

Nostra Signora del Sacro Cuore



Nostra Signora del Sacro Cuore (Our Lady of the Sacred Heart) is a 15th century convent and titular church dedicated to the Virgin Mary located in Rome's Piazza Navona. The church is in the care of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who run it as a devotional shrine and have their Roman provincial headquarters here. [1] [2]

For most of its history this church was known as San Giacomo dei Spagnoli, meaning "St James of the Spaniards", and the name is still sometimes used.

History

An earlier oratory had been erected on the ruins of the Stadium of Domitian in the 10th century by the Benedictines of the Farfa Abbey to honor St. Andrew.

The first documentary reference to the church is in the will of the Infante [Enrique](#) (1230-1304), fourth son of King St Ferdinand III of Castile. He provided the funds to build the church in 1259 and also two hospice for Catalan pilgrims, one for men and one for women. The dedication was to St James the Great, patron of Spain in general and especially of the Reconquista or the re-conquest of the country from the Muslims. His shrine is at Santiago de Compostela. [1]

In the Holy Year of 1450 the church was completely rebuilt as a result of a private benefaction by Alfonso de Paradinas, who was then a canon of Seville Cathedral. When he died in 1485 he left his fortune to finish the project, which also involved a large new pilgrim hospice next door to replace the two old ones. Pope Alexander VI Borgia (a Spaniard himself) took an interest in finishing the work. The main entrance to the church at that time was from Corso Rinascimento, then called via San Giacomo and later via della Sapienza. Also he ordered the building of a façade on the Piazza Navona, behind the presbyterium. This was designed by **Bernardo Rossellino**, and was one of the first stages in the process of turning the ruined stadium into the city piazza that it is now. At the same time the main city market was transferred here from the Campodoglio. [1] [2]

In 1506 the church with its hospice was declared to be a national church of the Kingdom of Spain in Rome as the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon had been united into modern Spain in 1469.

Further work was done on it in 1518 by **Antonio da Sangallo the Younger**, who was responsible for the ceiling vaults and the surviving Chapel of St James. Two other artists worked with him: **Jacopo Sansovino** for sculptures and **Pellegrino Aretuse da Modena** for the frescoes. [1]

In the same year, however, the Aragonese in Rome built a new church and hospice of their own, Santa Maria in Monserrato. Hence, the new united kingdom had two national churches in Rome. [1]

As a Spanish national church, this edifice was important and was lavishly provided with decorations and works of art, much in the Mannerist style. At the end of the 18th century it still had its main entrance at the east end, and was a short and wide rectangular basilica. [1]

During their occupation of Rome (1798-99), the French took revenge on their enemies by looting their churches. Hence, when peace was restored after Napoleon in 1815 the Spanish had two churches in poor repair. For some reason they decided to concentrate on Santa Maria in Monserrato, and effectively abandoned this one in 1829, and became a storehouse for timbers. In the process, they stripped most of the artworks out, took some back to Spain and left some more at the other church. [1] [b]

In 1878 the derelict building was sold to Fr. Jules Chevalier, founder of the French Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. He commissioned architect **Luca Carmini** to restore the church. **Carmini** changed the orientation of the church, opening an entrance onto Piazza Navona, and built a new apse onto via della Sapienza. He divided the space into three naves of equal height. The restored church was re-consecrated in 1881 and entrusted to the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and dedicated to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. [1] [b]

The apse and the transept were demolished in 1938 to open the current Corso del Rinascimento. The apse was cut and the main altar was repositioned on the side of Piazza Navona, blocking the former main entrance door. The architect **Arnaldo Foschini** gave the church the present double entrance, from Piazza Navona and from Corso Rinascimento. [1]

The church was made titular as a diaconate by Pope Pope Paul VI in 1965. [1]

Exterior

The fabric of the church is invisible from the street, apart from the façade on the Piazza Navona. This is very misleading. Looking at it, you will see two storeys. In fact, only the first storey fronts the church; the second storey is in front of the domestic apartments which are located above the church for its entire length. These now house the Provincialate of the Missionaries, and used to be part of the Spanish hospice. In other words, the church has no independent architectural identity. [1]

The main entrance is now on the Corso del Rinascimento. The 1930's building was rendered in faded pale orange with a colonnaded loggia under the roofline, has an old doorway which has been saved and re-erected. Above it is a large oculus in a molded stone frame. The doorcase, in marble with moldings, has the arms of the Kingdom of Spain on its lintel. Above it is a frieze displaying the scallop shells which are the emblem of St James, and above that is a slightly oversized pediment with egg-and-dart decoration. [1]

On the side facing Piazza Navona, the first storey has a high plinth, on which are six pilasters in what passed for the Composite style at the period. The capitals are degenerate in design, but finely executed. They support an entablature with a dedicatory inscription: Deo Optimo Maximo in honorem Mariae nostrae Dominae a Sacro Corde Iesu aedes dedicata an[no] MDCCCLXXIX. The outer four pilasters are in pairs. There are three arched windows with molded frames; these touch the entablature, and are over the three entrances. [1]

