

Santi Apostoli



Santi Apostoli is a 15th century minor basilica, parish and titular church on ancient foundations in the rione Trevi (II), next to the Palazzo Colonna. The dedication of the church is to the Twelve Apostles, and the official name is **Santi XII Apostoli**. It is in the care of the Conventual Franciscans. [1]

History

The first church on the site may have been founded in the time of Pope Julius I (R. 337-352), who erected it in the ancient barracks of the Vigiles in about the year 340. There are indications of this in the Liber Pontificalis. However, the first church we have certain knowledge about was founded by Pope Pelagius I (R. 556-561) in commemoration of the victory over Totila and the Ostrogoths and their expulsion by Narses, the general of the Emperor Justinian. It was completed and consecrated by his immediate successor John III (R. 561-574), and dedicated to the Apostles St James and St Philip. This is described in a surviving inscription over the entrance door. The two apostles had a very popular cult in Constantinople at the time, and relics of the two apostles were brought from that city. Material from the nearby abandoned Baths of Constantine was probably used in the construction of the church. [1] [2] [a] [b] [c] [i]

At the end of the 8th century, Pope Adrian I (R. 772-795) in a letter to Charlemagne mentioned that the church was richly decorated with mosaics. [1]

The church was restored by Pope Stephen VI (R. 885-891). At the time the suburbs of the city were lawless and were prey to raiders, so many suburban churches and catacombs were abandoned. The relics of martyrs enshrined in them were collected and brought within the walls of the city to be re-enshrined. This was one of the churches which received a large collection of relics, notably those of SS Chrysanthus and Daria. [1] [b] [c]

It has been speculated that the materials used to build the original church came from the Baths of Constantine, which was located nearby. Six antique columns in the present church came from the original church.

The Basilica was neglected during the 14th century Avignon papacy. In 1348 the church was severely damaged by an earthquake, and had to be abandoned. It was rebuilt in 1417 by Pope Martin V whose family, the Colonnas, owned the surrounding area. It was on this occasion that it was dedicated to the Twelve Apostles. The pope himself lived in a palace nearby, possibly on the site of the present Palazzo Colonna. Afterwards the church was considered almost as the family chapel of the Colonna family. [1] [8] [g]

The church was later embellished by the Byzantine Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1474), but the church did not regain real significance until Pope Pius II (R. 1458-1464) gave it to the *Minori Conventuali* (Black Friars Minor). [b]

The fortunes of the Basilica changed drastically in the mid-15th century when it became the new headquarters of the Franciscan Conventuals. Pope Sixtus IV, elected in 1471, was himself a Franciscan Conventual, and in 1472 appointed his nephew Pietro Riario to be the Cardinal Protector of the order. Unfortunately for Sixtus, this young favorite died only fourteen months later, and in 1474 the Pope turned to another nephew, Giuliano della Rovere, to be the new Cardinal Protector of the Conventuals and of Santi Apostoli. [g]

The façade and two-story entrance portico was rebuilt in at the end of the 15th century by **Baccio Pontelli** on a commission from Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, later Pope Julius II. The latter also built the palazzo which is now the convent, in the same building campaign. The church was rededicated to all the Apostles and consecrated by Pope Sixtus V in 1586, according to the inscription in the portico. [1] [c]

At this time, the church was a typical aisled basilica with probably nine columns in each nave arcade. There was a main apse, but also apses at the ends of the transept in front of the presbyterium. In the main apse was an enormous fresco by **Melozzo da Forlì**, regarded as his masterpiece and painted in 1480. It showed the *Ascension of Christ*, and demonstrated the artist's grasp of the new technique of foreshortening. The main altar had a baldacchino with four porphyry columns, and there were twelve side chapels. [1] [g]

Pontelli's design for the portico was changed when **Carlo Rainaldi** walled up the arches on the upper level, inserted windows in the Baroque style and added the statues of *Christ* and the *Apostles* to the parapet around the year 1665. [1]

A drastic new restoration took place under Pope Clement XI (R. 1700-1721), carried out by a team of architects led by **Carlo Fontana** and his son **Francesco**, with the assistance of **Nicola Michetti**. This amounted to a rebuilding; apart from the portico and the confessorium or crypt in front of the high altar (then inaccessible), the entire edifice was demolished and rebuilt. The (probably damaged) apse fresco by **Melozzo** was tragically removed in 1711 and divided into bits; the central figure of Christ was taken to the Quirinal Palace, portions ended up in the sacristy of St Peter's, and fourteen of the fresco fragments are now in the Vatican Pinacoteca museum. It was consecrated in 1724 to the Santi XII Apostoli by Benedict XIII (R. 1724-1730). [1] [b] [c]

The twelve side-chapels were reduced to seven in the rebuilding. Other altars were later added when the crypt was dug out and refurbished in the 19th century. [1]

The parish was re-established in the care of the Conventual Franciscans in 1745, and remains their responsibility. Their Generalate is adjacent to the church. [1]

Further restoration became necessary when a fire severely damaged the building in 1872. The present façade above the portico was designed by **Giuseppe Valadier** as part of the restoration in 1827. The nobleman, John Turlonia, Duke of Bracciano, who paid for it is commemorated in the inscription on the frieze, which reads: [b]

Iohannes Dux Torlonia frontem perfecit AD MDCCCXXVII.

