

Sant'Antonio a Circonvallazione Appia



Sant'Antonio a Circonvallazione Appia is a 20th century Fascist-era convent, parish and titular church in the Appio Latino quarter. The dedication is to St Anthony of Padua.

The name of the church as given is the official one, as used by the Diocese. There are variants in use: Sant'Antonio di (or da) Padova a (or alla) Circonvallazione Appia. The cardinalate title is Sant'Antonio di Padova a Circonvallazione Appia.

History

The church was not originally parochial, but was built for a very large convent complex in 1938 to a design by Alessandro Villa. This complex was part of the establishment in Rome of a new religious family founded by St Hannibal-Mary di Francia at the end of the 19th century, the Rogate. This has the dual charism of prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and care for destitute people of any race or belief, especially orphans.

The saint was a nobleman of Messina in Sicily, who became a diocesan priest and cathedral canon in 1878. He was shocked by the gross material and cultural poverty of deracinated former peasantry migrating to the city, and in 1883 founded the first of the "Antonian Orphanages" under the patronage of St Anthony of Padua. In 1887 he founded the "Daughters of Divine Zeal" (Figlie del Divin Zelo -FDZ) to help with the work, and in 1897 the male congregation of the "Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus" (Rogazionisti del Cuore di Gesù -RCI) as well as secular institutes for clerics and laypeople.

The sisters arrived in Rome some time before their male brethren, in 1924. They developed a large site in what was then on an isolated location in between the Via Latina and Via Appia Nuova, and founded the Istituto Antoniano as an orphanage for girls, and the Scuola "Annibale Maria di Francia as a school. Both of

these still flourish, in a vast three-storey convent arranged symmetrically around two courtyards with the church in the middle.

The parish was only set up in 1988, and entrusted to the Rogationists who had been at their nearby convent (now called Santi Antonio e Annibale Maria) since 1947. This was after a four-year trial period, when the future parochial territory was administered as a "quasi-parish" (quasi parrocchia).

Exterior

The convent with its church was completed in 1938, and comprises two large symmetrical rectangular three-storey blocks around a pair of enclosed courtyards flanking the church. Further accommodation is located behind the church's sanctuary, around a third much smaller sanctuary. This means that only the church's façade is visible from the street.

The church is an effective 1930's adaptation of the neo-Romanesque style on a basilical plan, resulting in one of the great 20th century Roman domed churches. The plan is based on a Latin cross with a central nave with structural side aisles having bays, then a transept with a domed crossing and finally a sanctuary of one bay with a semi-circular apse. The fabric seems to be in brick, with reinforced concrete structural elements. The visible external walls are rendered in a pale yellow.

The first nave bay has no windows, because the street wings of the convent abut it on either side. However, the next four bays each have a large round-headed window in each central nave side wall. The aisles below are completely incorporated into the convent wings which clasp the church on both sides. These wings also abut on the ends of the transept, each of which has a large lunette window in its visible wall with an oculus above

The roofs are pitched and tiled. The nave, ends of the transept and the sanctuary have their own pitches, with the last continued by five sectors over the apse.

Dome

The hemispherical central dome is in metal, and sits on a low octagonal drum with a large window in each side occupying the entire height of the drum. It has a lantern in the form of a little round temple with its own metal cupola.

Campanili

Flanking the apse are two identical square tower campanili. Each tower is rendered like the church in pale yellow, but each side has a pair of blind pilasters in red brick at the corners which are connected at the top by a cornice in the same style to form a frame. Above, the bell-chamber is in the form of a kiosk with three red pillars on each side separating two tall round-headed openings having connecting bars at the archivolt springers. The walls around and above the archivolts are in the pale yellow again. The campanili each have a steep metal pyramidal cap, almost a spire.

Façade

The entrance facade is monumental, and was obviously designed to give the impression of a palazzo. Two identical convent wings stretch out to either side, each being of three storeys and having nine bays. The first two storeys are in red brick, with each bay having a pair of rectangular windows within a large niche occupying both storeys. The third storey is rendered in pale yellow, with one window in each bay.

The actual façade has two storeys, the second being somewhat more than twice the height of the first. The first storey is clad in travertine limestone ashlar, and is approached by a flight of steps along its entire width (indicating that the church has a crypt). It is crowned by a sort-of entablature in what looks like concrete, having a blank frieze and a slightly protruding cornice but no architrave. There are three entrances. The two side aisle doorways are in simple rectangular recesses, but the central one is provided with a monumental porch or prothyrium in the form of a serliana. This has two free-standing blind columns, supporting a tall arch crowned by a gable with a cornice. To either side is a horizontal entablature formed by bringing

forward the main entablature of this storey, and this ends in a slab-pier at the corner thus forming a rectangular aperture.