Of these entrances, the middle one is much larger than the other two. It has a marble doorcase with a barley-sugar twist molding along its outer edge, and above it is a frieze decorated with swags. The tympanum of the dentillated pediment on top contains a rather eroded shield supported by flying angels. The right hand one is by **Mino da Fiesole**, and the left hand one by **Paolo Tuccone**. On the tip of the pediment is a modern statue of *Our Lady*. The side doorcases support fragments of

entablature with projecting cornices, and above these are molded archivolts looking rather like stone rainbows. [1]

The second storey, above the actual line of the church's vaulting, is the same width as the first but half the height. It has six pilasters of the same style, but slightly narrower. They support a second entablature with an inscription that reads: *Ametur ubique terrarum Cor Iesu Sacratissimum* ("May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere, in all lands"). The small triangular pediment only occupies the middle third of the width of the façade, and contains a cross bottony which means that it has trefoil endings to its arms. There is a cross finial on the tip of the pediment, and this is in the same style with a representation of the Sacred Heart in the middle. [1]

This storey has three large rose windows; that is, round ones with Gothic tracery in an octagonal pattern. As mentioned, these do not light the church but the rooms above it. The windows themselves are the same size, but the middle one has a larger frame with a double molding. This central rose window was the one in the original pediment. [1]

Interior

This is what is called a "hall church", which means that the side aisles are the same height as the central nave. There are four large square pillars on each side, and the cross-vaulting is supported by four attached pilasters which have capitals in the same sort of style as those of the façade. The vaulting ribs are attractively tricked out in barley-sugar twist moldings, recalling that around the main door on the Piazza Navona. Most of the side chapels are in arched alcoves, and the barrel vaults of these now have large garlands rendered on them. The aisles are open from one end of the church to the other. [1]

Sanctuary

The presbyterium is defined by a pair of screen walls in between the furthest pair of pillars and the far wall of the church, and each wall contains two arches. Above the arches is polychrome marble decoration in opus sectile, featuring a floral motif in an oblate octagonal panel. This motif is now replicated in modern frescoing over the chapels. To the left of the altar is a further narrow section of side wall between the last arch pier and the back wall of the church, and this has more polychrome marble in a cross and roundel motif. Opposite, there is no wall but a gap. [1]

The present, modern main altar is neo-Baroque, in the form of a triumphal arch. It re-uses older architectural details. The arch itself is supported by a pair of Corinthian columns in what looks like red marble, and behind these are a pair of tripletted pilasters. Either side of the arch is a relief panel showing a venerating angel, and on the outer corners is a pair of Corinthian pilasters in what looks like grey veined marble. Columns and pilasters support ornate entablatures either side of the arch springing. Above the arch is a triangular pediment with a deep entablature, supported either side of the arch by tiny marble pilasters flanked by curlicues. The marble backdrop in serliana was by **Pietro and Domenico Rosselli**. [1] [3] [4]

The altarpiece is the subject of popular devotion. It is a full-length modern portrait of the Madonna and Child, in pastel colors. [1]

Most of the older works of art and funerary monuments in the church were transferred to Santa Maria de Monserrato when the Spaniards decided to abandon this church. In the restoration, little of the original wall frescoes were saved and the overall impression of the decor is now rather austere with much whitewash. [1]

On the entrance wall on the Corso Rinascimento side are two plaques recalling the Herrera family and the decoration of their chapel, which was designed by Flaminio Ponzio but destroyed during the remodelling of the church. [a]

Right side chapels and altars

Described from the rear to the front:

Chapel of the Resurrection (3)

The chapel was ceded to Antonio de Fonseca on 6th April 1583 and built to a design by **Guillermo Ferrant**, and frescoed by **Baldassare Croce**.

Ceiling:

Daniel, Elijah, Isaiah and David;

Intrados: from right to left:

Christ on the Way to Emmaus;

Supper at Emmaus;

Christ Appears before the Apostles;

Incredulity of St Thomas;

Annunciation to the Holy Women of Christ's Resurrection;

Left wall:

Jonah and the Whale and

Right wall:

Noli me tangere and a Sibyl.

The modern altarpiece, *St Joseph with Christ Child* (1941), is by **Ettore Ballerini**. [a]

Chapel of St. Anne (4)

The modern altarpiece, *Education of the Virgin* (1931), is by **Giovanni Battista Conti**. On the left wall is *Birth of the Virgin*, and on the right wall is *Presentation in the Temple*. In the tondo above the altar is *God the Father*. [a]

Choir loft and Sacristy (5)

The superb cantoria over the sacristy door is by **Pietro Torrigiano**, built for **Bishop Diego Meléndez Valdés** in 1506. It has a balustraded balcony with intricate decoration in white and gold and a central coat-of-arms of the bishop. It now contains the organ, although intended for solo vocal performers. The organ is from 1930. [1] [4] [a]

Following are three alcoves with altars and altarpieces: [a]

The first altar (6) has a painting of *St Vincent de Paola*, (1905) with his motto, **CARITAS**

The next altar (7) has a painting of *St Margaret Mary Alacoque* by an unknown artist.

