

# San Giuseppe alla Lungara



**San Giuseppe alla Lungara** is an 18th century convent church in the north end of Trastevere. The street here is very narrow, squeezed in below the Lungotevere Gianicolense. The dedication is to St Joseph.

## History

The church was a new foundation in the 18th century, for the Congregation of Pious Workers or Pii Operai. This was originally founded in 1602 as the Congregazione della Dottrina Cristiana by Carol Carafa, a diocesan priest of Naples, in order to catechize rural areas where the peasants had no schools. The Kingdom of Naples had refused to implement the prescriptions of the Council of Trent as regards the training of priests, and as a result the educational and pastoral standards of the kingdom's clergy were very low. Founding a specialist catechetical congregation to do what the parish clergy should have been doing anyway was an effective way of circumventing the problem.

The new congregation was renamed in 1621, and in 1687 established a presence at Rome by the basilica of Santa Balbina. The brethren then moved to San Lorenzo ai Monti (now demolished) before buying a site on the Via della Lungara for a new convent.

The church was funded by a gift from Msgr. Carlo Maiella, who in 1730 gave the congregation 300 scudi for pious works in Trastevere. It was designed by Ludovico Rusconi Sassi, a student of Carlo Fontana, and the solemn consecration was performed on 24 January 1734. This is Rusconi Sassi's only complete church in Rome, and is arguably his most important work. He was obviously influenced by Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane.

The convent was begun in 1760, and finally completed in 1764 with the architect being Giovanni Francesco Fiori. The delay was in order to raise funds. The complex was to act as a center for catechetical activities in the area, since Trastevere had a high proportion of poverty-stricken lower-class people right up to the later 20th century. Fiori also finished off the façade.

The Pii Operai was always a small congregation, and this convent became its most important house outside its base at San Nicola alla Carità in Naples.

The church was restored in 1861 by Antonio Cipolla. The ceiling was renewed in 1872, after it had collapsed, only for the convent to be sequestered in the following year by the Italian government. However, the congregation was allowed to maintain occupation of the church and part of the convent with the freehold being held by the Ministry of the Interior.

The early 20th century saw a decline of the congregation, which failed to attract vocations. Finally, one priest only was left at San Nicola and so the congregation was united in 1943 with the Rurali Missionari, another congregation with the same aims founded in Calabria in 1928. The combined congregation is now called the Congregation of Rural Catechists or Pii Operai Catechisti Rurali Missionari Adorini (POCR), familiarly known as the Ardorini Fathers.

The Ardorini Fathers still serve the church, but they occupy only a small part of the original convent complex. The office of the General Procurator of the congregation is located in the convent, and the rector of the church resides there.

## **Exterior**

The body of the church occupies an octagonal plan elongated along the major axis, with a separate sanctuary on a square plan. The neighbouring buildings abut onto the side walls, so only the façade is visible from the street. The main roof has two main pitches and three small sectors at the apse end, while the apse has a lower double-pitched roof which is hipped at the far end.

The campanile is inserted into the join of apse and nave roofs on the left hand side, and is a slab with a very tall, narrow arch to hold the bells. The top has a bow curve, on which is a very odd stumpy finial like an elongated pyramid. The only view that you can get of the campanile is from the Gianicolo hill behind the church.

### Façade

The façade has two storeys, and is rendered in pale orange with limestone architectural details. The first storey has six Ionic pilasters, two pairs flanking the doorway and two at the corners. They support an entablature which has its frieze in the orange colour, and the middle pair are doubletted. The doorcase has a double lintel, the top section having a dedicatory inscription to St Joseph and the bottom one proclaiming that the church is indulgenced. This means that a pious visit obtains relief from Purgatory for the visitor or a soul already there. Above the epigraphs is a floating cornice without a pediment.

The narrower second storey has two pairs pilasters with derivative Ionic capitals, which have their volutes reversed and decorated with swags. A pair of capitals without pilasters tucked behind the capitals of the outer pair. This entablature is of the same style as the one below, and supports a segmental pediment containing a blank panel. There is a large round window in this storey, set in a square panel with a cornice.

In photographs, the church can seem as if it has a very low first storey. This is because the façade can only be conveniently photographed from the Lungotevere, and so the bottom of the church may be shown chopped off.

### Convent

The main convent block is to the left of the church. It is an impressive four-storey edifice with a symmetrical frontage, and with good Baroque detailing around the central entrance door and the central windows of the second and third storeys. The choir chapel in the convent has a painting by Mariano Rossi.

