

Sacro Cuore del Suffragio



Sacro Cuore del Suffragio is an early 20th century parish church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, located in the Prati district near the Palace of Justice. It is a familiar riverside landmark. The official name of the church is **Sacro Cuore di Gesù in Prati**, but the name as given is the familiar one. (1) (4)

History

In 1893 the Association of the Sacred Heart of the Suffrage of the Purgatory Souls (Associazione del Sacro Cuore del Suffragio delle Anime del Purgatorio) was founded in Rome by Victor Jouet, a French priest from Marseille, who had been impressed by a miracle which had allegedly occurred on the site of the present church. A small chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary had burned down in 1894, and the only item to survive was a fragment of a mural or a scorch mark (sources differ on this point), showing the face of a soul in Purgatory. (1) (4)

A second oratory, used between 1896 and 1914, was located on the Lungotevere Prati, into a ground that the founder had bought in order to build a bigger church, whose foundation stone was blessed in 1894 by Joseph-Jean-Louis Robert, Bishop of Marseille. (1) (4)

The construction of the new church began in 1908 and the design was committed to engineer **Giuseppe Gualandi**, who chose a style inspired by French Gothic architecture. In 1914, the Association moved to the church of St. Joseph Calasanz in Via Cavallini, since the old chapel was

partially demolished in order to allow the completion of the new church; the building, completed in 1917, was blessed and opened to worship on November 1 of the same year. The parish was founded on December 10. On May 17, 1921, the church was consecrated by Pietro Benedetti, Archbishop of Tyre, its first vicar. (4)

The purpose of the church and the association is to give aid to the souls in Purgatory. Père Jouet also collected documentary evidence, witness testimonies and artefacts demonstrating supernatural events which, he alleged, were proof of the existence of Purgatory. Some of these things are displayed in the so-called Museum of Purgatory, which is in a corridor leading to the sacristy. This comprises a row of glass-fronted wall cabinets, which can be inspected by visitors to the church free of charge. (1)

The church remains parochial, and is now served by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart which is a religious congregation of French origin. (1)

Exterior

The church is in the neo-Gothic style, and the main body is in yellow brick with dark grey stone banding. The architectural details and the façade were constructed in reinforced concrete cleverly rendered to look like light grey stonework, with the same dark grey background banding. (1)

The layout consists of a central nave with aisles. The nave is long and narrow, and ends in an integral apse formed from three sides of a hexagon. The roof is almost flat, and is surrounded by a parapet in quatrefoil fretwork and decorated with little pinnacles, seven on each side. These mark out the bays of the nave. (1)

The aisle roofs are much lower, and have similar parapets. The bays are separated at the exterior walls by pilasters which rise up to large free-standing crocketed pinnacles from which spring flying buttresses supporting the central nave walls. These crocketed pinnacle-pilasters are the primary motif in the exterior design. (1)

To the right of the church is the residence of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. (1)

Façade

The façade is very ornate, and rather French (most neo-Gothic churches in Rome are in the Lombardic style). The façade, entirely made with reinforced concrete, underlines the internal subdivision into three naves thanks to six quadrangular piers, each surmounted by a spire. In the lower part are three portals whose embrasure is decorated by little columns made of red Verona marble; each portal is surmounted by a wimperg and decorated with a marble lunette hosting a bas-relief:

- the central lunette portrays the *Souls of Purgatory*,
- the one on the right the *Deposition of Christ* and
- the one on the left the *Resurrection of Christ*;

The wimperg above the central portal shows a high-relief portraying *the Sacred Heart of Jesus between two Angels*. In correspondence to each of the side naves there is a high triphora, while the central nave corresponds to a big esaphora including a rose window showing a richly decorated trestle. The façade ends aloft with a thin octagonal bell tower. It is surmounted by a cross that hosts an earth-shaped ex-voto, donated by Victor Jouët. (1) (4)

There are three entrances for the nave and aisles, each having a slightly pointed arch enclosing a tympanum surmounted by a gable and flanked by crocketed pinnacles. The main entrance is larger, and has three orders of slim pink marble columns. The smaller aisle entrances only have two. (1)