The second storey is divided into three vertical zones corresponding to the central nave and side aisles behind. The central zone is brought forward slightly, and is clad in large rectangular limestone slabs. These are separated by three horizontal concrete string-courses, regularly spaced. At the level of the rooflines of the convent wings there is a deep concrete entablature with architrave, frieze and cornice in projecting steps, and above this the frontage is clad again in slabs up to the roofline.

The major design element of this zone of the façade is a very tall arch running up from the central gable of the porch, being the same width as it, to a recessed tympanum the bottom edge of which aligns with the cornice of the entablature just mentioned. This tympanum contains a marble relief sculpture of St Anthony with the Christ Child, Accompanied by Orphans. In between the tympanum and the gable of the porch is a very large rectangular window, divided into twenty vertical rectangular panes by concrete mullions.

The side zones of the façade are actually part of the flanking convent wings. They are in red brick, and the three string courses of the central zone cross them. The tympanum entablature of this latter zone also crowns them, and above are a pair of triangular screens panelled in more limestone slabbing and with sloping cornices. These give the impression of a partly hidden pediment, but are false since there is nothing behind them. Each side zone of the second storey has a tall, narrow rectangular window occupying the entire height to the entablature. This has eight rectangular panes divided by mullions.

Interior

Nave

The five bay nave has its bays divided by large transverse arches holding up the roof, which rise from rectangular piers without any impostes or capitals. These piers also support galleries, one in each side of each bay below a large round-headed window. The balconies of these galleries are flat, and are seamless with the inner faces of the piers and the intradoses of the arches. There is a little cornice on the upper edge of each balcony, and the large rectangular aperture below each balcony leading into the aisle has a double step molding on the edge all round.

The balconies connect up as a gallery above each aisle, and the two side galleries are connected over the entrance by a floating walkway that incorporates three balconies, one facing down the nave and two facing each other at the sides. The latter have rounded corners facing the nave. Unlike the nave balconies, this walkway with its balconies has rectangular decorative apertures containing little pillars and each with a central metal device. The central balcony has two of the Sacred Heart, and the walkway flanking the balcony has the Chi-rho.

The ceilings of the side galleries are supported by thick vertical slab-beams inserted immediately below the windows, which are completely undecorated.

This system of galleries was designed for the religious sisters and the girls of the orphanage and school. It means that they have not needed to enter the body of the church to attend the liturgies. This arrangement is called a matroneum, and is actually an ancient feature of church architecture.

The interior is coolly decorated in white, cream and pearl grey with the windows in clear glass. The ceiling is divided by the transverse arches. Each section has a central horizontal zone containing a set of nested rectangular coffers, and two sloping side zones each having concrete rafters forming crosses.

The set of Stations of the Cross is carved in fine white marble, each Station with a green marble frame. Above each Station is a contemporary metal electric light fitting, involving one large glass globe and three small ones -amounting to an electrolier and one of the best things in the church.

The striking pulpit attached to a far pier on the left has a sweeping solid balustrade to its staircase.

Sanctuary

The transept galleries are in the same style as those over the entrance. The right hand end of the transept is dedicated to Our Lady, and the left hand one to St Michael the Archangel, his statue is surrounded by organ pipes.

The base of the dome drum is supported by four pairs of squinch arches in lieu of pendentives.

The apse is devoid of artworks or windows, but has a string course supported by pilasters in grey. The old altar has been left in place, with its tabernacle. However, the Blessed Sacrament is now reserved in a new tabernacle inserted into the pier at the right hand side of the apse. This has a mosaic of the Holy Spirit as the dove and as fire, accompanied by grapevines. The tabernacle itself is a cylinder in vertical black and white stripes, with a gilded door bearing a relief of the Lamb of God producing the River of Life from which a pair of deer is drinking.

Access

According to the Diocese, the church is open:
Weekdays 7:45 to 12:00, 16:30 to 19:15;

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated, according to the Diocese:
Weekdays 8:30 (not August), 18:30 (19:00 July and August);
Sundays and Solemnities 7:45 to 13:00 (12:00 July and August),
17:00 to 19:45 (17:30 to 20:00 July and August).

There is Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on the first Thursday of the month from 9:15 to 18:30.
The Rosary is recited every day from 18:00.

Location:

Address: Circonvallazione Appia 150
Coord: [41°52'31.3"N 12°30'46.1"E](#)

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[Roman Despatches](#) - blog with gallery