

Santi Maria della Visitazione e Francesco di Sales delle Mantellate



Santi Maria della Visitazione e Francesco di Sales delle Mantellate is a re-consecrated 17th century former convent church in the north of Trastevere. The dedication is to the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Francis de Sales.

History

The church here began as part of a convent of Visitation nuns, which was located behind the much larger Carmelite nunnery of Santa Maria Regina Coeli on the Via della Lungara. The convent was founded in 1669 by Pope Clement IX, shortly after the death of St Jane Frances de Chantal who had established the new order of the Visitation. She was helped in this by St Francis de Sales, hence he is in the dedication. The architect was Giovan Battista Contini, and the principal patrons were Cardinal Giacomo Rospigliosi and the Borghese family.

In 1778, Henry, Cardinal Duke of York arranged for a restoration of the church and re-consecrated it in that year. The community was here until 1793. Then it moved in turn to Sant'Anna dei Falegnami, and Santa Maria dell'Umiltà in 1810. After other vicissitudes it ended up in 1940 at Madonna di Guadalupe e San Francesco di Sales in Collatino, where it remains.

In 1794 the empty complex was purchased by Vincenzo and Maddalena Masturzi, silk merchants, who had a daughter called Maria Giuliana. She wanted to found a new convent with some friends, and this project received papal approval in 1801. The little community of twelve began common life in 1803. The result was

a Third Order Servite sisterhood called the Serve di Maria, using the rule of life drawn up by St Juliana Falconieri. They were nicknamed the Mantellate after the cloaks they wore, hence the name of the street.

The freehold of the convent was expropriated in 1873, but the sisters were allowed to stay in residence until 1884. This was because the Carmelite convent next door was being converted into the prison of Regina Coeli, which was to be the main prison in Rome and which was going to use the convent premises when open. When that job was done, the Mantellate were evicted and the convent was converted into an annexe for women prisoners. This it remained until a new women's prison was built at Rebibbia in 1964. In the process of conversion, the convent buildings were extended and the work included a storey over the sanctuary end of the church.

The church was deconsecrated at least by the 1960's, but it was restored by the prison authorities and re-consecrated in 2005. In 2013 it was being used by a charismatic worshipping community, and you may find it open on Sunday mornings.

Exterior

The exterior is very unassuming. The entrance façade is attached to the convent on the left hand side at the end of the street, with its own flight of stairs and a faux gas lamp over the entrance.

The facade has no distinguishing features, having just the doorway, the lamp and a rectangular window in the gable of the roofline. The reason for this seems to be that the church used to have its public entrance round the corner, opening onto the presbyterium. This is the convent. The church entrance is up the stairs on the right.

The former convent entrance, just down the hill in the Via delle Mantellate, has on the wall next to it a stucco device of a cross in glory with two curlicued scrolls. This is a surviving reminder of the Visitation nuns.

Interior

There is a short rectangular nave with an apse, and with two side altars on each side in arched niches. An entablature runs round the entire church, supported on shallow Ionic pilasters. The ceiling has a barrel vault, with a central fresco depicting The Sacred Heart of Jesus and two window lunettes on either side.

The décor is very understated, in white for the pilaster capitals, pale cream for the walls and a yellowish grey for the pilasters

Sanctuary

The presbyterium is an apse with a conch. The altarpiece on the main altar depicting the Visitation was by Carlo Cesio, but this has been replaced by a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes in the empty Baroque frame. There is a vertical row of four Baroque stucco reliefs in differently shaped frames on each side featuring pious motifs, including the Sacred Initials of IHS and the monogram for Maria in the two lowest ones which are oval tondi.

The frieze of the entablature reads Ave Maria, Gratia Plena, Dominus Tecum. The apse conch is very simply decorated.

Side chapels

The side chapels are described in anticlockwise order, starting from the bottom right.

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St Philip Benizi, and originally had an altarpiece showing the Death of St Joseph of the school of Guido Reni. (It used to be thought that it was by Sebastiano Conca, but is now described as anonymous.) This work has been replaced by a wooden crucifix, and the altar has been removed.

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to St Francis of Sales, and the statue of the saint that used to be there was by Francesco Moretti. It has a fresco showing St Philip Benizi Presenting SS Alexis Falconieri and Juliana Falconieri to Our Lady. This is a copy of a work by Pier Leone Ghezzi at San Marcello al Corso.

The second chapel on the left has an altarpiece of St Michael the Archangel which is a copy of a work by Guido Reni.

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order, and the 18th century altarpiece shows them with Our Lady. Again, here the altar has been removed.

Access

Liturgy

Location:

Address: Via delle Mantellate 10

Coord: [41°53'42.8"N 12°27'43.5"E](#)

External links

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[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

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