

## San Nicola dei Prefetti



**San Nicola dei Prefetti** is an 18<sup>th</sup> century Baroque church near the Piazza del Parlamento in the rione Campo Marzio. The dedication is to St Nicholas of Bari.

### History:

By tradition the foundation of the church was early, perhaps before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. However, this belief depends on the foundation story of the nunnery of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio nearby. According to this, Pope Zachariah (741-52) donated the church to a community of expatriate nuns from Constantinople as part of their patrimony. However there is a small doubt as to the accuracy of this, because the original documents have not survived but were transcribed. (1)

After this, the first mention of the church is in a bull of Pope Urban III, 1186, which addressed a dispute between the nuns of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio and the priests in charge. It is subsequently listed in the late mediaeval catalogues under the name de Prefectis or variants of this. Back then, it was one of many small parish churches of the mediaeval built-up area of the city. (1)

The name is thought to derive from the proximity of the palazzo of the De Vico family (on the site of the present Palazzo di Firenze), since members of the family served as prefects of the city. (1)

In 1524 St Cajetan established his new religious order of Theatines in a house situated in the parish here, and so worshipped in this church. However, they were driven out by the Sack of Rome in 1527. (1)

The church was apparently left in ruins. In 1567, Pope Pius V granted the church to the Dominicans of Santa Sabina, who restored it and also erected the adjacent convent which occupies wings on both sides. It is not known whether the friars rebuilt the body of the church from its foundations, or re-used some of the fabric. (1)

The façade was built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (before 1674). The interior was completely re-done from 1725 to 1730. (1)

The parish was suppressed in 1824, and combined with the parish of San Lorenzo in Lucina. In 1846 the Dominicans gave up the church to the Confraternita del Santissimo Crocifisso Agonizzante attached to San Lorenzo, and in 1860 the Confraternity arranged a restoration by **Paolo Belloni**. This entailed a re-modelling of the sanctuary around a crucifix. (1)

The freehold of the convent was confiscated by the State in 1873, along with all the others in the city, but being very small was not much use to the government. In 1927, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were granted possession of the complex and they have been in charge ever since. The Confraternity continues in existence, and its members are now OMI priests. (1)

### **Exterior:**

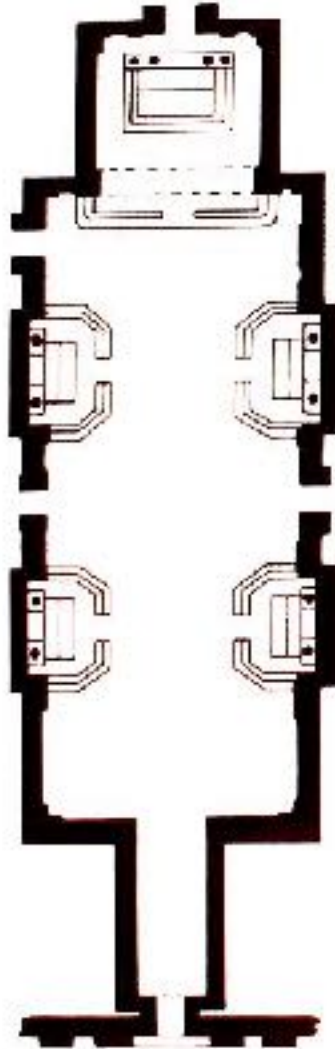
The convent surrounds the church on both sides, so only the façade is visible. As mentioned, there is a suspicion that some of the fabric may be mediaeval. (1)

The façade is of one storey, and is rendered in a lemon yellow with details in white. It has two pairs of gigantic Composite pilasters supporting an entablature and triangular pediment which has a broken cornice. The break contains a tondo with a relief of Pope Pius V, which intrudes into the frieze of the entablature below. The inner pair of pilasters is doubletted, with posts in the entablature above the outer doublets. The entablature has a simple dedicatory inscription. (1)

The doorway has a molded doorcase and a raised segmental pediment, above which is a blank wall. Two vertical rows of windows are in between the pilaster pairs, but these belong to convent accommodation and not to the church. (1)

A range of convent accommodation also sits on top of the façade. Above the pediment is a gabled attic, and on this and on the ends of the pediment are four flaming torch finials. Very oddly, these do not stand proud but are in niches in the convent range wall behind. (1)

There is a campanile, invisible from the street. It is actually on the roofline of a convent building behind the church, and is a simple slab with a rectangular aperture for one bell and a gabled top. (1)

**Plan:****Interior:**

The layout is a simple rectangle, with a little square apse.

