

Basilica di Santi Celso e Giuliano



Saints Celso and Giuliano is an 18th century former parish church (now conventual) located near the Ponte Sant'Angelo in the rione Ponti. The main entrance is on Via del Banco di Santo Spirito. (1)

The dedication is a problem. St Celsus seems to be one of two alleged early martyrs of Milan, [Nazarius and Celsus](#), and St Julian to be [Julian the Hospitaller](#). This version is more tenable, since the older references to the church refer to St Celsus alone. (1)

However, there is also a Celsus mentioned in the spurious legend of [Julian and Basilissa](#), martyrs once credited to Antioch in Syria but now considered to have been from Antinoë in Egypt. According to this legend, Julian and Basilissa were a married couple who made vows of celibacy while living at Antioch and turned their house into a refuge for destitute people. Then they were martyred in the reign of the emperor Diocletian together with Anthony a priest, Anastasius a new convert, Marcionilla a married woman and Celsus, her little son. Julian, Basilissa, Marcionilla and Celsus feature in the church's main altarpiece. (1)

History

The first unequivocal reference occurs in 1127, when a bull of Pope Honorius II mentions a priest *Sancti Celsi*. The church was fully parochial by this century, because a subsequent bull of Pope Honorius III in 1218 put three local churches (now all gone) under it as dependent chapels. (1)

The church used to be larger, and the street it was on used to be narrower. This meant a serious problem of access to the *Ponte Sant'Angelo*, which was the only ancient bridge crossing the river apart from the two at the Isola. In 1509 Pope Julius II had it pulled down to have more space to enlarge the streets. He then commissioned Bramante with the rebuilding in renaissance stile. After the pope's death the rebuilding was stopped, and the unfinished church apparently left as a ruin. (1)

Later the shell of the Renaissance building was pulled down and Pope Clement XIII commissioned Carlo de Dominicis to build a completely new church in 1735. (1)

The parish was suppressed in the 19th century. The church is now in the care of the "Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary" (*Misioneros de los Sagrados Corazones de Jesús y María*), which has its origins on Mallorca in Spain and must be distinguished from another congregation of the same name based at Naples. The congregation was founded in 1890, and has its Roman headquarters here which is served by a small community. (1)

Exterior

De Dominicis was influenced both by Bernini and Borromini in designing this church, the former in the layout and the latter in some details. The external plan is based on an irregular octagon drawn around an ellipse, with an external round-ended apse but with no entrance vestibule. One side of the octagon is occupied by the façade. (1)

The fabric is in brick, and there is a tiled roof of eight triangular pitches with a low parapet. Five of the six corners of the octagon away from the façade have large finials looking like dumpy vases, embellished with volutes and with a ball on top of each. (1)

The sixth corner, top right, has the campanile with an attractive design on the plan of a chamfered square. Each side has a pair of shallow Doric pilasters supporting an entablature with triglyphs on the frieze and tassels on the architrave, and flanking an arched soundhole with Doric impost. Above the latter on each face is an oval aperture embellished by a pair of curlicues. Above the entablature is an attic plinth in the form of a chamfered square, then another smaller plinth which is also chamfered but with incurves. The stone cushion cupola is wider than this second plinth, has eight ribs and is incurved between the ribs. Very attractive, and obviously derived from Borromini. (1)

Despite being widened, the street is still narrow and hence the church is not easily appreciated from outside. Unfortunately, this applies to the campanile and it is not easy to find a place at ground level to see it. (1)

The façade is a fine piece of late Baroque (*tardobarocco*), but is on a narrow street with busy traffic and is difficult to appreciate properly. (1)

There are two storeys, in travertine limestone. The first storey has two pairs of Composite columns flanking the single entrance, with the outer pair hiding pilasters in the same style. Tripletted pilasters occupy the outer corners, and all of these stand on very high plinths embellished with raised blank tablets and cornices. (1)

In between the inner pair of columns the façade is slightly bowed, and contains the singly molded doorcase with chamfered upper corners. Above this is a vertical elliptical window in a

molded frame extended by two horizontal cornice fragments and embellished with draped frond and fruit sprays on top. A chi-rho symbol crowns the composition. (1)

In between the outer columns and the corner pilasters is a pair of empty round-headed niches with scallop shells in the conchs and a gable over a human face above. These niches have segmental stands on strap corbels, and so were obviously intended for statues. In between the column and pilaster capitals are swags. (1)

The storeys are separated by an entablature, and on the frieze is a dedicatory inscription: *In honorem S[ancti] M[artyres] Celsi et Iuliani, Clemens XIII Pont[ifex] M[aximus] An[no pontificis] V.* The second storey is difficult to appreciate. There are four derivative Ionic pilasters standing on an attic, the inner pair doubletted and the outer pair tripletted around the corner. The capitals have little human faces, and support an ogee-curved pediment with the central section recessed, and with the entablature vertically stepped over the capitals as well as curving back in the central section. The pediment has a pair of flaming torch finials flanking the traditional central wire cross. (1)

The sides of this storey have sweeps, and instead of volutes as you might expect there is a pair of gigantic olive fronds with ribbons -a nice touch. (1)

The centre of the upper storey is dominated by a large arched window, well set back inside a bowed (convex) aedicule and flanked by a pair of segmental columns with strap capitals and embellished with putto's heads over sprays of vegetation. These columns support a split segmental pediment, and stand on plinths which have another putto's head with branches and cloth swags between them. The archivolt of the window arch has rosette coffering. (1)

Finally, two halves of a split and separated segmental pediment flank this pair of aedicule plinths, and have curlicues at the breaks. (1)

The bell tower and small turrets on the roof have an onion shape, which is unusual in Rome, but is typical of Baroque Vienna.