The tympani and the gables over the entrances have carved reliefs, the dominant one in the central gable being of the *Sacred Heart* adored by angels. Below this, the central tympanum depicts the *Souls in Purgatory*; the side tympani have the *Resurrection* on the left, and the *Deposition* on the right. The sculptor was called Orsini, from Bologna. (1)

Above the main entrance is a large six-light window containing wheel tracery in the Flamboyant style, but the smaller aisle windows have three lights each with a cinquefoil. (1)

The decorations of the façade, formerly made with artificial stone, has been replaced, starting from 1960, by statues made with St. Gotthard stone, though identical to the original ones. They include gothic-inspired architectural features and nineteen statues of saints, personally chosen by Pope Pius X; they are positioned within recesses above the slopes of the central nave (from left : *St. Augustine*, *St. Peter the Apostle*, *St. Joseph*, *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, *St. John the Evangelist*, *St Paul* and *St Odo Cluny*), of the right aisle (from left : *St. Victor*, *St. Francis of Assisi* and *St. Nicholas Tolentino*) and the left aisle (left to right : *St. Francis Xavier*, *St. Dominic* and *St. Michael the Archangel*) and close to the six pillars, shelves above (from left : *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, *St. Gregory the Great*, *St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, *St. Catherine of Genoa*, *St. Anthony of Padua* and *St. Patrick*. (4)

The campanile is part of the façade design. It is an octagonal Gothic aedicule on a plinth, with a little crocketed spire, and is perched just behind the tip of the central nave gable. (1)

The overall effect is thought to mimic the cathedral at Milan, and hence the church has been nicknamed Il Piccolo Duomo di Milano. (1)

Interior

The interior of the church, slightly rotated in respect with the axis of the façade, has three aisles of six bays each, covered with a cross vault and separated by arches resting on clustered pillars with carved capitals. The pillars and ribs of the vaults are decorated with bands of gray stone and red bricks, while the floor has inserts in red Verona marble. The external light enters from the three windows of the façade, through eighteen lancet windows with stained-glass windows. The ones in the nave on the right show, starting from the entrance, depicting *Santa Francesca Romana* and *St. Catherine of Genoa*, *St. Brigid* and *St. Ambrose*, *St. Bonaventure* and *St. Thomas Aquinas*, *St. Ephrem* and *St. Peter Damian*, *St. Joan of Arc* and *St. Sebastian*, *St. Robert Bellarmine* and *St. Francis de Sales*. (4)

The arcades have Gothic arches supported by quatrefoil clustered columns with foliate capitals. These columns are in banded stonework, pink sandstone and white limestone. Above the arcades are single-light Gothic clerestory windows, and three more of these are over the high altar in the central apse. The design gives the impression of great height, and hence of more space than there actually is. (1)

The central nave ends with a deep polygonal apse, enlightened by two orders of ogival windows. In the centre of the apse rises the marble high altar, decorated with gilded bronzes and surmounted by the tabernacle. Behind the altar there is the altarpiece *The Sacred Heart and the Souls of Purgatory*, by **Giuseppe** and **Alessandro Catani**. To the sides are frescoes of *Our Lady* and *St Joseph*. (1) (4)

The each side aisle ends with a polygonal chapel containing a marble altar resting whose slab rests on small columns and enclosed by a balustrade decorated with trefoil arches. (4)

The chapel at the end of the right aisle is dedicated to St. Joseph and corresponds to the second oratory of the Association of the Sacred Heart of Suffrage of the souls in Purgatory. The altar is

surmounted by a altarpiece **Giuseppe Brugo** depicting *St. Joseph with the Child Jesus between two angels and Saints Teresa and Bernard*. (4)

The chapel on the other side is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and above the altar there is a altarpiece by Francesco Notari of *Lady of the Rosary with Angels and Saints Dominic and Catherine of Siena*. The frame is decorated with *God the Father* (center) and the *Annunciation* (on the sides), while the predella, painted, presents to the left (from the outside), *Sts. Zita, Agnes and Cecilia*, to the right (outside) the *Sts. Alfonso Maria de 'Liguori, Bernardino of Siena, and Cyril of Alexandria*. The tabernacle there is the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*. The frame, made drawings of Notari, is the work of the carpenter Giseppe Fallaci, engraver Arturo Grossi and gilder Joachim Corsi. (4)

