

## San Basilio agli Orti Sallustiani



San Basilio agli Orti Sallustiani is a 17<sup>th</sup> century monastic church in the rione Trevi. Mass is celebrated here according to the Byzantine **Melchite** rite as used by the Italo-Greek Catholic Church, one of the Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. The dedication is to St [Basil the Great](#), Doctor of the Church. (1)

### History

The Italo-Greek Catholic Church (also referred to as the Italo-Greek rite) claims direct descent from the ancient Greek cities of southern Italy, an area which was ruled by the Roman and Byzantine empires until the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century. The area used the Latin rite until 726, however, before Emperor Leo III transferred the administration of the churches in the area of south Italy that he ruled from the Pope to the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Byzantine rite was then introduced to most areas, although not to all. (1)

In order to establish a Generalate (or headquarters) for the new Italian Basilian Order of Grottaferrata (OSBI), Apolemone Agreste the abbot of Abbey of Grottaferrata bought a house on a rural site in the rione Trevi in 1660. This was then on the outskirts of the built-up area. In 1682 the abbey had this small church built, and dedicated it to the patron of its order. The architect was Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri. (1)

Then the abbey built a monastery, a college, a seminary and a library here to the east of the church. The project went on into the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it seems it was never completed. Much of the original fabric survives. (1)

Tellingly, the new church was designed for the Latin rite. There were two side chapels, and the main altar was inserted into an apse. Also, apparently, there was no iconostasis. All this is not compatible with celebrations of the Eucharist in the Byzantine rite, and shows that this rite was being supplanted even among the Basilian monks. (1)

There was a major restoration in 1862. (1)

The college and seminary prospered until the conquest of Rome by the Kingdom of Italy in 1874. Then, as with all other convents in the city, the complex was sequestered by the government and converted into a training school for electricians. However, the monks were allowed a tenancy of the church and part of the old monastery and remain in charge of it. However, the Generalate of the order was permanently moved to Grottaferrata. (1)

In 1881, Pope Leo XIII finally ordered the restoration of the Byzantine rite in its pure form. This entailed the insertion of a wooden iconostasis, and the removal of the side altars. There was a further restoration at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (1)

The church is regarded as part of the abbey of Grottaferrata. However, the church is listed as a dependency of the parish church of San Camillo de Lellis. (1)

## Exterior

The church is completely surrounded by higher buildings except at each end, hence its fabric is invisible from the street. It is small and rather narrow, with a nave of three bays and a rectangular apse. Side altars are in shallow niches in the middle bays. The exterior roof is flat. (1)

Over the top of the façade can be seen the little campanile, perched on the bottom left hand side wall of the nave. It is in the form of a triumphal arch, having a molded archivolt on imposts, a triangular pediment and two bells hung one over the other. The campanile is at an angle to the façade. This is because the major axis of the church is at an angle to the street, and hence also to the façade facing onto it. (1)

The monastic buildings are to the right and at the back, where there is a small cloister with arcades on the east and south sides. The former connects with a doorway to the left of the main altar. The church's rectangular apse, with a single-pitched roof, is on the north side. (1)

The façade, by Bizzaccheri, has two storeys and is now painted in pale blue with the architectural details in white. (1)

A pair of wide tripletted Doric pilasters occupies the corners of the first storey and supports a full entablature with a blank frieze and a dentillate cornice. The plain molded doorcase has a dedicatory

inscription above it: Sancto Basilio Magno, Anno Domini MDCLXXXII. Above this is a segmental pediment on incurved strap corbels, which has a blank tympanum. (1)

The second storey has a pair of dumpy pilasters in the same style, supporting a triangular pediment into which is inserted a segmental pediment. Below the latter is a rectangular window decorated with a pair of triglyphs with tassels. The façade does not end with the pediment, but continues upwards to a horizontal roofline. The actual roof of the church and the campanile, at an angle to the façade as explained, can be seen rising behind this. (1)

## Interior

The church has a single nave of three bays, with an apse. To provide for the Byzantine liturgy, the presbyterium is separated from the nave by an iconostasis which cuts off the back third of the last bay. (1)

Each bay has a shallow arched recess in both side walls, and those of the central bays used to have altars. These recesses are separated by tripletted Ionic pilasters with swagged capitals, and these are revetted with what looks like yellow alabaster. This contrasts with adjacent revetting in what looks like green (*verde antico*?) and red (*portasanta*?) marbles. (1)

There are also several inscriptions commemorating monks and prelates who studied at the adjacent college. (1)

The first bay is separated from the body of the church by a striking open metal screen, made in a grid pattern with each square divided into four by spikes. The central zone has the squares horizontal, while the side zones are diapered. This screen turns the first bay into a narthex, which is traditionally required in a Byzantine church. It is the customary place for catechumens, penitents and unbelievers. (1)

The body of the nave has moveable chairs for the congregation. Pews are not appropriate to a Byzantine church, since everybody except the ill and infirm are expected to stand during the liturgy. (1)

The flat ceiling is decorated with the emblem of St Basil, which is a burning column surrounded by the motto *Talis Magnus Basileus* ("The great Basil is like this"). (1)

### Former side chapels

To the left used to be the Chapel of Our Lady, with an altarpiece showing *The Madonna and Child with Saints*. The one presenting the model monastery is St Nilus. To the right is the former Chapel of St Joseph, with an altarpiece showing *The Death of St Joseph*. The altarpieces were kept when the altars were removed. They are anonymous, and were commissioned in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the church was built. (1)

### Presbyterium

The vault of the presbyterium apse is painted a rich blue, with golden stars and the *Dove of the Holy Spirit* in a glory in the centre. (1)

The iconostasis is in a traditional style familiar in Orthodox churches, of varnished wood. The inscription running across the top is in Greek, and reads: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory". Above this is a depiction of the Last Supper, and on top is a Calvary. (1)

In the apse is the site of the former Latin-rite altar. It has an altarpiece of *St Basil*, possibly by **Gregorio Stasi**. The Byzantine-rite altar is free-standing in front of this, square as is traditional and revetted in alabaster. There is a gabled canopy on spindly columns, decorated on each gable with angels venerating the Cross. (1)

### Special notes

The Feast of St Basil is celebrated on 5 January. In the Roman calendar it is on 2 January, jointly with St Gregory Nazianzen, and this is also usually marked in some way. (1)

### Burial

Bishop Filiteo De Zossis (1653-1726)

Archbishop Basilio Matranga , O.S.B.M., († 1748)

<Archbishop of Achrida (Ochrida), Bulgaria>

### Location:

Addr: Via di San Basilio 51, 00187 Roma

Coord: [41° 54' 17.8" N: 12° 29' 23.5" E](#)

### Info:

Tel. 06 48 82 580

### Links:

1. [http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San\\_Basilio\\_agli\\_Orti\\_Sallustiani](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San_Basilio_agli_Orti_Sallustiani)
2. [http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=1356](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=1356)
3. <http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi132.htm#Basilio>
4. <http://www.romasegreta.it/trevi/s-basilio.html>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157629865306840/>  
("De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr)

[http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page\\_id=188&ID=800](http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page_id=188&ID=800)