Interior

The interior is elliptical, the long axis being transverse, and once through the entrance door you are immediately in this space. There is the presbyterium apse straight ahead, and three side chapels in large arched niches on each side. The chapels on the diagonal axes are smaller, and have *cantoria* (opera-boxes for solo musical performers) above them with bowed balustraded balconies. (1)

In between each pair of chapels, and also flanking the main apse, is a gigantic tripletted Composite pilaster with ribbing and gilding. These support the dome entablature, with a dentillated cornice. (1)

The elliptical saucer dome rests directly onto its entablature, and is separated into eight sectors by wide molded ribbing focusing on a Dove of the Holy Spirit in a glory with putto's heads in the oculus (the dome has no lantern). The sectors on the axes of the ellipse have round-headed windows in lunettes, but the diagonal sectors have circular ones. The former sectors have stucco tendrils and scallops, while the latter have crossed palm fronds. The decor is in white and gold. (1)

The presbyterium apse has its own vault, with a conch supported by pendentives and a horizontal oval window over the altar. The main altar is against the far wall, in an arched niche under the pendentives. The beautiful high altar was designed by Pompeo Batoni in 1738. The altarpiece is flanked by stucco ornaments in the form of winged putto's heads supporting garlands hanging down each side, and above is a crown fully in the round being supported by a pair of angels. (1)

On the main altar is placed a painting of "*Christ in Glory and Saints. Celsus, Julian, and Marconilla Basilissa*," Pompeo Batoni's masterpiece of 1738. (1)

The paintings on the side walls of the apse show *The Victory of St Celsus Over the Pagan Priests* by Francesco Caccianiga, and *St Julian Raises the Dead* by Giacomo Triga. (1)

There are six side chapels, three on each side. Going clockwise, left to right, they are: (1)

Baptism of Christ, with an altarpiece by Giuseppe Ranucci of 1736. (1)

St Liberius, with an altarpiece by Giuseppe Valeriani of the same year. (1)

Madonna delle Grazie, with a copy of the famous 16th century icon now at Santa Maria della Consolazione. (1)

Crucifixion, with a crucifix of 1450. (1)

St Mary Magdalen, with an altarpiece by Emmanuele Alfani of 1736. (1)

SS Cornelius, Artemia and Januaria, with an altarpiece by Gaetano Lapis of 1737. Cornelius was a 3rd century pope, Artemia was an Armenian princess allegedly martyred under the emperor Diocletian (and who is not listed in the Roman martyrology), and Januaria was an Roman African martyr. Presumably they are celebrated jointly here because relics were brought together. (1)

Artists and Architects:

Carlo [de Dominicis](#) (1696-1758), Italian architect
 Emmanuele Alfani (18th cent), Italian painter
 Francesco [Caccianiga](#) (1700-1781). Italian painter
 Gaetano [Lapis](#) (1704-1776) was an Italian painter of the late-Baroque period
 Giacomo [Triga](#) (1674-1746), Italian painter of the late baroque
 Giuseppe Ranucci (18th cent), Italian painter
 Giuseppe Valeriani (18th cent), Italian painter
 Pompeo [Batoni](#) (1708-1787), Italian painter

Burials:

Giovanni Antonio Cardinal [SANGIORGIO](#), (1439/1442-1509)

Buried in front of the main altar

His funeral inscription was lost in 1547 and recovered in 1736 when the church was restored

Location:

Addr: 12 Vicolo del Curato / Via del Banco Santo Spirito

Coord: [41° 54' 3"N 12° 28' 0"E](#)

Info:

Phone: 0039 06 6879263

Email: sancelsomsscc@libero.it

Open times:

Mon-Fri from 7.00 to 8.30

Saturday from 17.30 to 19.00

Sunday 11.00 to 12.30

Mass times:

Weekdays: 7.30

Holidays: 11.30

Before holidays: 18.00

Links:

1. http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santi_Celso_e_Giuliano
2. <http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi109.htm#SS.%20Celso%20e%20Giuliano>
3. http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_de_i_Santi_Celso_e_Giuliano&ei=EXdZTZiDMIiCgAernt3WDA&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CBsQ7gEwAQ&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dsanti%2Bcelso%2Be%2Bgiuliano%2Brome%26hl%3Den%26prmd%3Divnso
4. <http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/cattolici/ss-celso-e-giuliano.html>
5. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvaris/sets/72157622362148849/>
6. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=762