

Santi Ildefonso e Tommaso da Villanova



The **church of Saints Ildefonso and Thomas of Villanova** is a 17th century convent church of Rome, in the. The dedication is to two saints of Spanish origin, Ildefonso of Toledo, a 7th century archbishop of Toledo where the Recollects had their beginnings, and St Thomas of Villanova (Villanueva in Spanish) because he was a great 16th century Augustinian archbishop of Valencia. [1]

History

In 1619 Fr Gabriel Concepcion bought an area in Via Sistina, in the land owned by the senator Pincio and founded a hospice for the Augustinians Recollects, a Spanish reform movement within the Augustinian friars which was recognized at a chapter held by the Friars at Toledo in 1588. [1]

In 1652 a congregation of Spanish subjects was founded, entitled "The School of Christ" which had the approval of Pope Innocent X (1644-55), who then annexed the hospice.

Ten years later, on the tenth anniversary of the death of Saint Ildefonso (1667), the construction of the church began. The first stone was laid September 20 of that year by Msgr. Giovanni Baptist Emilio Altieri, who became Pope Clement X (1670-76). The project was entrusted to Dominican friar and architect P. **Giuseppe Paglia**. The stucco work was performed by the brothers **Antonio** and **Carlo Cometti**. On January 18, 1672 the present church was consecrated and opened to the public. [2]

The façade was built many years after the construction of the Church, between 1724 and 1730 by **Francesco Ferrari** in a tripartite Baroque style. [1]

In 1809, during the France occupation of Rome, the priests were expelled and both the hospice and the adjoining Church were looted, fell into ruin. At the request of the Spanish ambassador Antonio Vargas and by decree of Pius VII, on 2 July 1814, the Augustinians Récollets were given back their home. Since then, the complex has functioned as the congregation's Roman headquarters and also as a theological college, Collegio Internazionale Sant'Ildefonso. The Recollects became a fully-fledged

and independent mendicant order in 1912. [1]

In 1888 the church was renovated and redecorated with the paintings, reliefs, paintings, pedestals, pillars, cornices, etc.. All these works were from established artists. Two years later, in 1890 a beautiful marble main altar was installed in the church. The arrangement of the floor of the apse lasted until 1935. In 1954 the church was again restored by **Antonio Muñoz**, who redecorate the interior, leaving it as currently seen.

In 1882 the hospice was modify. From 1930 to 1942 and from 1949 to 1959 was the seat of the General Curia of Augustinian Recollects while college students of the Order, which at the same time universities of the Eternal City. Since 1960 only used as a residence for men who are studying in Rome.

Exterior

The church is on a simple rectangular plan, with a sanctuary in a square apse. Only the façade is visible from the street, as the church is hemmed in by other buildings. The tiny campanile or bellcote is over the right hand side, but cannot be seen. The original convent was very small, with a tiny garden and no cloister. [1]

Façade

The late Baroque (tardobarocco) façade is of two storeys, rendered in a very pale pinkish tan with architectural details in white and carvings in travertine. [1]

The first storey has four Ionic pilasters on plinths, supporting an entablature with a dedicatory inscription on its frieze. The inscription reads: "S. S. Ildefonso Thomae et de Villanova dicatum". The pilaster capitals are swagged, and the volutes are doubled (an unusual feature). The central zone of the storey, in between the inner pair of pilasters, is slightly recessed and this design feature continues up in the second storey as far as the cornice of the crowning pediment. [1]

The molded Baroque doorcase has a segmental pediment having a broken cornice and raised on tasselled posts over a tablet. In between the pilaster pairs on each side is an empty round-headed niche in a molded frame, topped by a floating gabled cornice under which shelters a scallop shell with swags. Below the niche is a panel with a rusticated (as if eroded) stone surface -another unusual design feature. [1]

The second storey also has four Ionic pilasters supporting an entablature, on which is a crowning segmental pediment containing a framed elliptical tondo with curlicues. This storey has a pair of similar niches, except here the floating cornices are omega-shaped (Ω). There is a large central window, topped by a triangular pediment and flanked by a pair of pilasters ending in straps. [1]

Interior

The interior is a single rectangular nave, with a square apsidal sanctuary entered through a triumphal arch. On both sides of the aisle open four chapels, two on each side, alternating with six niches, three on each side, containing many statues of plaster. The chapel altars have finely carved frontals.

The vault sits on a ledge with ribs, which begin dale faux columns and form a plot without moldings. The ceiling is decorated with a dove and heads of angels.

Overall, the stucco decoration of the church is rich but restrained and is in white on a pale greyish-green background. The various images are dominated by a series of symbols, decorative stucco or plaster, the sun, the moon, the cedar, the palm tree, garlands, wreaths of palms, a pectoral cross, the "Civitas Dei" with regard to the "City of God "of St. Augustine.