The restoration in 1873 dug out the ancient crypt, and decked it out to resemble an ancient catacomb. In this restoration, the ancient high altar of the crypt was discovered with the relics of the apostles Philip and James still in place. [1]

Cardinals

Pope John III established the title here in 555. The current Cardinal Priest of the *Titulus XII Apostolorum* is [Angelo Scola](#) (2022). Among the previous Cardinal Priests are Pope Clement XIV, whose tomb by Canova is in the basilica, and [Henry Stuart](#) (1758). [James Stuart](#), the Old Pretender, died in 1766, in the palace at the end of the piazza, and his body lay in state in the church for five days before being buried in the crypt of St. Peter's in 1766. The list is titular cardinals, [here](#). [1] [2] [b]

Exterior

The entrance portico is at an angle to the major axis, making the left hand exterior wall longer than the right hand one. The space at the near end of the left hand aisle that this leaves is filled by the campanile. [1]

Next to the church is the Palazzo Cardinalizio dei Santi XII Apostoli, finished in 1480 for the future Pope Julius II and still owned by the Holy See. It has served as the Franciscan convent, and escaped sequestration by the Italian government in the 19th century because the friars were there as tenants not as owners. It has two cloisters along the side of the church, the far one rectangular and the near one an irregular quadrilateral because the near building range follows the line of the church portico. Beyond the far cloister is a third, the largest, and the range on the other side of it is on the *Via della Pilotta*. [1]

Façade

The façade is unusual, and makes the church look almost like a palace. In this it matches the two palazzi that are its neighbors; the Palazzo Colonna to the right, and the Palazzo dei Apostoli to the left. The three structures are conjoined. [1]

In front of the actual church there is a 15th century Renaissance two-storied portico with nine arches, attributed to **Baccio Pontelli** and financed by Cardinal della Rovere. The upper story used to be open, comprising an extended verandah from which the Pope and other dignitaries could address the crowd. However, this upper story was filled in with Baroque windows c. 1665 by **Carlo Rainaldi**. He also designed the balustrade, with statues of *Christ* and the *Apostles*, along the top of the portico. The bottom story consists of nine large open arches, resembling an ancient aqueduct. The pillars are octagonal (actually, a square chamfered in cross-section), and have degenerate and derivative Composite capitals in a typical Renaissance style. The archivolts of the arches are triply ribbed, as is the architrave of the entablature separating the two stories, which is not supported by the arches but by volute corbels. [1] [c]

The arches of the second story of the portico match those below in size, but have triple moldings with the outermost doubly ribbed. The wide piers between them are Doric, but include Ionic semi-columns which support the outermost moulding. The windows inserted by **Rainaldi** have balustrades, and each is in its own aedicule. This has a pair of Doric pilasters supporting a segmental pediment with a slight ogee curve and recessed within the pilaster capitals. The pediment contains a winged putto's head. [1]

The central window of the nine is more elaborately decorated. The aedicule is slightly coved, the pilaster shafts are embellished with panels and rosettes and the capitals are doubled. The pediment here contains a putto's head with six wings -in other words, representing a seraph rather than an ordinary angel. [1]

The second story entablature is also supported by volute corbels. Unlike the one below, the cornice is supported by a row of small corbels. Above it is an open balustrade, interrupted by the plinths on which the thirteen statues stand. [1]

Finally, the actual nave frontage was added by **Valadier** in a neo-Classical style in 1827. It is rendered in a pale orange, with architectural details in white. The four Corinthian pilasters support a slightly oversized entablature and pediment, with an inscription on the frieze and the cornice and pediment decorated with modillions (little stone brackets). The tympanum of the pediment is blank. The pediment itself is false, as there is nothing behind it (the roof of the nave only reaches the level of the cornice). Also false are the two screen walls either side that look like the ends of the aisles, as

the aisle roofs are lower. [1]

Campanile

The campanile is attached to the left hand side of the nave frontage, tucked into the near end of the left hand aisle. It has five stories above the aisle roofline. The first is blank, while the following three have a large arched opening on each face. The top story has a round opening on each face, and the whole is topped by an ogee cupola in lead. The stories are separated by slightly projecting fillets. The whole composition is painted to match the nave façade. [1]

Convent

The Palazzo dei Apostoli can be entered at No. 51, the entrance of which is immediately to the right of the church portico. It has a Renaissance portal, with a pair of Doric columns supporting a cornice on inverted plinths. Behind the columns are doubletted pilasters in the same style, and the entrance itself has an arched doorcase. You will find the parish office through here. Note the stumpy tower on the street corner. Towers used to be very fashionable among the Roman nobility a century before this one was built, but were very quickly going out of fashion by the late 15th century. [1]

The palazzo is sometimes called the Palazzo della Rovere, after the cardinal who built it. You may notice the carved emblem of the family on the walls, an oak tree. [1]

There is a wall monument to Michelangelo in the second cloister, since he was buried here for a time in 1564 before his body was taken home to Florence. In the first cloister is a bas-relief of the *Nativity* by the school of Arnolfo di Cambio, and an early Christian sarcophagus. You will also find a double inscription in Latin and Greek, which was dictated by Basilios Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472) for his tomb. [1]

Portico (1)

