

Santi Sette Fondatori



Santi Sette Fondatori is a mid 20th century parish and convent church in the Nomentano quarter, just north-east of the Policlinico metro station. The dedication is to the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order, which administers the parish.

History

The "Compassionate Sisters, Servants of Mary" (Suore compassioniste serve di Maria) were founded at Castellammare di Stabia near Naples by Bl Maria Maddalena Starace (1845-1921) in 1869. The foundress wished to have a convent in Rome, and this was first established in 1901, on the Via Emilia in the Ludovisi quarter. Just before she died she oversaw the transfer of this convent to the Piazza Salerno, and the foundation of a school -the Istituto Mater Dolorosa. The foundation stone of the chapel was laid in 1920, but it was only consecrated in 1926.

The congregation received its pontifical decree in 1936, enabling it to become international. This upgrade in status coincided with the moving of the school to Via Alessandro Torlonia 14 nearby, and later the foundation of a new Generalate (headquarters) at Via Appia Nuova 1009. This is the present Casa Santa Maria.

The chapel of the sisters actually fronted the Via Benevento, to the east of the present church, and was dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. This seems to have been where the present theatre now stands.

Old photographs show a substantial single-naved edifice in brick, which had an interesting apse. This was semi-circular and had the choir of the sisters behind, accessed by seven rectangular portals in the curve of the apse. Above the choir was a gallery, and this had an arcade of seven arches supported by short Corinthian columns.

The sanctuary occupied the apse, and was accessed by a flight of four marble steps which intruded into the nave. The top of the stairs had a low communion screen with marble slabs pierced in quatrefoils. The altar had a tall aedicule, reaching up beyond the height of the choir portals, which contained a statue of Our Lady.

A pair of round-headed statue niches flanked the apse.

The parish was set up in 1935, and put into the care of the Servite Friars. They took up residence in a rented house in Via Forlì, which is one block south-east of the present church. When the Suore compassioniste vacated their school premises in 1936, they handed them over to the new parish which then used the chapel as a temporary parish church.

Tempio del Perpetuo Suffragio

The project for a permanent parish church was seriously delayed by the Second World War. However, it was then decided to combine the project with the provision of a memorial sanctuary for those of the Italian armed forces killed in the war. This, the Tempio del Perpetuo Suffragio, is the crypt of the church. It was begun in 1947 and completed in 1949. In 2010, a little icon of Our Lady was solemnly installed and blessed as the Madonna dei Dispersi. She is especially invoked for those who went missing on the Eastern Front, and who probably died in Soviet Gulags.

Permanent church

The present church was designed by Alberto Tonelli. After a pause with the completion of the crypt, work to finish the edifice was begun in 1953 and completed in 1956. The former convent chapel on Via Benevento was made redundant by the opening of the church, so it was demolished and replaced by a theatre.

The sanctuary was provided with a mosaic in 1964.

There was a restoration and another re-ordering of the sanctuary in 1984.

Exterior

The church stands over a crypt. It has two storeys, the second nested within the first in the plan. The first storey is on the plan of a tear-drop with the point cut off to form the entrance façade. The second storey is in the form of a dodecahedron (regular twelve-sided polyhedron) with the church's major axis intersecting two opposite faces.

The sanctuary has an apse in the form of a transverse rectangle with a slightly out-curved back wall. This is embedded in the sacristy and parish office block which is a low range wrapped round the apse and far left hand side of the church with its own entrance off the street to the left (the Via Lazzaro Spallanzani).

The right hand side of the apse abuts a large rectangular block containing convent premises and a theatre (Teatro 7).

The fabric comprises a reinforced concrete frame, with brick, concrete and stone infill.

The first storey is flat-roofed. The side walls, each of which curves round to the sanctuary (a separate structural element, see below) are revetted in large, smooth creamy-white limestone slabs. The tops of the walls provide very low parapets for the roof, and have been topped with metal safety railings. Each side wall has a row of twenty-four small rectangular windows, deeply recessed, near the top of the wall. The left had

side wall has a long ramp running up to a side entrance with an angled top near the sanctuary, and this is obviously the disabled access to the church. The corresponding location in the right hand wall has no doorway.

The second storey comprises a twelve-sided drum, with the concrete frame piers showing at the corners and the infill being red brick. The entire width of the top of each side is occupied by a large stained glass window with a three-sided top having very shallow angles. This window top abuts a fairly deep white roofline fascia.

The roof of the drum, not really a dome, has twelve sectors divided by ribs springing from the tops of the support piers. Each sector is double pitched, with a very slight gable and is in a grey composition. The sectors meet at a circular platform in red, bearing a wire sculpture in the form of a ball and cross.

The flat roof of the first storey has a pavilion abutting the front face of the drum, in the form of an irregular hexagon with a very short front side. It is in red brick, with a slightly gabled roof.

The sanctuary end of the church is in red brick, not in limestone slabs. It is substantially higher than the first storey, with its own flat roof. It clasps the three far sides of the drum, slightly intruding into the two adjacent sides. The apse projects, and is of the same height.

