

San Gregorio a Ponte Quattro Capi Santa Maria della Divina Pietà



San Gregorio a Ponte Quattro Capi is an 18th century church former confraternity church, and is located at Piazza di Monte Savello 9 which is at the east end of the Ponte Fabricio. This is in the rione Ripa. The dedication is to Pope St Gregory the Great.

However, there is a subsidiary dedication to the Blessed Virgin Mary as Our Lady of Piety. Hence, the church is also known as San Gregorio della Divina Pietà, or as Santa Maria della Pietà. As such, it should not be confused with Santa Maria della Pietà in Camposanto.

The church is also known as S Gregorio della Divina Pietà and S Gregoria a Ponte Quattro Capi. According to legend it was built on the site of St Gregory the Great's birthplace, a private house owned by his patrician father Gordinanus. The first name refers to the congregation that has owned the church since

the 18th century, and the second to the Ponte Quattro Capi, the Bridge of Four Heads, which is named after the four marble statues standing on it.

History

The church itself was probably founded in the 10th century, as were many of the little churches in the built-up area in the Middle Ages. However, there is no reference to it before its listings in the late mediaeval catalogues and the documentary evidence is one of these entries, from 1405.

It was rebuilt by Pope Benedict XIII (1724-1730) in 1727, and given to the Congregazione degli Operai della Divina Pietà, the Congregation of the Works of Divine Piety. The congregation assisted aristocratic families who had fallen upon hard times, and hence the church gained a new popular name.

It was restored in 1858 on the orders of Pope Pius IX, and it is from this restoration that much of the interior decoration derives. Before then a notorious reproach to the Jews was painted on the façade, but Pope Pius then ordered it to be carved into a marble tablet during the restoration. This act caused serious controversy and scandal internationally at the time. The text of Isaiah 65.2 is written in both Latin and Hebrew: "All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and faithless nation".

In the late 19th century the church narrowly escaped being demolished for the building of the Lungotevere de Pierleone. A contemporary rumour was that this was because the Italian government valued the continued existence of the inscription just mentioned, as a reminder of the obscurantism of the papal government in the city before 1870.

Close to the church is the Jewish Synagogue, which was finished in 1904 and takes up almost half of the former Ghetto area.

Then, in the early and mid 20th century the church was lucky to escape pressure from the archaeological establishment to have it cleared for the sake of the ancient remains known to be under it. As it was, many surrounding buildings were pulled down to reveal the remains of the Portico of Octavia and the Theatre of Marcellus, and as a result the church is now a rather isolated building beset by heavy traffic.

Nowadays, it lacks a pastoral ministry but has been used as a venue for musical concerts. However, the latest news is that it is closed "awaiting restoration".

Exterior

The church has a short rectangular nave with a pitched and tiled roof, a very short presbyterium which is lower in elevation and an attached five-sided apse which is lower still. Ancillary rooms are attached to the left hand side wall, and there is a small two-storey Baroque bellcote on top of this range. This has two storeys, and the smaller second one has a pretty curved top the arc corncies of which end in small incurved volutes on each side.

Façade

The early 18th century two storey white rendered façade is by Filippo Barigioni, as is apparently the rest of the church. Two simple Doric pilasters are at the corners, and these have posts on top of their capitals which support a projecting cornice. The Barque doorcase has a very slight curve to the top of it, and above this is an indulgence inscription flanked by posts carved as bundles of acanthus leaves which support a horizontal cornice.

Above this canopy can be seen the notorious reproach to the Jews, formerly painted on the façade but then ordered to be carved into a marble tablet by Pope Pius IX during the 1858 restoration. It has been left as a reminder of less tolerant times, despite some pressure in the late 20th century to have it removed.

The second storey of the façade has four pilasters with shell-and-volute capitals. The inner pair are partly hidden by the frame of a large rectangular window, with a balustrade on the cornice in front of it. Above this window is a small segmental pediment containing a winged putto's head, and on the corners of the façade is a pair of finials in the form of torches.

Interior

The church has an aisleless nave, with a sanctuary occupying a small rectangular apse. There are two rectangular side chapels, one on each side. The last major restoration was the one carried out in 1858, which resulted in the present interior decoration including the polychrome marble work.

Nave

The plan of the nave is a rectangle with rounded corners. An entablature with a dark pink marble frieze runs round the church, and this is supported by columns in the same stone which flank the triumphal arch and the side chapels. Pilasters in the same style are folded into the corners, and also flank the entrance and the side chapel columns. The capitals of these columns and pilasters are not Classical, but are made up of rosettes, rose cuttings and palm fronds.

The ceiling has a fresco by Giuseppe Sereni, depicting *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. This is in an elliptical tondo, touched by the keystones of the triumphal arch and the arches over the side aisles and the entrance. The pendentives thus created contain frescoes of putti holding scrolls with Marian biblical texts: *Signum magnum apparuit in caelo* ("A great sign appeared in heaven"), *Adstitit regina a dextris tuis* ("The queen stands on your right"), *Quasi palma exaltata sum in Cades* ("Like a palm tree I am tall in Kadesh") and *Quasi cedrus exaltata sum in Libano* ("Like a cedar I am tall in Lebanon").

There are memorial tablets in pink marble frames flanking the entrance, and also between the chapels and the apse.

Above the entrance, the counterfaçade has a pretty bow-fronted gallery with a balustrade. The balusters of this are alternately inverted, a detail that Barigioni borrowed from Borromini at San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is a small, shallow rectangular apse. The high altar has no aedicule, but instead a large Baroque glory with many angels in white stucco is on the wall above the altar table. This contains an icon by the Flemish painter Gilles Hallet, depicting *The Madonna of Divine Pity*. The altar and tabernacle is in rich polychrome stonework, including alabaster in the frontal and verde antico style marble, and is by Barigioni.

The lunette above the gloria contains a fresco of *God the Father* by Andrea Pasquale Marini, 1858.

Side chapels

The side chapels are rectangular niches, with triumphal arches. The altars do not have aedicules, but the altarpieces are in white marble frames on the walls.

In the right hand one is a painting of *The Ecstasy of St Philip Neri at the Minerva* by Andrea Casali, and the left hand one has *St Gregory Waits at the Table of the Poor* by Étienne Parrocel.

Access

At present, the church is "closed for restoration".

Liturgy

St Gregory the Great is commemorated on 12 March and 3 September. He died on the former date but, since this is always in Lent, his feast-day is celebrated on the day in September on which he was consecrated as Pope.

Location:

Coordinates: [41°53'29"N 12°28'43"E](#)

Address: Piazza di Monte Savello 9, 00186 Roma

Telephone: 06-68.65.223

External Links:

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[English Wikipedia page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Nolli map](#) (look for 1036)

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[Icon of Our Lady of Divine Pity](#) (12th row, on right)