

# San Francesco a Ripa



**San Francesco a Ripa** is a church in Rome. It is dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi because the adjacent convent hosted his visit to Rome in 1229. The name is derived from an old gate on the Tiber called *Ripa grande*.

## History:

A chapel dedicated to St Blaise (in Italian: *San Biagio de Curtibus*) was built here by the Benedictine monastery of San Cosimato in Trastevere nearby in the late 12th or early 13th century; some sources date it to the late 10th century, but this seems unlikely. (The church is therefore sometimes referred to in the records as *Santi Biagio e Francesco*.) In 1229 the Roman noble lady [Giacoma di Settesoli](#) (Brother Jacoba), a devoted follower of St. Francis who was present at his death, got permission from Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) to give the church as a shrine to St [Francis of Assisi](#). In 1231 the small church was annexed to the convent. This church was decorated with the (now lost) *St. Francis* cycle by [Pietro Cavallini](#). This cycle probably served as prototype for the famous *Legend of St Francis* frescoes, ascribed to [Giotto di Bondone](#), in the Upper Basilica of St Francis in Assisi.

Next to the church is a convent of what used to be the hospital, and here the room that was used by St. Francis was converted into a chapel by Cardinal Montalto, nephew of Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590).

The construction of the present church was begun in 1603 by [Onorio Longhi](#), starting from the apse, then up to 1687 by [Carlo Fontana](#). The façade was finished in 1681-1701 with design by [Mattia de Rossi](#), commissioned by Cardinal Lazzaro Pallavicini. The church was restored in 1862.

The convent of friars survived until 1873, and was partnered with the Poor Clare nuns at San Cosimato. However, in that year the complex was sequestered by the Italian government. From 1873 to 1943 the old

convent was used as barracks by the Bersaglieri corps of the Italian Army. In 1943 it was turned into a hostel for refugees.

Franciscans still serve the church, and their Provincialate is adjacent to it.

### **Exterior:**

The façade, as seen from the piazza, is not entirely genuine architecturally. The segmental pediment actually protrudes above the gabled roofline, and the outer two of the five vertical zones in the first storey belong to convent buildings and not to the church. The architectural details are in travertine limestone, and the walls in between are rendered in dull orange (which is showing its age). There are three entrances, the aisle ones having simple stone doorcases and the central one being larger with a triangular pediment. There is a pair of triplet rectangular pilasters flanking the main entrance, another triplet pair flanking the aisle frontages and a pair of singletons on the outer corners of the façade as a whole. The inner pair of triplets are bunched, but the aisle pair has one of the triplet with its own identity. These pilasters do not have their own proper capitals, but support an entablature on which simplified Doric capitals appear in shallow relief. There is a square window over each aisle entrance, and two more in the outer zones. The second storey, or the upper nave frontage, has a pair of triplet pilasters in the same style as the entrance pair supporting an entablature and segmental pediment. There is a large rectangular window, and swooping curves over the aisle rooflines. Two rather bizarre halves of a broken segmental pediment are attached to the outer edges of the aisle rooflines.

The tiled and pitched roof has a single ridge from one end to the other. As befits the ideal of poverty of the Franciscan order, there has never been a campanile but only a bellcote over the right hand transept with two bells. There is no separate apse, but unusually the east end has its own façade with an entrance between four shallow rectangular pilasters supporting an entablature and triangular pediment and a round window over the entrance. This is not usually accessible to the public.

In the garden of the convent is an orange tree, which according to the tradition was planted by the Saint Francis.

The square in front of the church has one Ionian column erected by Pope Pius IX, taken from the ruins of Veii.

### **Interior:**

The interior is divided into a nave, two aisles and short transepts by pillars and arcades. The nave arcades have wide piers, and there is a barrel-vaulted ceiling and a (false) saucer dome over the crossing. The decoration is very simple and the dominant color is cream, not as one might expect in a church of the period.

#### Left aisle, chapels and monuments:

Over the altar of the first chapel in the left aisle is a painting by Marten De Vos (1555), *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary*, who had been an observant of the third rule of Saint Francis. To the right is the *Assumption* by Antonio della Corgna, and to the left is a *Birth of the Virgin* (1620) by Simon Vouet. To the left of the chapel is the monument of the Ven. Innocent of Chiusa, who died in 1631, designed by Giacomo Mola.

#### Castellani Chapel:

The chapel, the second on the left in the nave, was under the patronage of the Castellani family and it houses the tomb of Mariano Castellani, in 1524, Guardian of the Confraternita del SS. Salvatore ad Sancta Sanctorum, and that of his wife, Bernardina de' Rustici, who died in 1544. In her will Bernardina donated funds to two confraternities. In 1614, to give thanks for this legacy, the two confraternities erected a memorial in her honor on the right-hand wall of the chapel. In 1622 Pope Gregory XV granted a plenary indulgence to all who visited the chapel on the feast day of the Annunciation, also recorded on a tablet in the chapel.

On the altar is the famous *Annunciation* by Francesco Salviati, which was probably commissioned by Bernardina around 1534

All of the frescoes are by Giovanni Battista Ricci from around 1614, with the possible collaboration of Cristoforo Greppi:

- *The Nativity* on the lunette to the left
- *Birth of the Virgin* on the lunette to the right
- the four lateral *Sibyls*
- the four great *Prophets* below, on the walls
- the four *Evangelists* in the spandrels
- *God the Father in Glory with Angels making music* on the ceiling.

Although there is no record of who was responsible for the stucco work framing the paintings, it seems plausible to assume that it was also by Ricci and Greppi. The frescoes were restored for the Holy Year of 2000.

The tomb of Giuseppe Paravicini was sculpted by Camillo Rusconi, also from 1614.

Over the altar of the third chapel was a *Pietà*, by Annibal Carracci. To the right is the monument of Card. Mattei, attributed to Lorenzo Ottoni. On the left wall is a monument for Laura Mattei Frangipani, sculpted by Andrea Bolgi (1637). St. Charles of Sezze is buried beneath the altar.

### Apse, transepts:

#### Albertoni chapel:

In the left transept, the chapel Paluzzi-Albertoni designed by Giacomo Mola (1622-1625). Inside is one of Bernini's masterpieces, the statue of the *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni in Ecstasy*.



After the beatification of Ludovica Albertoni (died in the convent in 1533) in 1671, Cardinal Paluzzi degli Albertoni undertook to renovate the decoration in the family chapel. The project was given to Bernini, forced to work without payment in exchange for the pardon for the brother involved in a scandal. This sculpture readily recalls the recumbent *Santa Teresa in Ecstasis* at Santa Maria della Vittoria, and is one of his last works. The sculpture of the dying Ludovica is placed above the altar of the chapel where she had been buried with her husband, Giacomo Della Cetera, in 1533. Her white marble effigy shows her in ecstasy while reclining on a bed placed on a billowing curtain carved from veined red jasper. Slightly above the statue, in a very unusual position, two series of stucco angels converge towards it. Finally the entire wall is covered by a gilded decoration. Also in this chapel Bernini devised a hidden window to direct light on the face of Beata Ludovica Albertoni.

Behind the statue is a painting of *Saint Anna and the Virgin* by Giovanni Battista Gaulli. The chapel frescoes had been ascribed to Gaspare Celio, but recently reattributed to Cristoforo Greppi:

- on the pillar to the right of the altar, *Bl. Ludovica*
- on the pillar to the left of the altar, *Saint Clare*
- in the spandrels, *St. Cecilia, St. Agnes, St. Francesca Romana and Bl. Ludovica Albertoni*
- and in the cupola, *Glory*.

The door to the left, outside the chapel, opens into the sacristy, with a painting of the *Bl. Trinity with St. Bernard of Sienna and St. Bonaventure*, to the left, on wood, by an unknown artist. On the wall above it, opposite the front window, is a *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, by the Cav. d' Arpino. The sacristy is lined with cupboards made by four lay brothers in 1698.

The door to the right opens into a passage, that leads up to the cell of S. Francis, the only remaining part of the mediaeval hospice now converted into a chapel. The wooden reliquary in the cell has a portrait of the saint, which is a 13th or 14th century copy of an actual portrait by the friar Margaritone d'Arezzo, made in the saint's lifetime or shortly after his death. The altar is said to contain more than 1000 relics. The original can be seen in the Pinacoteca Vaticana (Vatican Museums). Part of the cell was redecorated in the Baroque style in 1698. The black stone that you'll see here is said to have been used as a pillow by St Francis. Ask in the sacristy, or if there is no one there ask any friar in the church, to be let into the 'stanza di San Francesco'. Above St Francis' cell is a room where relics of St Charles of Sezze are kept. His heart, said to have been visibly pierced by a ray of light during prayer, used to be here but was stolen some years ago.

The main altar, planned by Antonio Rinaldi, was completed in 1746 and has composite pillars in red, grey and yellow veined marble. In the centre is a statue of St Francis with the stigmata being venerated by an angel.

The Baroque altarpiece, from 1698, *Saint Francis in Ecstasy*, was made by Franciscan brothers, attributed to Fra Diego da Careri, the *Trinity* canvas by Paris Nogari. The *Faith* over the door to the right opening into the choir, the *Charity* over that to the left, the *Saint Antony of Padua* over the lateral altar to the left, and *Saint Giacinta Mariscotti*, over that to the right, are all of carved wood.

#### Rospigliosi chapel:

In the right transept the chapel of the Rospigliosi-Pallavicini is a tour-de-force in Baroque polychrome marble and gilding, started by Nicola Michetti and completed by Ludovico Rusconi Sassi in 1725. The chapel is decorated with two Ionic columns, incrustated with verde antique, and having gilt bases and capitals, and its numerous composite pilasters are of giallo brecciato. The altar is composed of Sicilian jasper, oriental alabaster, breccia di settebasi, giallo antico, and verde antique; and the frame of its altarpiece is of giallo brecciato, on a ground of alabastro nuvolone.

The altarpiece depicts *San Pietro d' Alcantara and San Pasquale Babylon*, with the four *Theological Virtues* in the ovals, painted by Tommaso Chiaro and the funeral monuments of Stefano and Lazzaro Pallavicini, Maria Camilla, and Giambattista Rospigliosi based on designs of Michetti and were executed by Giuseppe Mazzuoli.

#### Right aisle, chapels and monuments:

##### Chapel of the Holy Family

The *Holy Family*, over the next altar, is by Stefano Maria Legnani of Milan from 1685. The *angel appearing to Saint Joseph in sleep*, to the left, the *Flight into Egypt* to the right, and the *Glory* above, are by Giuseppe Passeri.

In the second chapel, Domenico Maria Muratori frescoed events from the life of *San Giovanni from Capestrano* (1725). to the right is the same Saint, curing the lame and the blind, to the left in the act of preaching, which, together with his birth in the left oval, his death in the right oval, and his apotheosis, on the ceiling, are all by Muratori.

The Crucifix, over the altar of the last chapel, is by Fra Diego of Milan. There are frescoes by Fra Emanuele da Como and monument to Cardinal Michelangelo Ricci by Domenico Guidi.

#### **Artists and Architects:**

Andrea Bolgi (1605–1656), Italian sculptor

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), Italian painter of the Baroque

Antonio [della Corgna](#) (1584-1654), Italian painter  
 Antonio [Rinaldi](#) (1710-1794), Italian architect of the Rococo  
 Camillo [Rusconi](#) (1658-1728), Italian sculptor of the late Baroque  
 Carlo [Fontana](#) (d. 1714), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period  
 Cristoforo Greppi (17<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian painter  
 Domenico [Guidi](#) (1625-1701), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period  
 Domenico Maria [Muratori](#) (1661-1744), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Fra Emanuele [da Como](#) (1586-1662), Italian painter  
 Fra Diego [da Careri](#) (1606-1661), Italian painter  
 Francesco de' Rossi aka [Il Salviati](#) (1510-1563), Italian Mannerist painter and stucco artist  
 Giacomo Mola (17<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian architect  
 Gian Lorenzo [Bernini](#) (1598-1680), Italian Baroque sculptor and architect  
 Giovanni Battista [Gaulli](#), aka Baciccia (1639-1709), Italian painter of the High Baroque  
 Giovanni Batista [Ricci](#) aka Da Novara (1537-1627), Italian painter  
 Giuseppe [Cesari](#), aka Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640), Italian Mannerist painter  
 Giuseppe [Mazzuoli](#) (1644-1725), Italian sculptor of the Baroque  
 Giuseppe [Passeri](#) (1654-1714), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Lorenzo [Ottoni](#) (1658-1736), Italian sculptor  
 Ludovico Rusconi [Sassi](#) (1678-1736), Italian architect of the Rococo period  
 Fra Margaritone d'Arezzo (1250-1290), Italian painter  
 Marten [de Vos](#) (1532-1603), Dutch painter and draughtsman  
 Mattia [de Rossi](#) (1637-1695), Italian architect of the Baroque period  
 Nicola [Michetti](#) (1675-1758), Italian architect of the late Baroque  
 Onorio [Longhi](#) (1568-1619), Italian architect  
 Paris [Nogari](#) (1536-1601), Italian painter of the Renaissance period  
 Simon [Vouet](#) (1590-1649), French painter of the Italian Baroque style  
 Stefano Maria [Legnani](#) (1660-1715), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Tommaso Chiaro, Italian painter

### Burials:

Clemente Cardinal [GROSSO DELLA ROVERE](#), O.F.M.Conv., (ca. 1462-1504)  
 Buried here or in the Lateran Basilica  
 Cesare Cardinal [GHERARDI](#), (1577-1623)  
 Lelio Cardinal [BISCIA](#), (1575-1638)  
 Buried on the left side of the main altar  
 Lazzaro Cardinal [PALLAVICINO](#), (1603?-1680)  
 Buried in the chapel of S. Pasquale  
 Michelangelo Cardinal [RICCI](#), (1619-1682)  
 Buried in the chapel of *SS. Crocifisso*, in his family's tomb  
 Orazio Cardinal [MATTEI](#), (1621-1688)  
 Buried on the left side of his family's chapel of *della Pietà*  
 Rannuzio Cardinal [PALLAVICINO](#), (1633-1712)  
 Buried in front of the main altar

Giorgio [de Chirico](#) (1888-1978)  
 Noted Greek-Italian Surrealist Painter and Sculptor  
 Giuseppe Paravicini  
 Laura (Mattei) Frangipani (d. 1635)  
 Maria Camilla  
 Giambattista Rospigliosi

### Ancient tombstones:

Incised slab (*on a pier, left of entrance*) : Agnese, wife of Pietro Andrea Massimi (d. 1328).

Relief slab: Francesco, Count of Anguillara (d. 1473) The figure, short and thick-set and bandy-legged, is presented in full plate-armour, with sword and dagger, the head without a helmet, the hands joined. The work is good, and the slab, little heeded by the sightseer, is of much interest among the tombs of Rome as a record of the days which bequeathed to the Campagna the ruined keeps with which it is strewn.

*Relief Slab.* Pandolfo. Count of Anguillara (no date). Fourteenth century, of the same family. He is in civilian dress, and wears a long outer robe and knotted girdle. It is good work. The arms of the Anguillara - two eels - are on both tombs.

**Location:**

Addr: 88 Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi, 00186 Roma

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Coord: [41°53'05"N, 12°28'22"E](#)

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