painted and gilded and has three central octagonal devices as well as a large square fresco panel. It runs the entire length of the central nave.

The aisle walls have pilasters matching the columns, also round-headed stained glass windows depicting events in the life of St Joseph. These are, left aisle: Patron of the Universal Church, Marriage to Our Lady, Dream of Child Born of the Holy Spirit, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, Presentation of the Child Jesus; right aisle: The Holy Family (including St Elizabeth and St John the Baptist) -five separate panes, Escape into Egypt, Residence in Egypt, Finding of the Boy Jesus in the Temple, The Family at Work, Death of St Joseph.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary was re-ordered in 1971. It now occupies the last bay of the nave as well as the structural sanctuary, and here stands the new free-standing altar which is on an octagonal white marble column drum inland with red marble panels. The matching ambo or lectern to the left has a pair of little red marble columns flanking its front.

The sanctuary bay is entered through a triumphal arch, of a rather unsatisfactory design. A pair of granite piers supports a pair of posts in the first entablature. On top of these is a second, taller pair of posts of the same height as the first set of decorative panelling. The semi-circular archivolt springs from this, and has the coat-of-arms of Blessed Pope Paul VI on its keystone as a witness to the 1971 re-ordering.

The sanctuary bay has two floating cantorie or balconies facing each other, and these contain the church organ which is in two separate parts. Then comes the apse triumphal arch.

The apse is entirely filled with mosaics added in 1964 to designs by Pio and Silvio Erolì. Behind the tabernacle altar is depicted The Deathbed of St Joseph who is accompanied by Christ and Our Lady. The Nativity is to the right, and The Marriage of Our Lady and St Joseph is to the left. The conch is occupied by a very large mosaic of The Apotheosis of St Joseph. The spandrel of the triumphal arch shows Christ in majesty with scenes featuring the four patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

The original high altar is still in place, and a tabernacle is located on it. There is a separate sanctuary ceiling, matching that of the nave.

Side chapels

The shrine of the Pietà in the right hand aisle was provided with a stained glass window in 2000 showing Pope St John Paul II opening the Holy Door for the Great Jubilee.

The chapel at the end of the right hand aisle is dedicated to St Luigi Guanella. It was fitted out in 1972 with an altarpiece portrait of him by Aristide Capanna, but when the saint was canonized in

2011 it was refitted and this painting was replaced by a mosaic showing him giving bread to poor people. This was designed by Claudio Valente. A striking feature of the design is that the basket of bread from which the saint is taking loaves is actually a tabernacle. This, as well as the altar cross and two candlesticks, was executed by Sister Anna Maria Kurek from Poland. The side wall paintings by Luigi Filocamo were left alone; to the left the saint is shown celebrating Mass in the new church, and to the right he is venerating St Joseph in the company of Pope St Pius X. Above the chapel entrance is a bas-relief showing the saint with sufferers.

The right hand semitranssept is dedicated to Our Lady of Divine Providence. It has two windows depicting St Luigi, and frescoes depicting scenes in her life with St Joseph.

The chapel at the end of the left hand aisle is dedicated to Pope St Pius X, and also has a bas-relief at its entrance showing the ministry of the pope.

Info

Address:

Via Bernardino Telesio 4/B - 00195 ROMA

Phone:

06-39.73.08.89

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated:

Weekdays 7:30, 9:00, 10:30, 18:00;

Sundays and Solemnities 8:00, 9:00, 10:30, 12:00, 18:30.

The Divine Office is celebrated publicly with Lauds at 9:00 and Vespers at 19:00.

Location

Coord: [41°54'42.3"N 12°27'07.3"E](#)

Burials

[Egidio Cardinal VAGNOZZI](#), (1906-1980)

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

Parish website

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Youtube slide-show by Luis Faldutti](#)

[Photos](#)