

Santi Bartolomeo e Alessandro dei Bergamaschi



The **Church of Santi Bartolomeo e Alessandro dei Bergamaschi** (also known as **Santa Maria della Pietà**) is a confraternity church of Rome in Rione Colonna, which overlooks Piazza Colonna. It is the regionary church for expatriates from [Bergamo](#), city and commune in Lombardy, Italy. The dedication is to Bartholomew the Apostle and Alexander, a martyr and patron of Bergamo.

History

The original church was built in 1591, erected by padre Ferrante Ruiz for the Ospedale dei Pazzarelli, Rome's first insane asylum, and took the name of *Santa Maria della Pietà*, from the image that is now above the portal.

When the hospital was moved to the Lungara in the 1720s, Pope Benedict XIII gave the church to the Archiconfraternità dei Bergamaschi, who rebuilt it in 1731-35 to designs of Giuseppe Valvassori, added their patron saints, Bartholomew and Alexander, to its dedication and used the hospital for

their own sick. It is the burial place of Giuseppe Alessandro Cardinal Furietti (1685-1764), antiquarian and native of Bergamo.

Despite the rededication, the church remained a centre of devotion to Our Lady in her aspect of Santa Maria della Pietà, and a venerated icon of her is over the high altar.

The archconfraternity still exists, and have administered the complex to the present day. There was a restoration of the church which was completed in 1839 by Giuseppe Valadier, and another major one completed in 1904 which involved enlarging the presbyterium by demolishing lateral choirs and re-decorating the interior.

The church received attention in 1994 to remedy defects in its side walls and barrel vault. Finally, in 2006 the façade was restored and repainted.

Exterior

The small but charming Baroque façade was apparently designed by Gabriele Valvassori, and was executed by Carlo De Dominicis with help from Giovan Battista Contini. In the last restoration it was painted in light blue with architectural details in white.

There is a single storey. A pair of gigantic rectangular Doric pilasters frames it, and supports an entablature of which bears a dedicatory inscription:

In hon[orem] B[eatae] M[ariae] V[irginis] et S[anctorum] Barthol[omei] et Alex[andris].

Above the dentillate cornice is an unusual ogee pediment, shaped like a wire coathanger and also dentillate, with a pair of flaming urn finials behind its ends.

The frontage below the entablature is dominated by a large lunette window with a molded architrave, which touches the entablature and springs from a pair of thin Doric pilasters attached to the sides of the main pilaster pair.

The large single entrance is approached by a flight of stairs on a rectangular plan with curved corners. The Baroque doorcase has a complicated arrangement for its lintel, where two anvil-shaped projections support a cornice fragment with a gable. This shelters a stucco relief of a pair of frolicking winged putto's heads. Above the gable just mentioned is a large vertically elliptical tondo containing a relief of a Pietà; above this, in turn, is another cornice fragment with archivolt which is raised into the lunette by a pair of curlicues.

The doorway is flanked by a pair of columns and then a pair of pilasters, both in the Composite style and both outwardly angled to give a bowed effect. These support a pair of divided fragments of a segmental pediment which flank the elliptical tondo.

Across the piazza is a lovely shrine of the Blessed Virgin in blue and white terracotta.

The church is hemmed in by taller buildings on all sides except the front, and hence its exterior fabric is invisible from the street. There seems to be a small campanile or bellcote over the top right hand corner of the nave, where there is a side door from the presbyterium into a tiny courtyard.

Interior

There is a single nave, rather wide for its length and with three chapels on each side separated by pillars. The dimension are diminutive: 13 metres long, 8 metres wide and with the chapels 2 metres deep. The decoration in gilded stucco is from the 1904 restoration, as is the fresco in the barrel-

vaulted ceiling which is by Emilio Retrosi and which depicts *Our Lady of Piety with SS Bartholomen, Alexander and Agnes*. The ceiling has three lunette side-vaults on each side over windows (only two of which are not blocked), and these lunette arches have medallions at their apexes. These six medallions display attributes of Our Lady: *Causa Nostrae Laetitiae, Salus Infirmorum, Consolatrix Afflictorum, Refugium Peccatorum, Auxilium Christianorum, Honorificentia Populi Nostri*. Except for the last, these are taken from the Litany of Loreto.

