

## Santa Maria in Via Lata



**Santa Maria in Via Lata** is a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### History:

Santa Maria in Via Lata, the medieval name for Via del Corso, is built over an old deaconry, on the remains of buildings from Hadrian's era and a 1<sup>st</sup> century monumental portico.

According to a strong tradition, the church stands on a site where St. Paul is said to have spent two years of his imprisonment here under house arrest and also to have written the Letters to Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and possibly Hebrews while living here. If this is true, then it was here that Paul converted Onesimus to the Faith. Some add that St. Luke, and perhaps even St. John the Evangelist, might have stayed here for a time as well.

The first Christian place of worship here was a 5th century oratory in the Roman building beneath the present church. This was constructed within the remains of a large Roman warehouse, some 250 metres long, which has also been excavated. The church's upper level was added in the 9th century, and murals added to the lower level between the 7th and 9th centuries. It is mentioned many times in the Liber Pontificalis, but the ancient structure had fallen into ruins by the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The church was rebuilt by Sergius I (687-701) but continuous flooding by the Tiber made the foundations unsafe. Nevertheless, another church was completed here by Leo IX (1049-1054) and it is this church which Eugenius IV (1431-1447) united to the possessions of the adjoining suppressed convent of Santi Ciriaco e Nicolo (which stood on the Piazza del Collegio Romano). This church had the opposite orientation as the current one, with the sanctuary being closer to the Via del Corso,

also known as the Via Lata or “wide street” because this was one of the largest streets in the city at the time.

At the end of the fifteenth century, Innocent VIII (1484-1492) rebuilt the church again, in the form that we see it today, with demolition beginning in 1491 and the new church, with the orientation changed so that it faced the Via del Corso, being dedicated in 1506. At this time the Triumphal Arch of Diocletian, the Arcus Novus, was also demolished, which once stood near the current location of the front doors of the church.

Between 1580 and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century works were performed to embellish the structure. Between 1639 and 1643 the sumptuous apse was constructed according to a design by Bernini. The current façade, complementing the surrounding palace of the Doria-Pamphilij family, was built between 1658 and 1662, with the lower church, including some of the remains of the old diaconia, being restored at the same time. Decoration continued into the early eighteenth century, giving us the current appearance. Between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century most of the paintings adorning the interior were created.

### **Exterior:**

The façade and portico are by [Pietro da Cortona](#), and were designed c. 1660. The new facade was commissioned by the canon Atanasio Ridolfi and closely guided by Pope [Alexander VII](#) whose family, the Chigi, hoped to develop a palace-chapel enclave in the area along the lines of that of the Pamphili in Piazza Navona. The curious upper story is an example of a fastigium, an arcuated lintel supported by columns and set within a triangular pediment. This architectural device was associated with the audiences of Roman emperors and was appropriated by early Christianity for depictions of the Enthroned Christ. The fastigium was also utilized by Roman Emperors for their viewing boxes at the hippodrome, which may in part be the appeal for Alexander VII whose large-scale redevelopment of Rome focused on improving the Corso as the main axis of the city and the site of horse races during Carnival.

The façade consists of two levels, one rising above the other, with Corinthian columns supporting the lower, and composite the upper architrave, and with pilasters at the sides.

The portico has apses on both ends and is covered by a barrel vault. It holds the tomb of Atanasio Ridolfi, designed by da Cortona. The inscription on the right wall of the portico commemorates the restoration of the church by Pope Alexander VII in 1661. Access to the ancient structures below the church is from the right side of the portico..

### **Interior:**

The church interior, with a nave and two side aisles, has the lavish polychrome appearance designed by [Cosimo Fanzago](#) in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. The nave is lined with twelve Ionic columns, incrustated with Sicilian jasper, having gilt bases and capitals, and sustaining small arcades. Over the entrance is a handsome organ, built in 1652. The cosmatesque pavement in black and white marble is from the 9<sup>th</sup> century church on the site.

### **The Tribune:**

The great altar is enclosed with a rich balustrade, at the extremities of which are two bronze angels, and inside which are the stalls of the Canons. The altar is adorned with four Corinthian columns of alabaster with gilt capitals; and on the pediment are statues of some merit, representing *Meekness* and *Charity*. On the Gospel side is the simple but elegant monument of G. B. d'Aste, at whose expense the tribune was erected, and who died in 1636. At the opposite side is a similar monument, erected to Clarice Margani, who died young in 1612.

The altar has been attributed to Bernini, but is now thought to be by Santi Ghetti. Above the altar is a 13th century venerated icon of the *Vergine Advocata*, the Blessed Virgin, said to have caused many miracles. Relics here include the head of St. [Cyriacus](#); the body of the 3rd century deacon and martyr, St. [Agapitus](#), and the remains of many other martyrs, including Sts. Largus and Smargdus.

#### The left aisle:

Above the altar of the chapel at the left side of the tribune is a *Madonna with child and Saints Cyriac and Catherine*, by [Giovanni Odazzi](#); and this chapel is similar in every respect to the corresponding one of the B. Sacrament. To the right of the altar is an oval with the marriage of the B. Virgin, by Masucci.

The tomb of the poet [Antonio Tebaldeo](#) (1453-1537) is at the end of the left aisle. It was designed in 1776. He was a friend of Raphael, who painted a portrait of him of which a copy is found here; the original is in the Vatican Pinacoteca.