The double portico with nine arches are protected by iron railings. The portico itself contains several tomb slabs and other interesting bits from the mediaeval church. [1]

On the end wall to the right is a 2nd century AD Roman bas-relief depicting an eagle encircled with a crown of oak leaves, emblems of civil and military virtues. It was found in the Forum of Trajan nearby, and donated by Giuliano della Rovere when he was cardinal under his uncle Pope Sixtus IV. (He later became pope himself, Julius II.) The relief is in the right hand side of the portico, and has an inscription added recording the donation:

Tot ruinis servatam Iul[ianus] Car[dinalis] Sixti IIII Pont[ificis] nepos hic statuit

("Julian the cardinal, nephew of Pontifex Sixtus IV set [this] up here, saved from such ruins"). This relief has been enormously influential artistically, and was especially emulated by the Italian Fascists and the Nazis. [1] [c]

Below this bas-relief is an inscription commemorating the consecration of the church by Pope Sixtus V in 1586. Below the inscription is a stone lion by **Pietro Vassalletto**, one of a family of sculptors active in Rome in the 12th century. The plinth it is on bears the ascription. The pair of lions in red marble flanking the doorway are of the same period; one of them is holding his lunch, a lamb. This pair used to support the pilasters of the church's entrance doorcase, and the column bases are visible on their backs. [1]

The fragments of marble transennae or screen-slabs which were probably from the mediaeval schola cantorum, and recall those at Santa Sabina and Santa Maria in Trastevere. [1]

To the left of the entrance is a neo-Classical memorial (a) of 1807 to Giovanni Volpato, executed by **Antonio Canova**. A young woman is depicted sitting in front of a bust of the deceased, crying and wiping her eyes on her dress. She is an allegory for *Friendship in Mourning*. Volpato, countryman, patron and friend of Canova, was a distinguished engraver. He helped obtain for the young sculptor, then in his 24th year, the commission of the monument of Clement XIV, which remains to be seen in the church. [1] [b] [c]

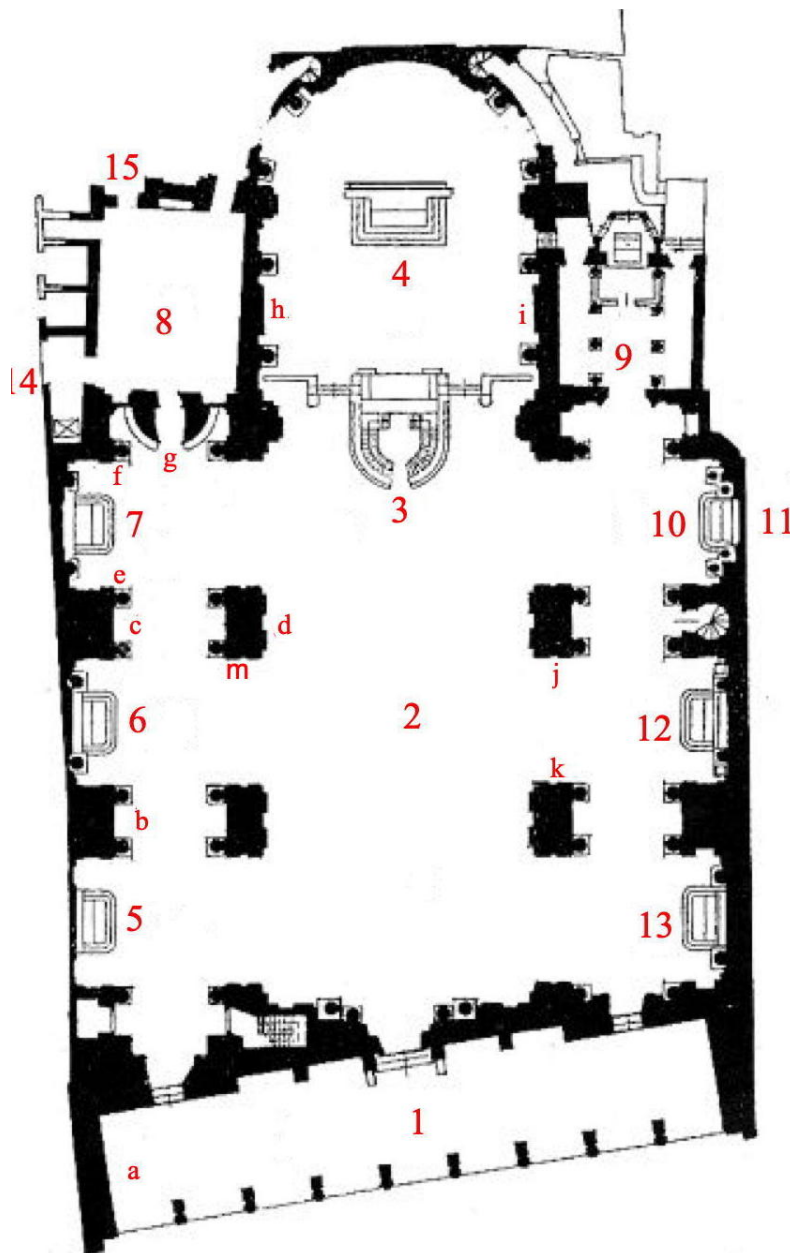
Other tombstones to note are a floor effigy of Gabriele Garra, a relative of Pope Sixtus IV, a much damaged tombstone of the 15th century and another of 1511 of a friar stated to have been from