The four blocked windows have interesting trompe l'oeil frescoes showing views over a balustrade into a formal garden.

On the counterfaçade wall on the left when entering is the attractive neo-Classical funerary monument of Countess Caterina Negroni who died in 1840 aged 23. The sculptor was Pietro Tenerani. The cameo-style portrait shows the girl with a suitably patrician nose and an expensive hairdo.

The lunette window above the entrance contains modern stained glass featuring the coat-of-arms of the confraternity.

In the top left hand corner of the nave is a large wooden statue of Christ at the Column of Flagellation by Filippo del Borgo of 1569, which was painted by Gerolamo de Sermoneta. The column has a gilded bronze capital, and is painted to look like verde antico. Symbols of the Passion are sculpted on the base.

The side-chapels are described clockwise, from the left hand side of the entrance.

Chapel of St Alexander

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to St Alexander. The small circular painting, displayed within a gilded bronze glory, was installed here in the 1904 restoration. Unfortunately, the Confraternity did not investigate it properly because on the back is an epigraph declaring the work to be depicting *St Florian*. It was the first painting sold by the Roman artist Pietro Galgardi .

The blue-eyed plaster statue of the Madonna and Child on the altar has a winsome charm.

Chapel of St John the Baptist

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St John the Baptist, and the altarpiece depicting *The Martyrdom of St John the Baptist* is by the Bolognese artist Aureliano Milani. It has a date, 1732. The saint is shown at the moment when the executioner is swinging his sword for the beheading, and Salome is lurking in the background waiting to be given the head.

Chapel of the Sacred Heart

The third chapel on the left is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It has an unusual altarpiece, formed of five paintings of saints by different 18th century artists arranged in the mid 19th century around a copy of the portrait of the Sacred Heart by Pompeo Battoni.

The large circular painting at the top, of *SS Philip Neri and Francis of Paola*, is by a French artist called Blanchet. Below this are five smaller elliptical paintings with the Sacred Heart in the middle. Top left is *St Anthony of Padua with the Child Jesus*, bottom left is *St Gregory Thaumaturgus* by an artist called Fattori, bottom right is *St Ignatius of Loyola* and top right is *St Anne with Our Lady as an Infant*. This last one is the most important, as it is an early work by Marco Benefial.

On the altar is an early 17th century painting showing *The Madonna and Child with the Infant John the Baptist and St Catherine of Siena*.

Chapel of the Crucifix

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to the Crucifixion, and has an anonymous wooden crucifix of the mid 16th century. It was in the old church when the Confraternity took over. Here it is in a niche protected by a screen of old glass panes, itself of interest.

Chapel of SS Firmus and Rusticus

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to SS Firmus and Rusticus. These two obscure saints, celebrated on 9 August, are here because their legend alleges that they were from Bergamo and were martyred in Verona. Their cult originated in the latter city, and one suggestion is that they were martyrs from Roman Africa whose relics were taken there. The lack of historical data has led them to be deleted from the Roman martyrology.

The altarpiece, depicting *The Trial of SS Firmus and Rusticus*, is by Giovanni Antonio Valtellina. This artist was active in Rome around 1500, but nothing biographical is known about him. The picture shows the saints refusing a demand to sacrifice to Jupiter.

Chapel of Pope John XXIII

The last chapel on the right is now dedicated to Pope John XXIII, who has been beatified. This is appropriate, since he came from the city of Bergamo and is considered its most famous citizen of the 20th century. The altarpiece is an official portrait of the pope by the Bergamese artist Natale Bertuletti, and was given to the Confraternity in 1960. Below the altar is a gilded reliquary containing a zucchetto (skullcap) belonging to Pope John, which was donated as a sacred relic in 2007.