The next oval has a painting of the *Presentation*, by Petri; and over the next altar is *Saint Paul baptizes Sabine and children*, by [Pier Leone Ghezzi](#).

Over the sacristy door is an oval with *the Birth of the B. Virgin*, by Pietro de Pietri, who also painted the *Virgin and Child, S. Antony, S. Laurence and other Saints* over the altar of the next chapel.

The *Blessed Virgin* in the next oval is by Masucci; and the *Christ risen and appearing to his Apostles*, in the next oval, is by Pastrini

#### The right aisle:

To the right of the entrance is the baptistery, with its beautiful font of black marble: in the oval above is the *Baptism of the Redeemer*, by A. Masucci; and in the adjoining oval is *the Annunciation*, by the same hand.

Over the altar in the next chapel is a well executed painting of *Martydom of Saint Andrew*, by [Giacinto Brandi](#) from 1685; and the *Nativity* in the next oval is by [Pietro da Pietri](#).

Over the second altar is a painting of *S. Nicholas, S. Biagius and S. Joseph*, by [Giuseppe Ghezzi](#); and the *Presentation*, in the adjoining oval, is by the same Petri. Another oval follows with the *Virgin and Child, presenting beads to S. Dominic and S. Catharine of Sienna, in presence of other Saints*, by Giovanni Domenico Piastrini; and the *Adoration of the Magi*, in the next oval, is by [Agostino Masucci](#).

Under this oval is the memorial of the French painter [Jean Dermani Drouais](#), a student of David who died in 1788.

To the right is the tomb of [Edward Dodwell](#), an Irish painter, traveller and a writer on archaeology who died in 1832.

Over the altar of the chapel of the B. Sacrament, at the extremity of this aisle, is a good crucifix; and the chapel is adorned with rare marbles, among which are two small columns of verde antique.

There are also tombs of the families of Joseph and Lucien Bonaparte.

The lower level has been excavated, and the remains of a large Roman warehouse, some 250 meters long, were found. The 5th century chapel and welfare center that were constructed in the building have been identified. There are murals from the 7th-9th centuries; they have been detached from the

walls to preserve them. A relief by [Cosimo Fancelli](#) was placed here in the 17th century, when the first excavations were carried out. Here also is a well, said to have sprung up to enable the Apostle of the Gentiles to baptize the crowds of new converts.

### Special notes

The lower level has been closed for some time for restorations, but the upper level is usually open from 17.00 to 19.00.

### Artists and Architects:

[Pietro da Cortona](#) (1596-1669), Italian Baroque painter  
 Cosimo [Fancelli](#) (1620-1688), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period  
 Cosimo [Fanzago](#) (1591-1678), Italian Baroque sculptor  
 Santi [Ghetti](#) (d. 1656), Italian stonemason  
 Giuseppe [Ghezzi](#) (1634-1721), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Pier Leone [Ghezzi](#) (1674-1755), Italian Rococo painter  
 Giovanni [Odazzi](#) (1663-1731), Italian painter and etcher of the Baroque period  
 Agostino [Masucci](#) (1691-1753), Italian painter of the late-Baroque or Rococo period  
 Giovanni Domenico Piastrini (1680-1740), Italian painter  
 Pietro [de Pietri](#) (1663-1721?), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period  
[Raphael](#) (1483-1520), Italian painter and architect of the High Renaissance

### Relics:

St. Cyriacus

### Burials:

St. Agapitus  
 St. Largus  
 St. Smargdus

Vitellozzo Cardinal [VITELLI](#), (1531-1568)  
 Maurizio Cardinal di [SAVOIA](#), (1593-1657)  
 There is a monument to his memory just over the entrance of the church, burial place unknown  
 Angelo Cardinal [GIORI](#), (1586-1662)  
 Ludovico Cardinal [GAZZOLI](#), (1774-1858)  
 Giuseppe Cardinal [UGOLINI](#), (1783-1867)

families of Joseph and Lucien Bonaparte

Antonio [Tebaldeo](#) (1453-1537)

<poet>

[Edward Dodwell](#) (d. 1832)

<Irish painter, traveller and a writer on archaeology>

### Location:

Address: 306 Via del Corso, 00186 Rome

Coordinates: [41°53'53"N](#) [12°28'52"E](#)

**Info:****Contacts**

Telephone: 0039 06 83396276

Telephone booking: visite agli scavi: 320 0960993 - 347 3811874

**Opening times**

Monday-Saturday: 5.00 pm - 10.30 pm;

Sunday: 9.45 am - 11.30 am *and* 5.00 pm - 10.30 pm.

**Mass Schedule:**

Weekdays: 8.00 pm;

Holidays: 10.30 am and 8.00 pm.

**Admission and ticketing****GUIDED TOURS TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS**

*From November 19, 2010, guided tours to the excavations are led from Friday to Sunday, from 10.00 am to 6.00 pm. The admission fee is € 2,00 per person. To find out the cost of the guided tour please call the Info line.*

*Info and booking: tel. +39 320 0960993 or +39 347 3811874.*

**Links:**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa\\_Maria\\_in\\_Via\\_Lata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Maria_in_Via_Lata)

[http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa\\_Maria\\_in\\_Via\\_Lata](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Maria_in_Via_Lata)

<http://www.pnac.org/station-churches/week-5/tuesday-santa-maria-in-via-lata/>

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/cattolici/s-maria-in-via-lata.html>