Bagnocavallo (the rest of his name is worn away). On the wall is a 15th century full-face depiction of a young man of the Colonna family (note the emblematic columns above him), flanked by a pair of cupids with downturned torches. The interesting thing about this is the lack of an inscription, which leads to the speculation that the owner died in disgrace. A tentative identification with Lorenzo Oddone Colonna has been made, who was beheaded for opposing papal authority in 1484. The memorial is by the sculptor **Luigi Capponi**. [1] [4] [e]

The tondi on the wall are by Luigi Roveri, and show several saints, the majority of whom are Franciscan. They are: *Joseph of Cupertino*, *Bonaventure*, *Francis of Assisi*, *Clare*, *Blessed Duns Scotus* and *Louis of France*. [1]

Plan and Layout

The church has a short and wide nave with three bays, and an aisle on each side. The aisles are furnished as side chapels, three on each side, but there are no blocking walls between them. There is a long presbyterium, and an external apse which is three-sided on the outside. To the right of the apse is a large chapel in the form of a miniature basilica, and to the left is the sacristy. [1]



Interior

The interior of the church consists of a lofty arched nave and two aisles, divided by six spacious arcades and sustained by massive pillars, faced with coupled Corinthian pilasters.

The late Baroque interior was designed by **Carlo and Francesco Fontana**, and completed in 1714.

It is impressive, and richly decorated in a basic color scheme of white and gold. It is better to visit on a bright day, so as to be able to see the artworks better. [1] [c]

The nave has three domed chapels on each side, and there is another to the right of the apse. The sacristy occupies the corresponding position on the left. In front of the main altar is the entrance to the confessio or crypt, which contains another altar. [1]

Tucked behind the third nave chapel on the right is the Cappella Bessarione, the funerary chapel of Cardinal Bessarion which was finally opened regularly to the public in 2010 after being lost to view for almost two hundred years. There is an admission charge. [1]

Nave (2)

The 18 meter wide nave has six massive arcade piers, three on each side. Each has a pair of ribbed Corinthian pilasters supporting the entablature over the arcade, and the cornice of the latter has modillions (little brackets). This is all Classically correct, according to the requirements of the Corinthian order. The intradoses of the arches of the arcades have rich stucco decoration and are supported by Composite pilasters, a pair of each side, which look like red marble but may be scagliola. In the nave are 16 Murano chandeliers. [1]

The nave ceiling is barrel-vaulted, with lunette windows inserted. The fresco in the top of vault is by **Giovanni Battista Gaulli**, nicknamed **il Baciccio**, paid for by Card. Giorgio Cornaro. It was painted in 1707, only two years before he died and, although impressive, cannot be ranked with his earlier work at the Gesù. It depicts the *Triumph of the Order of St Francis*. The frescoes of the *Evangelists* and *Angels* were added in the 19th century by **Luigi Fontana**. After the death of Baciccio, the fresco decorations above the nave arch were completed by **Giovanni Odazzi** in 1709. The fresco there depicts the *Rebel Angels Defeated by St Michael*. The use of perspective is very good, and the angels appear to come out of the vault. [1] [4] [7] [c]

On the counterfaçade, stucco statues of *Religion* by **Pierre Le Gros**; of *Prayer* by **Pierrè Etienne Monnot**; of *Charity* by **Giuseppe Napolini**; and of *Faith* is by **Pietro Papaleo**. Between the statues is an inscription commemorating the church restoration by Pope Clement XI and Card. Lorenzo Brancati, who was the titular cardinal at the time. The inscription is dated 1711. Above the inscription is the coat-of-arms of Pope Clement XI. [4]

On the first pier of the nave on the right-hand side is the burial place of the heart of Maria Clementina Sobieska (j), wife of James Francis Edward Stuart (better known as the "Old Pretender"). Her actual tomb is at San Pietro in Vatican. Her monument here is by **Filippo della Valle** in 1737. Her husband used to pray here every morning, until he himself died in 1766 and was laid in state here, before being buried with his wife at St Peter's. They used to live at the Palazzo Balestra opposite, so this was their parish church. The monument itself is rather fun, showing putti frolicking in clouds and drapery with a sunburst, all in white marble set on an urn in verde antico.

[1] [4]

On the second pillar on the left-hand side is the monument (l) to Cardinal Bessarion (1403-72), which is a 16th century relief portrait of him in a red marble tondo placed over a long epitaph. The one he composed for himself is in the second cloister of the convent. His mortal remains were transferred to this church as late as 1957. He had been born at Trebizond in what is now Turkey, although then a small independent empire, and went on to become a Basilian monk and a Greek Orthodox bishop in the Byzantine Empire. After the Council of Florence he was reconciled to the Catholic Church, and went on to be one of the most erudite Renaissance scholars in Italy as well as an archbishop and cardinal. [1] [2]

The nave floor, of black and white marble with an angular geometric design, is late 19th century. The pulpit (d) was executed by **Sebastiano Cipriani**, 1736. [1] [4]

Confessio (3)