Presbyterium

The presbyterium is entered through a triumphal arch springing from piers with Ionic semi-columns on the inner faces, and pilasters on the other two sides. These have capitals swagged with garlands. The ceiling has a cross-vault with a circular tondo bearing a Greek cross device.

The high altar has a base in the form of a trapezoidal sarcophagus, and has two Composite columns in black marble with white veins, which support a segmental pediment with a recessed central section. In a spectacular gilded bronze glory, embellished with putti, is the venerated icon of *Santa Maria della Pietà* which is painted on a board. This is thought to be of the school of Guido Reni, but the provenance is obscure and it looks suspiciously like a fragment of a larger work. The aspect of Our Lady resembles her in depictions of the Nativity. The image was donated to the Confraternity in 1790, and became a popular object of veneration. The then sacristan allegedly gave it the name of *Santa Maria della Pietà* without knowing that the church was originally dedicated to her.

There are more putti frolicking in clouds above the pediment. A pair of busts in gilded wood on wall brackets flank the altar; these are of SS *Bartholomew* and *Alexander*.

In front of the high altar another altar has been placed, for Masses where the priest faces the congregation. It was designed by Ilario Cirillo, and installed in 1994; the middle is hollow, bounded by incurved molded arcs, and contains a bronze cross.

On the right hand wall is a memorial to Cardinal Giuseppe Alessandro Furietti, who died in 1764. It shows his portrait. He was a noted antiquarian scholar and early archaeologist, and excavated at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli.

On the portal of entry of a notice, in Italian and the dialect of Bergamo, invites tourists and pilgrims to visit the church.

Artists and Architects:

Aureliano [Milani](#) (1675-1749), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period
 Carlo [De Dominicis](#) (1696-1758), Italian architect
 Durante [Alberti](#) (1538-1613), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance period.
 Emilio Ritrosi, Italian painter
 Ilario Cirillo (20th cent), Italian architect
 Filippo del Borgo, sculptor
 Girolamo [Siciolante](#) da Sermoneta (1521-c.1580), Italian Mannerist painter
 Giovanni Antonio Valtellina (16th cent), Italian painter
 Giovanni Battista [Contini](#) (1641-1723), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period
 Giuseppe [Valadier](#) (1762-1839), Italian architect
 Giuseppe [Valvassori](#) (1683-1761), Italian architect
 Marco [Benefial](#) (1684-1764), Italian proto-Neoclassical painter
 Natale [Bertuletti](#) (1915-1994), Italian painter
 Pietro Galgardi (1809-90), Italian painter
 Pietro [Tenerani](#) (1789-1869), Italian Neoclassical sculptor
 Pompeo Girolamo [Batoni](#) (1708 -1787), Italian painter of the Rococo/ Neoclassical period

Burials:

Giuseppe Alessandro Cardinal [FURIETTI](#), (1685-1764) [also see [here](#)]
 Recognized philologist, historian, archeologist, and collector of ancient art and books. Promoted the excavations of *Villa Adriana*, Tivoli. His book on mosaics, *De Musivis*, became a classic on the subject.

Andrea Cardinal [NEGRONI](#), (1710-1789) [also see [here](#)]

Giangiacomo Tasso
 Countess Caterina Negroni (d. 1840)

Location:

Address: Via di Pietra 70 - 00186 ROMA

Coordinates: [41°54'1"N](#) [12°28'47"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 69920723

Open times:

Opening times are advertised as being 16:00 to 18:00, every day.

Links:

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

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santi_Bartolomeo_ed_Alessandro_dei_Bergamaschi

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/ss-bartolomeo-e-alessandro-dei-bergamaschi.html>

http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=209

http://209.85.165.132/translate_c?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_dei_Santi_Bar-tolomeo_e_Alessandro_dei_Bergamaschi

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157618054944375/>

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Sharp, Mary; A GUIDE TO THE CHURCHES OF ROME; 1966, pg 55