Along the two aisles opens, in correspondence of each span, a shallow rectangular chapel; the second and fourth chapel of each side host a marble altar, while the other ones show fine wooden neo-gothic confessionals. (4)

Side Chapels

The chapels are described from the left rear then moving clockwise:

The last bay of the aisle on the left, against the wall, there is the tomb of Bishop Pietro Benedetti (1932), made with polychrome marbles, with a bronze *Pieta* by **Giovanni Battista Conti** in the lower part, and abust of the same material depicting the deceased bishop above. (4)

The next altar is dedicated to St. Gregory the Great, and is surmounted by a altarpiece inspired by the legend of the monk Justus. It depicts *St. Gregory the Great, who celebrates Mass for the repose of the monk*, with above, the *Holy Spirit*. On top of the frame, sculpture *God the Father*; presents the dais, from left: *St. Michael the Archangel, St. Gregory the Great and the poor, St. Gregory the Great called Gregorian chant* and *St. Gabriel the Archangel*. The work of **Giovanni Battista Conti**. (4)

The first altar on the left is dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua and the altarpiece, by **Giuseppe Burgo**, representing *St. Anthony as the saint of charity*, resting on a predella depicting from left : *St. Jerome Emiliani, St. Vincent de 'Paoli, St. Camillus de Lellis, Redeemer Jesus breaking the bread, Blessed Anna Maria Taigi, St. Elizabeth of Hungary* and *St. Louise de Marillac*. (4)

The first altar on the right is dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel and is topped with an altarpiece depicting by **Alessandro Catani**; the predella is made up of seven musician Angels, painted by the daughters of the artist. (4)

The next altar is dedicated to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and is topped with a triptych of **Giovan Battista Conti** depicting the *Vision of the Heart of Jesus in Mary Margaret Alacoque* (1923), while on the predella are, from left, *St. Jeanne-Françoise Frémiot de Chantal, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque surrounded by the souls in Purgatory, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque introduces novices to the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* and *St. Francis de Sales*. (4)

The floor has a striking herringbone design, in pink and light grey. The pink marble is from Verona. (1)

The organ in the counter-façade

Close to the counter-façade, above a wooden cantoria whose bulwark is decorated with a series of ogival arches, rises the pipe organ, built by Fabbrica Organi Ruffatti after 1960 in place of a former one, coming from the church of Santa Brigida. (4)

Special notes

The feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated on Friday after the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Artists and Architects:

Alessandro Catani (20th cent), Italian painter
Arturo Grossi (20th cent), engraver
Francesco Notari (20th cent), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista Conti (20th cent), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Bortotti (20th cent), Italian sculptor from Venice
Gisueppe Fallaci (20th cent), woodworker
Giuseppe Burgo (20th cent), Italian painter
Giuseppe Catani (20th cent), Italian painter
Giuseppe [Gualandi](#) (1870-1944), Italian architect
Joachim Corsi (20th cent), gilder

Burial:

Bishop Pietro Benedetti (1867-1930)
<Apostolic Delegate Emeritus of Cuba>

Location:

12 Lungotevere Prati, 00193 Roma
Coordinates: [41° 54' 14.5"N 12° 28' 20.4"E](#)

Info:

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Opening times:

Every day: 7.30 am - 11.00 am and 4.30 pm - 7.00 pm

Links and References:

1. http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Cuore_del_Suffragio
2. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=729
3. <http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/sacro-cuore-di-gesu-in-prati.html>
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_del_Sacro_Cuore_del_Suffragio

http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page_id=188&ID=53

(Official diocesan web-page)

<http://www.blogdolcevita.com/post/875/the-mysteries-of-rome-the-church-of-the-sacred-heart-or-sacro-cuore-del-suffragio>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157620413022025/>

("De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/r4all/sets/72157628336389453/with/7251737584/>

(r4all gallery on Flickr)