The crypt, located before the main altar, was built by **Luca Carimini** from 1869 to 1871 during excavations which uncovered the original crypt. The remains of this show it to have been at a slight

angle to the major axis of the present church, and to have had a U-shaped plan. At the nave end was a small aisled hall, with three pillars on each side. At the curved end were two staircases leading down from the main church, and wrapped round the curve was an ambulatory or passage through which pilgrims could file to venerate the shrine of the two apostles which was in a little cubicle halfway along. [1] [h]

During the excavation, the relics of St Philip and St James the Less were rediscovered in their original 6th century altar-shrine. This was a low stone plinth on a square plan, topped by a large slab which had a Greek cross carved in relief on it. Raising this slab revealed a small square cavity in which the relics were found; they were not left in situ, but moved to a new shrine after the crypt was reconstructed (not entirely to its original plan). Architectural remains from the earlier layout are visible. [1] [d]

From the nave two staircases curve down under an arch bearing an inscription in golden mosaic:

Corpora sanctorum in pace sepulta sunt, et vivent nomina eorum in aeternum.

("The bodies of the saints rest in peace, and their names live forever.")

At the bottom, there is a semi-circular area paved in polychrome marble, surrounded by four Doric columns beyond which is the present ambulatory. Off the latter are three arched niches.

The central niche is closed behind a glass screen. In it there is a small altar, over which is a screened opening to another small chamber, which contains the original shrine-altar in which the apostles' relics were found, although it has been much restored and now has an ancient relief of a bucolic harvest scene on the front.

The arched chamber to the left is a tomb chamber. The tomb of Raffaele della Rovere (died 1477), brother of Pope Sixtus IV and father of Pope Julius II, is on the right side of the chamber. It was designed by **Andrea Bregno**. The tomb was originally in the upper church. Of the original monument nothing remains but the recumbent figure on the bier, in a coffered recess, with attendant putti holding the Della Rovere arms. Also here is the tomb of Cardinal Tommaso Riario-Sforza (d. 1857). Also in this chamber the tombs of Alessandro and Raffaele Riario are to be found.

The arched chamber to the right was never completed, and the rough cut rock is closed by an iron gate. [1] [h]

The relics of the apostles are now kept in a reliquary of red and green marble underneath an altar in a deep barrel-vaulted niche at the other end of the crypt. [1]

In the middle of the crypt is a small well covered with a metal mesh, the so-called "well of the martyrs", with the relics of Sts. Chrysanthus, Daria, Protus and Hyacinth as well as other martyrs.

[1] [e]

The wall frescoes are reproductions of catacomb paintings, apparently inspired by those to be found in the Catacombs of Domitilla, and executed 1876-1877. This is because, as well as the original relics of the apostles, other saints' relics were preserved here when they were taken from the catacombs in the 9th century to protect them from invaders. An inscription explains that one of those who helped move these relics was Pope Stephen IV, who in 886 walked barefoot from the catacombs to the church carrying them on his shoulders. Unfortunately, the damp has been damaging these frescoes.

[1]

There is a statue of *St Eugenia* by **Giuseppe Peroni**, and one of *St Claudia* (the mother of St Linus, the successor to St Peter as pope) by **Domenico Guidi**. [1]

You may visit the crypt if the gates are open. If there is a friar or custodian on duty in the church, ask him or her to turn on the lights if they are not already on, as it is quite dark down there. [1]

Sanctuary (4)

The very large presbytery originally belonged to the Riario family, who had placed five tombs of family members there (two now remain and two others have been placed in the crypt). [h]

The high altar is placed against the wall of the apse, and does not have a canopy. The previous apse was decorated with the famous fresco executed by Melozzo da Forlì in the 15th century, and if you wish to see the surviving fragments you have to go to both the Quirinal Palace and the Vatican Museums. The fresco was removed, because of moisture damage. In its place, the present apse has

a large gilded Baroque glory covered in frolicking putti, inserted into a parabolic niche in the conch of the apse. The round-headed 18th century altarpiece is possibly the largest painting on canvas in Rome, measuring 14 meters by 6.5 meters. It is by **Domenico Maria Muratori**, and depicts the *Martyrdoms of the Apostles Philip and James the Less*. It was commissioned by Archbishop Jerome Crispi through Cardinal Giuseppe Renato Imperiali (the patron of the painter), and painted between 1713-1717. [1] [4]

To each side of this is a rectangular window inserted into lunettes of the same form. The windows show the symbol of the Franciscans, and the monogram of the Virgin Mary. [1] [h]

The triumphal arch of the sanctuary is topped by a pair of stucco angels bearing the shield of the Franciscan order, which has two crossed arms with nail-holes in the palms. One is Christ's, the other belongs to St Francis after he received the stigmata. This stucco work is by **Luigi Fontana**, 1875. Above the triumphal arch of the apse is a fresco of 1709 by **Giovanni Odazzi**, depicting the *Rebel Angels Defeated by St Michael*. Again the use of perspective is excellent, and the angels about to become demons really look as if they're falling out of heaven. [1] [4]

On either side of the altar are two pairs of red marble Composite columns that supports statues. The sanctuary in front of the apse has a pair of columns in the same style on either side, which support two cantoria. These look like opera boxes, and are for solo singers or small choirs. [1]

To the left is a superb and ornate Renaissance monument (h) to Pietro Cardinal Riario, by the school of **Andrea Bregno** and possibly designed by **Bregno** himself. The relief panel above the cardinal's reclining effigy, showing him and his brother being presented to *Our Lady by SS Peter and Paul*, is by **Mino da Fiesole** (1474). [1] [e] [h]

To the right of the sanctuary (i) are the tombs of Count Anseduno Giraud de Caprières, Knight of France (d. 1506) of the retinue of Charles VIII and married to the niece of Julius II. Also, the Monument of Raffaele Cardinal Riario (died 1474), tentatively attributed to **Michelangelo** (the cardinal had been a famous collector and patron in Renaissance Rome, and the patron of Michelangelo). He is actually buried in the crypt. [1] [e] [h] [i]

Side Chapels

The side chapels are described in a clockwise order, starting with the near left hand side.

Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows (5)

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, or the Pietà. The altarpiece showing the *Deposition* is by **Francesco Manno**, 1807. He supervised the re-fitting of the chapel for the Muti Papazzurri family in that year; this noble clan is famous for its patronage of the church of Santa Maria dell'Archetto nearby. On the altar of this chapel is a picture of *St Joseph with the Christ Child*, 1924 by **Antonio Cianci**, a priest-artist. The angels on the sides were sculpted by **Andrea Bergondi**. A small room past the chapel is used as a baptistery, with a black marble font, and protected by a cast iron gate. The chapel features modern balustrades made with bare material.

[1] [4] (9) [h]

Located here is a fine neo-Renaissance monument (b) to Giuseppe and Clara Vannutelli, 1861 by **Vincenzo Luccardi**. [1]

Chapel of St Joseph of Cupertino (6)

The chapel, under the patronage of the Mancini family, was dedicated to St. Joseph of Cupertino in 1753, when the saint was beatified by Benedict XIV. On this occasion the chapel was renovated by **Michelangelo Simonetti** in 1777. [1] [9]

The two ribbed Corinthian altar columns of verde antico, a rare green marble, are reputed to be the largest known in that type of stone. The chapel has an altarpiece from 1777 by **Giuseppe Cades**. It shows the *The saint on the altar Levitating in Ecstasy* during a Mass celebrated in Assisi in 1651. This

event provoked the conversion to Catholicism of the Lutheran Duke Giovanni Federico of Saxony. The eight *Beatitudes* and the four *Cardinal Virtues* by **Luigi Fontana** (1865) are frescoed in the small dome and pendentives. [1] [4] [c]

On the nave pier is a sixteenth-century sculpted medallion (**m**), the work of an unknown artist, with the profile portrait of Cardinal Bessarione. [1] [9]

Between this chapel and the next is a memorial (**c**) to Filippo III Colonna and his wife Caterina Aloysia, 1822 by **Francesco Pozzi**. Note that Filippo gets a cameo portrait, but his wife does not. The sculpture of a woman with twin babies on top is of *Charity*. Her naked foot on display is not Classical, because the big toe is longer than the second one; this indicates that the sculptor executed the work from life (at least, as regards the woman herself). [1]

Chapel of St Francis (**7**)

The chapel, dedicated to St Francis, has been under the patronage of the Colonna family since 1464. Originally, there had been paintings by Durante Alberti, Andrea Lilio and Giovanni Battista Ricci, which were destroyed during the restructuring works of 1726 and completed by Luigi Fontana in 1865. On the occasion, the altar with purple marble columns was built, and **Giuseppe Bartolomeo Chiari** was called upon to paint the altarpiece with *The Ecstasy of St Francis*. The small cupola was frescoed with allegorical figures by **Luigi Fontana** (1865). [h]

On the left wall is the monument and urn with the precordia of Cardinal Carlo Colonna (**e**) (1753), attributed to **Giovanni Battista Grossi**. On the right wall is the tomb (**f**) of Maria Lucrezia Rospigliosi Salviati (1670-1733), by **Bernardino Ludovisi**. The monument is especially interesting; one of **Ludovisi's** trade-mark angels with ostrich-feather wings is peering into a sarcophagus, which contains a heap of bones with a skull on top. Buried beneath the pavement at the entrance of the chapel is Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, in 1998. Also in the floor is the tombstone for Cardinal Markantonio Colonna (d. 1793). [1] [6]

Tomb monument of Pope Clement XIV (**g**)

At the extremity of the aisle is the door of the sacristy, over which rises the superb monument of Pope Clement XIV (R. 1769-1774), commissioned by the Frati Minori Conventuali. The pope's Neo-Classical tomb is by **Antonio Canova**, and was executed in 1784, when the artist was 27 years old. This was the first major work Canova accomplished in Rome, and it established his international reputation. It shows the pope seated on a throne on a granite plinth in the act of giving a blessing, and below him is a Classical sarcophagus on lions' feet. A young woman in a veil, *Temperance*, is sitting miserably near a lamb on the right. Another one with her hair in a fillet, *Clemency*, has thrown herself onto the sarcophagus from the left. The body of the pontiff is buried in a niche on the left, indicated by the plaque and the lamp. [1] [4] [9] [c] [h]

Sacristy (**8**)

The sacristy is to the left of the sanctuary, and is a large room. It was restored and decorated at the expense of Prince Alessandro Torlonia in 1883, and the frescoes on the walls and ceiling are by **Domenico Bruschi**. Apart from portraits of the popes involved in restorations of the church, the subjects depicted are the *Baptism of Constantine*, the *Consecration of the Church by Pope Sixtus V* and allegorical figures of *Peace*, *Justice*, *Liberality* and *Religion*. [1] [4]