## Interior

To understand this church, it helps to visit Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane first because this is the inspiration. The interior plan is an elongated octagon, with short diagonal sides and the four longer sides occupied by the entrance, sanctuary and two major side chapels. These longer sides are occupied by enormous arches, onto which a ceiling in the form of a very shallow oval saucer dome is placed. The shorter sides meet this cupola via squared-off pendentives. Because the dome is not elliptical, the archivolts of the arches of the major side chapels do not meet the pendentives; the gaps are occupied by curlicues. If you look carefully, you will see that the building has settled and crushed the very narrow cornice bounding the cupola at the keystones of the arches.

The arches spring from an entablature which runs all the way around the church, and which is supported by clustered Ionic pilasters at the corners below the archivolts. The frieze of the entablature is in what looks like red Sicilian jasper, which is also used on the pilasters framed in yellow Siena marble. The latter is used for the dome cornice and to outline the pendentives; the background of the latter, and of the side chapels, is in green verde antico.

The short sides have four small arches, leading into alcove chapels. These arches are molded, in yellow marble, have no archivolts and are surmounted by cantoria (little chambers for musicians) which are balustraded but which have no balconies.

The ceiling cupola has a fresco executed by Filippo Frigiotti, which is meant to be viewed while facing the altar. It is a skyscape with clouds, on which is superimposed the Ave Maria monogram in a blue circle, surrounded by a separate white ring with nine putto's heads. The Dove of the Holy Spirit in glory is near the altar, and two putti together are near the entrance. The fresco is surrounded by a single ring of oversized double rosettes. The pendentives have tondi featuring Four Doctors of the Church (SS Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianzen and Athanasius) which were executed by Vincenzo Paliotti in 1859 restoration by Antonio Cipolla.

### Tribune

Over the entrance is a large tribune or gallery with a coved frontage, having two wings stretching forwards from a central zone. The frontage displays thirteen separate paintings by Mariano Rossi, of Christ in Gethsemane and the twelve apostles (including St Matthias) arranged in a row. This is a very unusual artistic feature. The artist is also responsible for seven other paintings in the church, a total of twenty-one.

The mechanical organ in the tribune was made by Joannes Conradus Worle (1702-77) in the 18th century.

### Sanctuary

The sanctuary is a single bay behind the major arch facing the entrance, with a cross-vaulted ceiling with stucco decorations and two lunette windows. The far lunette has a fresco of God the Father within an arc of stucco foliage.

The high altar is against the back wall, without an aedicule. The very large altarpiece by Rossi depicts the Dream of St Joseph. On the side walls of the sanctuary are two further paintings by him, the Adoration of the Magi and the Slaughter of the Innocents.

### Ferial chapel

The old sacristy of the church is through one of the doors in the side walls of the sanctuary, and has been converted into the Ferial Chapel in which Mass is said during weekdays. The ceiling depicts the Triumph of Charity by Rossi again.

### Side chapels

The chapels are described in anticlockwise order, starting from the right hand side near the entrance.

The first niche chapel on the right contains another painting by Rossi, Christ in the Workshop of St Joseph.

The second chapel on the right, in the large arch, contains a work by Niccolò Ricciolini showing The

Deposition from the Cross. This is crowned by a segmental pediment supported on two corbels executed as putto caryatids, and which has a broken cornice. Within is a pediment gable sheltering stucco putto's heads and garlands. The picture on the actual altar is Tobias with the Angel Raphael.

The third niche chapel on the right has The Wedding of Our Lady and St Joseph, by Rossi.

The third niche chapel on the left has The Death of St Joseph, by Rossi. The angel is telling the saint that Our Lady (praying in the next room) is pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

The second chapel on the left has an altarpiece by Girolamo Pesci, painted in 1735, which depicts The Virgin Mary with SS Joachim and Anna. In other words, Our Lady as a little girl with her parents. The altarpiece is in a frame of red jasper, with a winged putto's head on top. The little picture on the actual altar shows The Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The first niche chapel on the left has The Nativity by Rossi.

### **Access**

As of February 2016 (source: church office staff), the church is open Mondays to Saturdays, from 16:30 - 19:00 (4:30 - 7:00 p.m.). On Sundays, it is open from 9:00 to 13:30 (9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.).

### **Liturgy**

The solemnity of St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church is celebrated on 19 March, and the feast of St Joseph the Worker on 1 May.

Normal Mass times:

Ferial days at 07.00 (unofficial source, this is probably in the so-called ferial chapel).

Sundays and solemnities at 09.30 (source is the parish website of Santa Dorotea).

### **Location:**

Address: Via della Lungara 45

Coord: [41°53'48.6"N 12°27'50.6"E](#)

### **External links**

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[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[GCatholic Web page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Adorini Fathers website](#)

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["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

[Roma SPQR web-page with gallery](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Article on the Mariano Rossi paintings](#)