Nave

The nave is a simple rectangle, with four side altars in very shallow rectangular niches. Each of these is flanked by a pair of ribbed Ionic pilasters which support an entablature running round the entire church. In between the altars are funerary monuments. The ceiling is barrel-vaulted, with lunette vaults over the four windows above the side altars. The central panel has an 18<sup>th</sup> century fresco of the *Apotheosis of St Nicholas* by **Giacomo Triga**. Six tondi with frescoes of saints and angels are on the vault in between the windows. The rest of the vault has delicate stucco decoration in cream and gold with some blue. (1)

The wall lunette over the organ on the counterfaçade has a representation of Pope Pius V. (1)

Sanctuary

The little square sanctuary has its own cross-vault with scrolled stucco decoration. Over the altar is a painted wooden crucifix on a geometric mosaic background in red and yellow. This crucifix is alleged to be miraculous. The altar is flanked by another pair of ribbed Ionic pilasters, and the frieze of the entablature

reads Pater, Dimitte Illis ("Father, forgive them"). The lunette above the entablature has a fresco of angels by Cleto Luzzi, 1915. (1)

The left side wall of the sanctuary has a painting of *Jesus in Gethsemane*, and the frieze above this reads Non mea voluntas sed tua fiat ("Not my will but yours be done"). The right hand wall has a picture of the *Pietà*, and the frieze reads: Regina martyrum ora pro nobis ("Queen of martyrs, pray for us"). Both pictures are from the 1860 restoration. The altarpiece beforehand was of *St Vincent Ferrer*, by Francesco Ferrari, which was moved to what is now the Sacred Heart altar and is now apparently in the sacristy. (1)

#### Side altars and monuments

The side altars are described in clockwise order, beginning to the left of the entrance:

The first altar on the left is dedicated to SS Joseph and James the Great. The altarpiece showing them with the Madonna and Child is by Vincenzo Pasqualoni. (1)

The large monument containing the door to the sacristy is of the Sturbinetti family, 1868. (1)

The second altar on the left is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, and has a 19<sup>th</sup> century doll of her and the Christ-Child which looks very Spanish. The columns of the aedicule are in black marble. (1)

To the left of the sanctuary is a memorial to Giovanna Ripari, 1853

The second altar on the right is dedicated to St Nicholas, with an anonymous altarpiece of him. (1)

Then come monuments of the Neri family: Antonio 1861, Luisella 1842 and Filippo 1867. (1)

The first altar on the right is dedicated to the Sacred Heart, with a statue in a round-headed niche. (1)

Here there are memorials to Caterina Mattei, 1861 and Giulia Capaldi, 1852. (1)

There is also a memorial for Cardinal Francesco di Paola Cassetta (d. 1919), by Luca Carimini. (2)

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

A. Pasqualoni, Sculptor  
 Cleto Luzzi (1884-1952), Italian painter  
 Francesco [Ferrari](#) (1634-1708), Italian **painter** and architect of the Baroque period  
 Giacomo [Triga](#) (1674-1746), Italian painter of the Late Baroque period  
 Luca [Carimini](#) (1830-1890), Italian architect  
 Paolo Belloni (19<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian Architect  
 Vincenzo Pasqualoni (1819-1880), Italian painter

#### **Location:**

Address: Via dei Prefetti, 34, Rione Campo Marzio

Coord: [41° 54' 9.2" N, 12° 28' 36" E](#)

#### **Info:**

Telephone: 0039 06 6873729

Fax: 0039 06 6873729

Opening times

Every day 7.20am-10.30am 5.00pm-7.30pm

Masses

Weekdays at 18:30  
Holidays 10.30am (Armenian rite)

**Links and sources:**

1. [http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San\\_Nicola\\_dei\\_Prefetti](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San_Nicola_dei_Prefetti)
2. [http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=199](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=199)
3. <http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/san-nicola-dei-prefetti.html>
4. [http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page\\_id=188&ID=714](http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page_id=188&ID=714)
5. <http://www.gcatholic.org/churches/rome/714.htm>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157622225889270/>  
("De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr)