

## Gesù Nazareno all'Argentina



**Gesù Nazareno all'Argentina** is an 18<sup>th</sup> century confraternity church at Via dei Barbieri 22/A, just to the west of the Largo Torre Argentina. The dedication is to Jesus the Nazarene.

At various time in the church history it have been called SS. Cosma et Damianus Barbitonsorum, SS. Cosma e Damiano de' Barbieri; SS. Cosimo e Damiano delli Barbieri. Before ca. 1575 the church also bore the following titles: SS. Trinita; Chiesa del Crocifisso; Chiesa de' Fitonardi. Briefly, .after 1885: S. Elena. (a)

### History

The church has had a complex history, generally confused in the brief notices given it. The confusion lies in the fact that the Barbieri seem to have owned the church at two different times. The Compagnia de' Barbieri (Confraternity of Barbers) was formed in 1440. At some uncertain time after this they obtained the present church. Then, in 1479, they restored it from the foundations. It the subsequent decades they appear to have lost the church, for in the reign of Pius V (1566-72) the church went under the name of the Chiesa del Crocifisso and was occupied by Tertiary Nuns of S. Francis. (a)

In the Barbieri re-obtained the church and rebuilt it in 1575. In 1724 the Confraternity rebuilt the church again (this is the existing building) and re-dedicated it to SS Cosmas and Damian. The architect was **Filippo Juvarra**. The two saints were the patrons of the confraternity, because (according to their legend) they had worked as doctors of medicine. As well as cutting and shaving hair, the barbers also performed minor surgical operations and blood-letting so the dedication was appropriate. (1) (a)

There was a minor restoration by the Confraternity in 1854, involving the interior decoration, adding a new sacristy, and also some attention to their headquarters next door. (1)

After the conquest of Rome by the Kingdom of Italy in 1870 the church was abandoned and desecrated, but was occupied by the Archconfraternity of Jesus of Nazareth in 1888. In 1896 they obtained possession, and restored and re-dedicated it (with its present dedication) two years later. A statue of Christ was substituted for the former altarpiece. (1)

There was another restoration of the interior in 1902, involving the re-painting of the sanctuary frescoes. (1)

The confraternity was wound up in 1922, and the little complex became a convent of Polish brethren of the Order of St Paul the First Hermit in 1934. They remained there until 1984, when the church was closed again. (1)

There was a major restoration which took place from 2002 to 2011, and the church now functions as a dependency of San Carlo ai Catinari nearby. The Arciconfraternita di Gesù Nazareno has been reconstituted, and is now in charge. (1)

Note the former dedication on the frieze. (1)

## Exterior

This is a very small church, on a rectangular plan. The neighbouring buildings on both sides are taller than the church, so the façade is all that is visible from the street. There is a small campanile of two arched bell-frames on the left hand edifice, but this cannot be seen. (1)

The narrow street makes it difficult to view the façade properly, hence Juvarra designed it to be seen at an angle. The corners are occupied by gigantic tripletted Composite pilasters in rather shallow relief, and these support an entablature with a dedicatory inscription to SS Cosmas and Damian on the frieze. (*Sanctis martyribus Cosmae et Damiano dicatum.*) Above this is a segmental pediment broken into two halves, which are placed over the pilasters. (1)

The single entrance has a molded doorcase, and a raised cornice supported by a pair of posts with bunched leaf decoration. There is a large arched window over the doorway, decorated with curlicues and a scallop shell at the top and with tassels under the sill. (1)

The left hand corner side wall, next to the former headquarters, is part of the composition. This has a pair of Corinthian pilasters (not tripletted) and in between these in ascending order are a side door, a door with a metal railing balcony and a slightly round-headed window. The balcony is an odd feature, and seems to have been part of the original design. The entire façade now has a creamy colour after being cleaned in the recent restoration. (1)

A large palace opposite the church is currently poorly maintained; a glance through the big portal reveals in the darkness a coat of arms of Pope Clement X Altieri (1670-76), who was the ruling pope when Cardinal Giovan Giacomo Cavallerini built this palace, still named after him. (4)

## Interior

The style of the small interior is typically charming late Baroque (tardobarocco). It is possible to tell that the frontage of the church is at a slight angle to the main body. (1)

