

Santo Spirito dei Napoletani



Santo Spirito dei Napoletani is a 19th century confraternity and regional church in Rome, along Via Giulia, dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It is the regional church of Campagna and Naples.

History:

Origins

The church had a predecessor which first appears in the list of dependent parish churches drawn up for the basilica of San Lorenzo in Damaso in 1183. There, it has the name Sancti Austerii de Campo Senense. The name mutates to Sancti Eusterii in the later mediaeval catalogues.

St Asterius was an obscure martyr associated with the city of Ostia. Obviously the later mediaevals didn't know who he was, and in the 15th century the name mutated to Sant'Aurea.

Aurea of Ostia was much better known, and the old cathedral at Ostia is dedicated to her - Sant'Aurea a Ostia Antica. There was a restoration in 1439.

Nuns

The parish failed and was suppressed, even before the Sack of Rome in 1527 reduced the city's population. The church then became part of a small convent of Dominican nuns, which has its first documentary mention in 1513. In 1572, the nuns moved to Santa Margherita di Antiochia in Trastevere.

First rebuilding

In the same year Pope Gregory XIII granted the complex to a confraternity of Neapolitan expatriates, although it only obtained possession in 1574. Domenico Fontana is mentioned as having worked on the old church, apparently. If he drew up the plans for a new building, he died in 1607 well before they were executed.

In 1619, the rebuilding project was initiated and the mediaeval church was demolished. The architect in charge was Ottaviano Nonni, Il Mascherino. As with several other similar confraternity church rebuildings, progress was very slow owing to financial issues. The church was only finished between 1647 and 1650, when a façade was erected by Cosimo Fanzago -much better known as an architect in Naples.

Meanwhile, the adjacent hospice was turned into the Collegio Ghislieri in 1630. This institution was founded by one Dr Giuseppe Ghislieri for the instruction and education of poor people. The interesting entrance survives at number 38, but the rest was demolished in 1939.

Second rebuilding

A second remodeling project was begun in 1700 under Carlo Fontana, and went on for eight years. However, the façade by Fanzago was left alone. There is an image of this unusual design here, from a watercolor by Achille Pinelli 1835 (it is, however, known that this artist was not reliable in reproducing architectural details and proportions). Back then, the church was a national church because Naples was the capital of the Kingdom of Naples. The confraternity and the church received royal patronage and funding, and with it employed Nicola Forti for more work on the interior in 1772.

Third rebuilding

The church was again heavily remodeled by Antonio Cipolla from 1852 to 1855. This time, the façade was rebuilt as was the sanctuary area with the present polygonal apse being added. As a result, the entire interior is now 19th century in appearance although many older memorials were kept. It may be the case that older fabric also survives in the walls, but if so it is invisible. The artist in charge of all fresco work in this restoration was Pietro Gagliardi.

Royal internments

In 1870 Princess Maria Cristina Pia, the baby daughter of King Francis II of the Two Sicilies, was buried here after dying at the hands of a lunatic English governess. The king had been deposed in 1861, and had decamped to Rome with his wife Queen Maria Sophie. The bereaved couple had to flee Rome later in the same year as the death of their child because of the city's conquest by Italy, and went to Germany. However, their remains were brought back and interred here in 1934 -only to be moved on to Naples in 1984 and put in the church of Santa Chiara.

Recent problems

The structure failed in the mid 20th century, and was closed down for about thirty years. The cause might have been the demolitions by the Fascists of buildings to the north in 1939, because in the following year cracks were noted in the nave ceiling vault and the intradoses of the side arches. Also, rising damp was affecting the foundations and so the church was shut in 1965. Water penetration had caused such damage that demolition was a real possibility, but fortunately when Monsignor Natalino Zagotto was appointed priest-in-charge in 1982 he put in hand a major restoration.

The work was supervised by the architect Giuseppe D'Emilio, and took four years. The church was re-opened for Christmas, 1986.

Exterior:

Layout and fabric

The church consists of three separate architectural elements. First comes a single nave without aisles (although there are side chapels in niches inside). This has a pitched and tiled roof. Then comes a hemispherical dome in lead, with a brick lantern with four slit apertures and its own lead cupola. This dome is set low, so that its cornice is lower than the ridge of the nave roof and it hardly features in any city views. Finally, there is a polygonal apse with a flat roof in two steps.

Façade

The façade was reconstructed in 1853, and is a rather uninspiring neo-Classical design by Cipolla. It looks suspiciously like he put together various elements from his scrapbook of motifs, and it was a pity that the Baroque façade by Fanzago was not kept.

There are two storeys, which since the recent restoration are rendered all in white. The first storey has four shallow and thin Corinthian pilasters supporting an entablature with a stepped architrave and blank frieze, and with posts above the capitals. These stand on stone pedestals which are themselves on a very high stone plinth, almost reaching halfway up the doorcase.

This doorcase is decoratively molded, and has a raised floating triangular pediment over a delicately carved panel featuring five fruity swags with festoons and winged putto's heads. The pediment is embellished with dentillation and egg-and-dart molding.

Above the pediment is a large fresco panels showing The Holy Spirit in Glory by Gagliardi, recalling a stucco work on the same theme that adorned the Baroque façade. Flanking the entrance is a pair of marble tablets bearing dedicatory epigraphs. The first storey has no windows, but a pair of large rosettes in tondi are in between the pilasters.

The second storey has a low attic plinth, supporting four Composite pilasters. These in turn support a second entablature and a crowning triangular pediment with modillions and a blank tympanum. In the centre is a large oculus or round window in a square frame with circular moldings and fleur-de-llys in the corners.