The ceiling vault has a fresco by **Sebastiano Ricci**, 1701 depicting the *Ascension of Christ*, commissioned by the Father General of the Conventual Minor Friars, Vincenzo Coronelli. The wardrobe cabinets are by **Luigi Fontana** from 1697. [1] [4]

In a corridor on the left is a monument to mark the spot where Michelangelo was temporarily buried, after his death in 1564, before being taken to Florence. He had lived in the parish of Santi Apostoli during his period in Rome. [b]

Chapel of the Crucifixion (**9**)

The Chapel of the Crucifixion is to the right of the presbyterium, and is in the style of a miniature basilica with a nave, aisles and sanctuary. The eight spirally fluted columns of lesbian marble, dating

from the 4th century AD. and found during the eighteenth-century demolition of the tribune. [1] [9]

This chapel was founded by one Faustina Inquilina, but was re-fitted by **Sebastiano Cipriani** in 1724. There was another re-fit under **Luca Carimini** in 1858, when the Marchese Sigismondo Giustiniani took over the patronage. [1] [4]

In the 'nave and aisles' section of the chapel are wall frescoes by **Domenico Bruschi** from 1875. The walls are frescoed to look like tapestries hanging on the walls. Above this are a series of scenes depicting the *life of St Francis*. At the end of each 'aisle' is a door, with a modern stained glass window above it. On the pilasters between the 'nave' and 'sanctuary' are frescoes showing *St Francis* and *St Anthony of Padua*. [1] [h]

The 'sanctuary' section of the chapel has large opaque windows on three sides. Over the altar hangs a large sculpture of the *Crucified Christ*. In the ribbed semi-dome, painted blue with small gold stars, are round and semi-circular stained glass windows.

Chapel of St Anthony of Padua (10)

The third chapel on the right is dedicated to St Anthony of Padua, and is the Odescalchi family chapel (their palazzo is on the other side of the piazza). Their coat-of-arms is inserted in polychrome marble mosaic in the floor; the strange pointed things it contains are incense burners, the family emblem. [1]

The altar is a spectacular Baroque composition in verde antico and alabaster, with four ribbed marble Corinthian columns of red breccia, and a fantastically curved pediment. The altarpiece showing *St. Anthony of Padua in prayer before the baby Jesus* is by **Benedetto Luti** (1723). The picture on the altar itself is of *St Maximilian Kolbe*, and is by **Angelo Liberati**, 1965. In front of the chapel are four large beautiful columns of violet breccia with corresponding pilasters, sustaining a cupola, the interior and spandrels of which are painted by **Giuseppe Nicola Nasini**. In the cupola is *The Glory of St Anthony* (first half 18th century), and in the spandrels, *The Virtues*. [1] [4] [c] [h]

The appearance of this chapel are mostly the result of a re-fitting by **Ludovico Rusconi Sassi**, under the patronage of Baldassarre Erba Odescalchi and completed in 1722. Before that, it had been rebuilt according to a design by **Carlo Rainaldi** in 1649. [1] [h]

Cardinal Agostino Casaroli is buried beneath the pavement at the entrance of the chapel. [6]

Bessarion Chapel (11)

The funerary chapel of Cardinal Basilios Bessarion is behind the Odescalchi Chapel, the building of which left it walled off and inaccessible until 2005. The tomb of Cardinal Bessarion was removed from the church, in 1702, to the cloisters of the adjoining convent. [b]

There is an entrance charge to get in. The dedication was to Our Lady and Sts Michael, John the Baptist and Eugenia. [1] [5]

It was completed and frescoed in 1483, but was apparently derelict and its frescoes whitewashed when the Odescalchi Chapel was built within it in between 1719 and 1723. Rather than demolishing the existing structure, the builders of the latter simply constructed it within the older chapel's walls and so left a very tight space between the new walls and the old. Remarkably, the arrangement was then completely forgotten about until restoration work on the adjacent Palazzo Colonna in 1959.

[1] [5]

The importance of the discovery was immediately understood, but restoration work only started in 1989 and continued until 2005. Since the lower part of the fresco cycle had been destroyed, a metal walkway was installed to allow visitors to examine the surviving upper part. However, opening times were irregular until 2010, when it is finally hoped to allow visiting on a regular basis. [1] [5]

The frescoes were executed by **Antoniazio Romano** with the help of **Mino da Fiesole** (Ref link 1) or **Melozzo da Forlì** (Ref link 5), and even in their damaged state are spectacularly colorful and impressively detailed. You will already have seen Romano's icon of *The Madonna* on the altar of the

Chapel of St Bonaventure; it originally belonged here, and the place where it used to be in the lower register now has a copy. To either side of this are two mediocre portraits of *SS Eugenia* and *Claudia*. It is known from early descriptions that there used to be a fresco cycle here depicting scenes from the life of John the Baptist, and that this was destroyed by flooding and replaced by these portraits perhaps in the early 17th century. [1] [5]

