

## San Benedetto e Scolastica all'Argentina



The church of Saints Benedict and Scholastica is a 17<sup>th</sup> century confraternity church and minor basilica, in the neighborhood Eustache, on via di Torre Argentina near Arco della Ciambella. This tiny church is one of the smallest in Rome, and is the *chiesa regionale* for expatriates of the town and region of Norcia.

St. [Benedict](#) and his sister St. [Scolastica](#) were born in [Norcia](#), a small town near Spoleto. The church was part of a building which provided lodging to pilgrims and care for the sick of the community. The Norcini were known as skilled butchers with a reputation for hams and salamis: still today a few shops build on this reputation, although their best-selling products are based on tartufo nero di Norcia (black truffle).

### History:

The Confraternita dei Santi Benedetto e Scolastica was founded in Rome by Pope Paul V in 1615 to care for the welfare of expatriates from Norcia and Spoleto. At first it was based at the church of Sant'Eustachio in Campo Marzio, until it was bequeathed a property on the Via di Torre Argentina that belonged to Pier Matteo Lucarucci, a member of the brotherhood.. In 1623 the confraternity was given the dignity of an archconfraternity by Pope Gregory XV. The already existing house chapel in their new headquarters was converted into a church with a separate entrance in 1625.

The church was devastated by the French invasion in 1798 and the Roman Republic in 1849 and was stripped of most of its rich works. In dispossession carried out by the French the archives also went missing.

The church was restored by the Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII. At present it is cherished by its small congregation. Remarkably, given its size, it has been granted the dignity of a Minor Basilica.

### **Exterior:**

The church is part of a larger building, and hence has no separate architectural identity. The entrance has a molded doorcase, over which is a circular tondo with a raised rim. This is flanked by two diagonal strips of floating cornice each with a faint S-curve, which join to it via tiny volutes.

It is marked by the interesting and unusual dedicatory inscription over the entrance, which is written in concentric circles within a tondo. This tondo is flanked by two diagonal strips of cornice each with a faint S-curve, and which join to it via tiny volutes. The inscription reads *Divis Benedicto et Scholasticae Patronis nursinus ordo et populus*, which translates as "To the honored patrons Benedict and Scholastica, the council and people of Norcia", dated A.D. 1619.

The metal railing gates were added in the latest restoration, to stop homeless people from sleeping on the step.

### **Interior:**

#### Nave

The diminutive single-roomed rectangular interior was entirely restored in the 19th century, and could be described as garish in places.

The walls are painted to imitate green hanging curtains patterned in red and yellow, with trompe-l'oeil pilasters supporting a painted entablature with a frieze inscription on yellow: *Felix Nursiae tellus quae talem genuit alumnum* or "Happy land of Norcia, which gave birth to such a pupil".

Below these curtains and above them are charmingly naïve frescoes executed in 1986, including a Pietà and a Birth of Mary. The artist's signature looks like Palzelico. The angelic musicians are especially delightful. The work contains epigraphs: *Veni sponsa Christi* "come, bride of Christ", *Benedictus nomine et gratia* "Benedict by name and grace" and *Ausculata O Fili, pracepta Magistri* "Listen O son, to the precepts of the master". The last is the first line of the Rule of St Benedict, and is a misquotation since the original does not have the vocative O.

The flat ceiling is occupied by a matching fresco of The Apotheosis of SS Benedict and Scholastica, in a dominant blue colour which goes well with the green hangings.

There are side shrines (former altars?), one of which is dedicated to the Crucifixion. This has a polychrome wooden crucifix, flanked by two oval portraits of Our Lady and St John the Evangelist forming a Calvary. The other one is dedicated to the Holy Family, with what looks like an 18th century oil painting depicting The Nativity.

#### Sanctuary

The sanctuary is not differentiated structurally.

The Baroque altar has polychrome marble inlay, and is early 17th century. Over it is an altarpiece of the Umbrian school of the same period, showing SS Benedict and Scholastica with a Benedictine monk and nun in the foreground. The latter are described as *altri santi*, but don't seem to have haloes. They are probably members of a notable family who became monastics, and for whom the painting was commissioned as an *ex voto*.

There is no aedicule -the painting is just hung on the wall. Above it is a lunette containing modern stained glass showing the Madonna and Child being venerated by SS Benedict and Scholastica.

On the shelf flanking the altar tabernacle are two reliquaries in the form of portrait busts in gilded metal, featuring the two saints again. The Italian sets of their relics are at Montecassino, although a rival French set is at the abbey of Fleury.

**Location:**

Addr: Vicolo Sinibaldi 1 - 00186 ROMA

Coord: [41° 53' 48.6"N 12° 28' 34.4"E](#)

**Info:**

Telephone: 0039 06 6877180

Open times:

06:00am-07:30am

Sunday 10:30am-12:00pm

Masses:

Weekdays: 06:30am

Holidays: 11:00am

**Links:**

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Confraternity website](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 786)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

["De Alvaris" gallery on Flickr](#)

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