The layout comprises a nave of three bays, the middle one of which has a chapel in a large shallow arched niche on each side. These chapels are flanked by Composite pilasters in shallow relief (echoing those on the façade), and these support an entablature with rosettes on the frieze which runs round the entire interior. (1)

The first bay is occupied by a hanging cantoria or gallery for musicians, which has a serpentine curve in three parts. The two outer sections curve inwards on quarter-circles, while the central section is slightly bowed. This gallery has no access from the church itself. Behind it, two more pilasters support an arch that frames the counterfaçade with its window, and this arch mirrors the triumphal arch into the sanctuary. (1)

The third bay has a doorway with a winged putto's head over it on the left hand side, and on the right a false door in an identical style for the sake of symmetry. Above each door is a window topped with a gilded crown. (1)

The ceiling is barrel-vaulted, with three lunettes on each side occupied by windows. Each bay has a fresco panel, the two outer ones featuring a pair of angels and the larger central one depicting *The Apotheosis of SS Cosmas and Damian*. These are by Giovanni Antonio Grecolini. (1)

The stucco decoration on the ceiling vault, gallery and elsewhere is richly intricate. The color scheme is overall a creamy white, with a few gilded touches here and there especially on the gallery frontal. The stucco work on the gallery is thought to be by **Giuseppe Piccioni**. (1)

### Sanctuary

The slightly narrower sanctuary allows for a triumphal arch, the archivolt of which is above the entablature just mentioned. The plan is square. The ceiling has a cross-vault over lunette windows on three sides, and the ribs of this meet at a fresco of *The Dove of the Holy Spirit*. (1)

The side walls of the sanctuary have two large frescoes depicting scenes from the legend of SS Cosmas and Damian, by **Michelangelo Cerruti** (restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The altarpiece is now a statue of *Jesus the Nazarene* in a red robe, in a niche behind glass with an arched frame, but used to have a picture of the beheading of the two saints. (1)

### Side chapels

The left hand altar has an altarpiece which is a notable painting of *St Helena the Empress* allegedly by **Cristoforo Roncalli (Il Pomarancio)**. This used to be over the main altar of the demolished church of Sant'Elena, and here replaced a Crucifixion by Cerruti. (1)

The right hand altar has an icon of the *Madonna and Child*, in an oval tondo with a gilded frame which is accompanied by an angel and putti in fine stucco work. It is attributed to **Federico Zuccari**. (1) (a)

**Access**

There is a Mass at 11:00 on Sunday, and the church is usually open at 10:30 in order to prepare for it. (1)

**Artists and Architects:**

Filippo [Juvarra](#) (1678-1736), Italian architect in the late Baroque period  
 Giovanni Antonio Grecolini (1675-1725), Italian painter  
 Giuseppe Piccioni, Italian sculptor  
 Michelangelo [Cerruti](#) (1663-1749), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
 Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) aka *Il Pomerancio* (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter  
 Federico [Zuccari](#) (1541-1609), Italian Mannerist **painter** and architect

**Location:**

Addr: 22/A Via dei Barbieri, 00186 Roma

Coord: [41° 53' 42.8"N 12° 28' 32.8"E](#)

**Info:**

Email: [info@chiesagesunazareno.it](mailto:info@chiesagesunazareno.it)

**Links:**

1. [http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Ges%C3%B9\\_Nazareno\\_all%27Argentina](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Ges%C3%B9_Nazareno_all%27Argentina)

2. <http://www.chiesagesunazareno.it/Home.aspx>  
 (Church website)

3. [http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=783](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=783)

4. <http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi136.htm#Nazareno>

[http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.romaspqr.it/ROMA/CHIESE/\\_/Altre\\_Chiese/Ges%25C3%25B9\\_nazareno.htm](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://www.romaspqr.it/ROMA/CHIESE/_/Altre_Chiese/Ges%25C3%25B9_nazareno.htm)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157615794410942/with/9132228353/>  
 ("De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ic-LhwOL-Y&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ic-LhwOL-Y&feature=player_embedded)

<http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/chiese-cattoliche/chiesa-di-gesu-nazareno-all-argentina.html>

a. Lewine, Milton; *THE ROMAN CHURCH INTERIOR, 1527-1580*; 1963; pg. 207

b. Donovan, Jeremiah; *ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS*; 1842; Vol. II, pg. 260