Façade

The façade is concave, in three equal zones which are flat. The outer two absolutely blank, in rough-cut limestone slabs which have been pecked. The middle one contains the entrance, which is recessed into an open internal porch with a triangular top edge. This recess does not occupy the entire width of this central zone, but the narrow strips of wall on either side are angled inwards and decorated with a honeycomb pattern (tessellated hexagons). Above the entrance, the central zone has a row of limestone tiles laid vertically on edge, and then smooth limestone slab revetting.

The façade is topped by a large floating canopy occupying the entire width. It is triangular, with a central gable and also reverse double pitches on either side dropping down to a pair of corbels.

Around the corners of the façade are two doorways which lead to the double set of stairs for the crypt. The doorway on the left seems to be the main public entrance for the Tempio. For both, the recessed door-case has the epigraph *Sacrario dei Caduti* on its lintel and the word *cripta* above.

Interior

Interior of church

Nave

Despite the church's unusual shape, the liturgical layout is traditional with the sanctuary opposite the entrance. The interior has a ring of tapering rectangular concrete piers, arranged radially, which support the drum and are continued in the wall up to the drum roof. There are only ten of these piers, not twelve as might be expected -the two at the sanctuary end are missing. These piers create the impression of side aisles to a central circular nave. The two side aisles have a pair of side altars at their far ends, and the left hand aisle has a side entrance before its altar. The piers are in grey, but the rest of the interior walling and the roofs are in white. The roof of the drum shows its twelve radial support beams, also in grey. These meet at a boss which bears the Marian monogram AM within a star device.

Welcome color is given by the stained glass in the large band of windows below the drum roof. Most of these show semi-abstract heavenly orbs, but the one above the sanctuary shows *The Crucifixion*. The floor in front of the sanctuary has the initials SM (*Sancta Maria*) inlaid in black.

The church's organ is in the drum, opposite the sanctuary. Over the entrance bay is a gallery with a frontal bearing a mural of *The Annunciation*, with *The Visitation* to the left and *The Nativity* to the right.

The Stations of the Cross are in glazed pottery relief tablets.

Sanctuary

At the far end, the walls of the drum open out into the sanctuary space which contains a transverse rectangular apse with a curved back wall. This is sheltered by a canopy amounting to a structural beam, and above it are two wall piers matching the ones above the ten free-standing piers of the nave.

On the apse wall behind the altar is an enormous mosaic by Ambrogio Fumagalli of 1964. It depicts the appearance of Our Lady to the Seven Holy Founders on Monte Senario in 1245, an event which led to the foundation of the Servite Order. Below this is the round gilded tabernacle, in the form of a sunburst.

Tempio del Perpetuo Suffragio

Nave

The crypt is a separate worshipping space, accessed by a double staircase. The first two flights converge from the two entrance doors to a landing the wall of which displays a large crucifix. Then another pair of flights lead from the landing into the near corners of the nave.

The shape of the crypt mimics that of the first storey of the church above, that is of a tear-drop with its point cut off. However, it is smaller and the curve of the shape is taken up entirely with a circular roof which matches the roof of the church drum above in size and layout. Here, twelve concrete beams meet at a light-fitting. The latter has yellow glass within a magenta ring, and bears the monogram NSA (Nuestra signora).

At its near curve, the ring-beam of this circular roof is supported by four concrete columns. In front of these, the side walls each have a row of twelve vertical rectangular stained glass windows below the entrance bay roof.

Two side altars flank the sanctuary on each side, the far ones being in deeper niches. A third altar is tucked into a square niche under the entrance landing.

The stone-clad walls are covered in the inscribed names of those of the Italian armed forces who were killed in the war.

The floor is in grey-veined marble.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary area is raised on a platform in red marble, with two steps in grey-veined marble.

The sanctuary has been re-ordered rather crudely. The sumptuous original altar was in a small apse, but has been removed and replaced by a row of fitted stall-seats for the clergy. However, the gradini in pinkish marble have been left and these flank the tabernacle. This is in green marble, of an irregular hexagonal form, and has a chased and gilded door.

The original altarpiece is a relief of the Pietà.

The new altar has a frontal bearing a relief of The Deposition. It is flanked by a pair of ambones in limestone. The left hand one is in the form of a pulpit bearing the label Evangelium, and has a book-rest in the form of an eagle. The one on the right is in the form of a pillar, bears the label Verbum Dei and also has an eagle book-rest

Liturgy

According to the Diocese, Mass is celebrated for the parish:

Weekdays 7:30, 18:30;

Sundays and Solemnities 8:30, 10:00, 11:00 (in the crypt), 11:30, 18:30.

The Tempio has a regular series of requiem and other Masses for the victims of warfare, most but not all in the context of military remembrance.

Location:

Address: Piazza Salerno 4

Coord: [41°54'39.3"N 12°30'46.5"E](#)

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Tempio website](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Beweb web-page](#)

[Youtube slide-show](#) (4:28)