

Corpus Domini al Nomentano



Corpus Domini al Nomentano is a 19th century convent church in the Nomentano quarter, which is just outside the Porta Pia. The dedication to the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, manifested in the Real Presence of the Eucharist.

History

The site of the present church is thought to correspond to that of a set of catacombs dedicated to St Nicomedes. He was Roman martyr about whom nothing is known except that he was buried outside the present Porta Pia by the early 4th century. A Christian cemetery was located here, on the Via Nomentana outside the gate, the Catacomba di San Nicomede.

The first possible mention of a church arises in the 4th century, when there existed a titulus Sancti Nicomedis. In the first half of the 7th century, a basilica was constructed over the martyr's tomb on the orders of Pope Pope Boniface V, and this was mentioned in pilgrim itineraries. It was restored at the end of the 8th century by Pope Adrian I , but was probably abandoned in the next century along with the majority of the churches outside the city walls.

The location of the catacombs is considered to be on the south side of the modern street. When the Ministry of Transport building was erected here, a set of catacomb galleries were discovered. However, no trace of any surface buildings associated with them has been found, or any means of positive identification in the archaeological finds.

The present church was begun in 1886 as part of a large convent for what were then called "Religious of the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament". This congregation had been founded by Anna de Meeûs (1823-1904), who was a member of a famous high-ranking family of Brussels in Belgium, the de Meeûs d'Argenteuil. The first community was set up by her near Brussels in 1856, and received Papal approval in 1872. The sisters were originally dedicated by their foundress to perpetual adoration, which meant that each convent had the Blessed Sacrament exposed and venerated by the sisters for the full 24 hours in the day. They also undertook catechetical work, especially for children preparing for First Communion. The mother house of the congregation remains at Watermael-Boitsfort near Brussels, but the convent here has been the Roman headquarters since its foundation.

The latter part of the 20th century was not kind to the congregation. In 1969 the name was changed to the Religious of the Eucharist as part of an attempt to modernize, but the number of vocations fell and the congregation now only has three convents including this one.

The large and impressive convent complex was designed by a Belgian architect Arthur Verhaegen. He was assisted by the local Carlo Busiri Vici, and the church was consecrated in 18 June 1889 after three years' work. Interior decoration was finished in 1993.

The church has never had a public pastoral responsibility until recently, being the convent chapel and a place of public adoration of the Eucharist. However, it has now been listed as one of those churches in Rome where the rites of the Eastern Catholic Churches can be celebrated. Since the collapse of Communism, nationalist sentiments have led to the assertion of several worshipping groups especially of Slavs of the Byzantine rite who do not have their own churches in Rome, and these now have the opportunity of celebrating here.

Exterior

This is a large convent for only five sisters to be resident in, and is arranged around a garden courtyard or cloister to the left (east) of the church. The main block on the far side of this has five storeys, but the street wing is lower with one section of four storeys and the other, two. The material throughout the fabric of both church and convent is red brick of a rather bright hue.

The church is basically in a style which in English is called Gothic Revival, although with a nod to the local Romanesque. It has a French note in its layout, which involves a central nave with aisles and a large U-shaped apse of the same width as the central nave. Ancillary accommodation occupies the sides of the apse. There is a tower campanile at the bottom of the left hand aisle, taking the place of that aisle's street frontage.

Façade

The façade is mostly in red brick, with stone detailing confined to the entrance. As a piece of integrated design, the façade is confined to the frontage of the central nave. This is dominated by an enormous Gothic arch recessed into the brickwork, which contains three large pointed lancet windows having the same size, the central one being set higher. Each window is divided into two lights by a central mullion and has a ring mullion at the top, but these features are unfortunately obscured by the windows having been double-glazed in plate glass. The roofline gable is decorated with brick dentillation

The Gothic doorway has a molded stone doorcase, and on either side is a short blind arcade of two tracery arches. In the tympanum of the doorway arch is a mosaic showing a golden chalice with three white Eucharistic hosts over it, on a blue background with a motto below. This is the emblem of the congregation.

The right hand aisle has a single pitched roof, and the sloping line is also dentillated. The blank wall has a pair of conjoined Gothic windows with very spindly columns. The left hand aisle, as mentioned, is occupied by the campanile which leaves the composition assymetrical and, frankly, quite ugly.

Campanile

The substantial and rather overpowering campanile has five storeys, each with a pair of separate Gothic lancet windows and a string course of zig-zag brick ornament between each storey. The bellchamber has soundholes in the form of a triple arcade on each side. There is a pyramidal cap in lead. This campanile is a Goth version of the traditional mediaeval Romanesque campanile familiar in the city.

Interior

The nave has a central nave with two side aisles, divided by two arcades of granite columns. It has four bays, but the first bay is flanked by the campanile on the left, and a corner chapel on the right. Thus, the arcades have three arches each.

The apse is in a grand Gothic style.

In the choir and on the triumphal arch are frescoes by Virginio Monti, executed in 1893. On the side walls, frescoes by Eugenio Cisterna, painted in 1910, featuring the celebration of the Eucharist and choirs of angels.

Liturgy

The feast of the Body of Christ (Corpus Christi) is celebrated with great solemnity. Details of any celebrations of Oriental rites are entirely lacking online.

Location:

Address: 8 Via Nomentana

Coord: [41°54'38.3"N 12°30'13.9"E](#)

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Wikipedia article on Arthur Verhaegen](#)