Gigantic ribbed Corinthian pilasters support an entablature which runs round the entire nave; there are two flanking each arch, two more flanking the entrance and four tucked into the corners. The archivolts of the arches are molded, with beading, and they spring from Doric impostos. [1]

The cornice of the entablature is embellished with rosettes and foliated modillions, and on this sits

the shallow barrel-vaulted ceiling. This has a diagonally reticulated design of intersecting ribs, vaguely Gothic. [1]

In between the capitals of the pilasters on the side walls and counterfaçade are panels with stucco swags. Above the side chapels the architrave and frieze of the entablature are broken to make way for four cantorie or opera-boxes for solo singers and musicians. These have balustraded frontals with thin balusters, and panels in alabaster. [1]

Our Lady of Copacabana

The entablature has a frieze with symbolic attributes and titles of Our Lady, and if you look over the entrance you will see a plaque saying Maria de Copacavana ora pro nobis. This indicates that there is a special devotion here to Our Lady under this title of Our Lady of Copacabana, venerated in Peru and Bolivia. The Augustinians founded a shrine at the town of Copacabana in what is now Bolivia in the early 17th century to house a miraculous image of Our Lady, and she remains patron of Bolivia. [1]

Sanctuary

The square apse has a little cupola on pendentives, embellished with stucco ornament. [1]

The altar aedicule is against the far wall of the apse, and has a pair of green marble Ionic columns supporting a triangular pediment with posts. In the tympanum delineated by the two further pendentives is an icon of *Our Lady of Copacabana*, supported by a pair of stucco putti. [1]

The 17th century altarpiece is an oil painting of the *Virgin Mary with San Ildefonso and St. Thomas de Villanova*. The Madonna is depicted helping St. Ildefonso to wear the cope and chasuble, which she herself gives him. Lower down to the left, St. Thomas of Villanova with a poor man at his side. [1]

Right side (starting from the entrance)

The side chapels are little square recesses, with their own tiny cupolas on pendentives. The altar frontals are in extremely rich polychrome pietra dura work -marquetry in stone. [1]

First niche - Statue of [Saint Rita of Cascia](#), Agostiniara nun, the patron saint of "impossible or lost causes."

First Chapel - Dedicated to the Nativity of Christ. Represents the Adoration of the Shepherds in a high relief, framed by a rich stucco frame imitating marble, and gilded. Relief dates to 1667. The relief and works of Francesco Grassia, called "Franco Sicilia", Palermo sculptor active in the second half of the 17th century.

Second niche - Statue of *San Fulgencio di Ruspe*. Passionate scholar of Augustine's thought. Embrace the religious life after reading the exposition of Psalm 36 from St. Augustine. Finally some monastery, and himself, while bishop of Ruspe, led community lives.

Second Chapel - Above the altar and place a framework which depicts the *Immaculate Conception between Saint Augustine and his mother, Santa Monica*. It belongs to the Roman school of the middle of the 18th century. It is also attributed to **Juan Correa de Murcia**, a painter who worked in Mexico in the period between 1675 and 1714.

Third niche - Statue of Saint [Ferdinand III](#), the King of Castile and Leon. In 1230 he joined in these two Spanish kingdoms to fight against the Muslims until the virtual conquest of Spain. This won him the title "Conqueror of Andalusia. Restoration of Catholicism in the Territory and in the cities Conquest.

Left side (starting from the Presbytery)

First niche - Statue of [St. Louis IX, King of France](#). He was born in 1214. He was canonized in 1297 by Pope Boniface VIII.

First Chapel - It is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The balanced and modern.

Second niche - Statue of St. Alipio born in Tagaste (today Afrasa Souk, Algeria). Countryman,

friend and disciple of St. Augustine. Shared with him the errors of youth, conversion, religious life and the labors of the apostolate. He was elected bishop of Tagaste about the year 394. Died around 430.

Second Chapel - Dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Within a frame of golden yellow stucco, you see a canvas that reproduce the famous Marian image of [Our Lady of Guadalupe](#), revered throughout the world. This was the first image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to come to Rome. It was painted in Mexico by [Juan Correa de Murcia](#) in 1669, and brought to Rome in 1672 by an Augustinian Recollet monk

On the walls of the chapel there are four other oil paints, which contain some scenes of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to the native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac, in the month of December 1531 (Mexicana art of the seventeenth century). In the last picture is seen kneeling in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the bishop Zumarraga.

Third niche - Statue of [St. Clare of Montefalco](#). Augustinian nun. Abbess from 1291 to 1308. Led an exemplary life. Urged the sisters to the spirit of sacrifice and personal commitment to achieve a solid spiritual life. Distinguished herself for her devotion to the Passion of Christ. Immediately following Clare's death her heart was removed from her body, and upon inspection it was reported that symbols of Christ's passion, a crucifix and a scourge, were found within her heart.

Info

Access and liturgy

The following is from an unofficial source, 2009:

Opening hours daily 7:20 to 13:30, 15:00 to 20:00.

Mass: Weekdays 7:30, 17:00. Sundays 10:30, 11:30, 17:00. (These times might have changed.)

Address: Via Sistina 11, 00187 Roma

Coord: [41°54'13"N](#) [12°29'14"E](#)

Links and References

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)

2. [Romapedia web site](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 374)

[Gallery from Colora](#) (did restoration work)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

[Roman Despatches](#) - blog with gallery

Booklet in Italian from the church