In between the pilasters are heraldic shields in relief of Pope Pius IX and King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies

Interior:

Layout and fabric

There is a nave with three bays, a domed transept as wide as the nave and a separate polygonal apsed sanctuary with a conch. There are three side chapels in arched niches on each side, although the central one on the right is occupied by an enormous memorial instead of an altar.

Nave

Each of the side arches is flanked by a pair of Corinthian pilasters in what looks like yellow Siena marble, making up two pairs and two singletons on each side. Hence, the arches do not form a proper arcade. Another pair of these pilasters is folded into the far nave corners, flanking the triumphal arch. They all support an entablature that runs around the nave, but is interrupted by the transept triumphal arch. It has its frieze in pink marble as well.

The barrel-vaulted ceiling springs directly from this entablature. It has a triangular lunette containing a circular window over each side arch, and its three bays are divided by a double intrados of coffers with rosettes. Overall, the colour scheme is in white and gold. The three main panels display the Dove of the Holy Spirit in glory in the centre, flanked by two heraldic shields in correct colours.

The counterfaçade has an organ gallery over the entrance, supported on four red marble Doric columns. The organ case is in the form of an aedicule, with a horizontal entablature supported by a pair of red marble Composite pilasters flanking a molded arch with imposts. Over this, in the lunette created by the ceiling vault, is the large rose window visible in the façade outside. It has modern stained glass featuring the Dove of the Holy Spirit surrounded by the twelve Apostles, which is by Oscar Guarnieri.

The side doors at the far end of the nave, just before the transept, have two large tondi over them containing stucco reliefs depicting scenes from the life of St Francis of Paola by Vincenzo Felici 1708.

Transept

The transept is on a square plan, with a dome on pendentives. It is part of the sanctuary, and has the altar pro populo for Masses said facing the congregation.

The triumphal arch springs from a pair of Doric piers with red marble panels, and is much lower than the ceiling vault. The wall over it has a large fresco of Pentecost by Gagliardi.

The side walls have other frescoes by him, depicting SS Christina and Sophie. Low down are the simple memorial tablets to King Francis and Queen Maria Sophie.

The dome pendentives have tondi with the Evangelists by Gagliardi again, but the interior of the dome is covered by a large fresco of Heaven by Giuseppe Passeri. The Trinity is shown surrounded by a host of angels and saints.

To the right of the modern altar since 2005 has been a large modern painted crucifix, Christus Patiens by Antonio Nocera.

Apse

The apse has five sides, and its own triumphal arch. On the piers of the latter are frescoes of SS Teresa of Avila and Ferdinand, King of Spain. The altarpiece is a fresco on the far wall, of The Annunciation by Gagliardi.

The apse conch is divided into sectors by ribs, and is in blue with golden stars. It has five lunette windows, with stained glass by Guarnieri which was installed after the last restoration.

Chapel of St Francis of Paola

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St Francis of Paola, and the altarpiece depicting him performing the miracle of resurrecting a dead baby is by Ventura Lamberti. There is no altar aedicule.

The side walls have a matching pair of memorials with two large marble reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the saint. He came from Calabria, part of the Kingdom of Naples, and so has been venerated here.

Memorial to Cardinal De Luca

The second arched alcove on the right no longer has a chapel, but instead contains the spectacular polychrome marble Baroque memorial to Cardinal Giovanni Battista De Luca by Domenico Guidi, 1683.

The effigy of the deceased in white marble shows him preaching at a cloth-covered lectern, above a black marble epitaph. Allegorical figures of Fortitude and Prudence are to either side -the latter is showing an alarming amount of leg.

Chapel of the Crucifix

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to the Crucifixion. The large round-headed altarpiece is by Gagliardi, and features a crucifix painted with a landscape background.

There is no altar aedicule. The altar was heavily re-modelled in the 19th century, with the original Baroque polychrome altar frontal now peeping over at the back. The new frontal featuring five relief panels featuring liturgical vessels.

Chapel of St Januarius

The third chapel on the left is dedicated to St Januarius (in Italian, Gennaro) who is the patron saint of Naples. The altarpiece depicting his martyrdom is by Luca Giordano, and was painted in 1705.

Chapel of Our Lady of the Lightning

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to Nostra Signora del Fulmine, and the altarpiece is an icon of the Madonna and Child, 15th century of the Umbrian-Roman school. The identification of the artist with Antoniazio Romano is not now regarded with favour.

The rather sumptuous neo-Classical aedicule displays the icon in a brown marble frame on a red marble background topped by a winged putto's head with ribbons and swags. A pair of red marble Corinthian columns supports a triangular pediment embellished with modillions and rosettes. The restrained polychrome frontal is flanked by a pair of heraldic shields delicately carved in white marble.

Chapel of St Thomas Aquinas

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to St Thomas Aquinas. The altarpiece of the saint performing a miracle is by Domenico Maria Muratori.

Burials:

Giovanni Battista Cardinal [DE LUCA](#), (1614-1683)

Location:

Addr: 145 Via Giulia, Rome

Coord: [41° 53' 46.9"N 12° 28' 4.5"E](#)

Info:

Sunday and holidays 9:00am-01:00pm

For visiting the Church call 0039 06 69886217

Links:

http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santo_Spirito_dei_Napoletani

http://www.romaspqr.it/ROMA/CHIESE/Chiese_Sette-ottocentesche/s_spirito_napoletani.htm

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/cattolici/santo-spirito-dei-napoletani.html>

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