The next altar (8) has a statue of *St. Benedict Joseph Labre*

Left side chapels and altars

Described from the front to the rear:

In the left aisle are three alcoves with altars and altarpieces: [a]

The first altar (9) has a wooden figure of *Christ Carrying the Cross* by **Mariano Pisani**, ca. 1755.

The next altar (10) has a terracotta figure of *Our Lady of Sorrows*, 1886.

The next altar (11) has a statue of *St Anthony of Padua Holding the Infant Jesus*.

Chapel of Saint James the Great (12)

This chapel reflects the original dedication of the early church. Saint James the Great is the patron saint of Spain. The chapel was commissioned by **Cardinal Antonio Maria Ciocchi del Monte**, in execution of the will of **Cardinal Jaime Serra I Cau**, Archbishop of Arborea (Oristano), died in 1517. For this, the Chapel also was called Chapel Serra. It is work of **Antonio da Sangallo the Young**, constructed between 1517 and 1523. Of rectangular form, the walls have pilaster with Corinthian capitals, and surmounted with octagonal paneled ceiling of marble and an elegant lantern to the center. The balustrade and the seats along the walls are in marble. [4] [b]

On the back wall behind the altar, in the marble niche flanked by Corinthian marble columns and frescoed figures of the *Apostles Peter and Paul*, is a copy of the statue of St. James, the original the work of **Jacopo Tatti**, called **Sansovino** (1486-1570), which was transferred to S. Maria di Monserrato, now national church of the Spanish. [b]

On the sidewalls, frescoes of **Pellegrino Aretusi da Modena** representing scenes of the life of St. James: [b]

- *the battle of Granada, with the miraculous participation of the Saint to horse* (on the right);
- *the escape of the Apostle from the tribunal of Agrippa,*
- *the healing of a paralytic* and
- *the martyrdom of the Saint by decapitation* (on the left).

On the right wall a plaque reproduces a “Breve” with which Pope Clemente XII (1732) granted the plenary indulgence to the visitors. In the left wall, tomb of Fr. Giovanni Genocchi (1860-1926), eminent figure of the Italian Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who was sent to South America by Pope Pius X to help the indians who were being exploited by white plantation owners. [b]

The altar frontal is a 7th century Byzantine carved marble slab. The barrel vault was probably built later to Sangallo’s design in 1546. In the pavement, in front of the altar, is the tombstone of Card. Serra. [b]

Judgement Chapel (12)

The first chapel at the left rear was decorated by **Ettore Ballerini** in 1908: [a]

Altarpiece: *Christ Judging the Souls in Purgatory*;

Right wall: *Death of Joseph* and

Left wall: *Dormition of the Virgin*

Artists and Architects

Antonio da [Sangallo the Younger](#) (1484-1546), Italian Renaissance architect from Florence
 Arnaldo [Foschini](#) (1884-1968), Italian architect
 Baldassare [Croce](#) (1558-1628), Italian painter of the late-Mannerist period
 Bernardo [Rossellino](#) (1409-1464), Italian sculptor and architect
 Domenico [Rosselli](#) (1439-1498), Italian sculptor
 Ettore Ballerini (1868-1942), Italian painter
 Giovanni Battista Conti (1878-1970), Italian painter
 Guillermo Ferrant (16th cent.), architect
 Jacopo [Sansovino](#) (1486-1570), Italian sculptor and architect
 Luca [Carmini](#) (1830-1890), Italian architect
 Mariano Pisani (19th cent.), Italian sculptor
 Mino [da Fiesole](#) (c.1429-1484), Italian sculptor of the early Renaissance period
 Paolo [Romano](#) [aka *Paolo Tuccone*] (15th cent), Italian early Renaissance sculptor and goldsmith
 Pellegrino [Aretuse](#) da Modena (ca.1460-1523), Italian painter
 Pietro [Rosselli](#) (1474-1521), Italian architect
 Pietro [Torrignano](#) (1472-1528), Italian sculptor

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated, according to the Diocese (July 2018):

Weekdays 7:00, 8:00, 18:00.

Sundays 8:30, 10:30, 12:00 (winter only), 18:00

Location:

Address: Corso del Rinascimento 27, 00186 Roma

Coordinates: [41° 53' 53.77" N, 12° 28' 25.3" E](#)

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [English Wikipedia page](#)

3. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)

4. [Art-in-Rome web site](#)

5. [Info Roma web site](#)

a. Erwee, Robert; **THE CHURCHES OF ROME, 1527-1870**; Pindar Press; 2013; pp. 190-191

b. Information plaques in the church

Other links

[Mural Paintings from the Herrera Chapel](#)

[Tourist info from 060608 web site](#)

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