The middle register of the frescoes shows two scenes from stories of legendary apparitions of St Michael. The left hand one concerns the foundation legend of the shrine at Monte Gargano, whereby the saint appeared in 490 to the Bishop of Siponto (the city appears in the fresco) to ask that the shrine be founded in a cave on the mountain. The depiction here shows the saint appearing as a bull in the sacred cave, with archers shooting at it only to have their arrows bounce off. [1] [5]

The right hand one concerns the *Apparition of St Michael to St Aubert of Avranches*, bishop of that city in France in the 8th century. This allegedly led him to found the famous shrine and monastery on the island of Mont Saint Michel, shown in the background. The figures in the fresco are standing on a beach, and include Basilian monks and Franciscan friars (Bessarion was one of the former). The richly dressed saintly archbishop allegedly has the features of King Louis XI of France, whom Bessarion had been trying to interest in a crusade against the Ottomans and who apparently was so insulting to the proposal that Bessarion's death was hastened in shock. To his left are two figures, one in purple with part of his face missing and one in vermillion. These are cardinals of the della Rovere family; the former is the future Pope Julius II, and the latter the future Pope Sixtus IV. [1]

The upper register of the frescoes consists of a host of angels adoring *Christ in Majesty*; unfortunately, only the lower edge of Christ's robe survives. [1] [5]

At the back of the chapel is an opening, through which you can see a porphyry urn which allegedly contains the relics of SS Eugenia and Claudia. They were among those brought from the Catacomb of Apronian on the Via Latina in the 9th century. [1]

Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (12)

The second chapel on the right was erected in 1858 by **Luigi Gabet**, on the commissioned by the banker A. Chiaveri, after the demolition of the Baroque chapel dedicated to St Cyprian which had been fitted out by **Sebastiano Cipriani** in 1721. Gabet was responsible for much architectural work in Rome in the mid 19th century. [1] [10]

The original altarpiece is by **Francesco Coghetti** from 1862. It had been sold, but the painting was relocated and purchased by the Italian government and returned (today it is in the upper corridor of the convent). The present altarpiece is by **Corrado Giaquinto**. The pair of flanking marble angels are by **Luigi Roveri** (holding the Ark of the Covenant-left) and **Domenico Morani** (right). The painting on the altar of the *Sacred Heart* is by **Antonio Ciani** (1924). [1] [4] [9] [b]

In the floor is a tomb slab for Maria Magdalena Vela (1732), which was restored by a descendent, M. P. Floridi in 1985.

Here is a memorial (k) to Vincenzo Valentini (d.1842). He was a banker who restored several Roman palazzi, including the Palazzo Odescalchi near the church and the Palazzo Valentini (now named after him) near the Piazza Venezia. Also here is an epigraph for Gioacchino Valentini (d. 1864).

[1] [b]

Affixed to one of the large pillars opposite is a monument (j) to Maria Clementina Sobieski, 1737 by **Filippo della Valle**. She is actually buried in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. On a porphyry slab beneath the urn is the inscription: [1] [c]

Hic Clementinae remanent praecordia, nam cor caelestis fuit ne superesset amor

(Here the heart of Clementine remains, for the heart was heavenly so that love would not survive)

Chapel of St Bonaventure (13)

The first chapel on the right-hand side of the nave is dedicated to St Bonaventure. It is also known as the Mendosi Chapel. This chapel was reconstructed in 1649 by **Carlo Rainaldi**, then restored in the 18th century by **Michelangelo Simonetti**. Here on the altar is a 15th century *Madonna and Child*

(also known as the *Madonna of Constantinople*) by Antoniazio Romano, which was relocated from the Chapel Bessarion. It is a beautiful work, and interesting as a survival of a derivative Byzantine style in Rome at this late period. The altarpiece behind is by Niccolò Lapiccola, and shows *Our Lady, St Bonaventure and Blessed Andrew Conti* (1775), who was a late 13th century Franciscan hermit from Anagni. On the sides of the chapel are allegorical statues by Bartolomeo Cavaceppi representing *Faith* (with the chalice) and *Divine Wisdom* (with the open book). Before it are four beautiful columns of cottanello, sustaining a cupola gilt in small polygonal coffers. [1] [4] [c] [f] [h]

Relics:

St James
St Philip
SS Eugenia and Claudia
P. Saint Marcellinus (296- 304)

Burials:

Pope Clement XIV {Lorenzo GANGANELLI, O.F.M. Conv., (1705-1774)}

Buried in marble mausoleum sculpted by Antonio Canova

Prospero Cardinal COLONNA, (ca. 1410-1463) {also see [here](#)}

Basilios Cardinal BESSARION (1403-1472) {also see [here](#) and [here](#)}

Pietro Cardinal RIARIO, O.F.M.Conv., (1445-1474) {also see [here](#)}

Paolo Cardinal FREGOSO, (1428-1498) {also see [here](#)}

three times doge of Genoa

Giovanni Cardinal COLONNA, (1456-1508)

Raffaele Cardinal SANSONI RIARIO, (1460-1521) {also see [here](#)}

Gregorio Cardinal CORTESE, O.S.B., (1483-1548) {also see [here](#)}

Lorenzo Cardinal BRANCATI, O.F.M.Conv., (1612-1693) {also see [here](#)}

Giuseppe Cardinal VALLEMANI, (1648-1725)

Carlo Cardinal COLONNA, (1665-1739) {also see [here](#)}

Viscera only, primary burial in the patriarchal Lateran basilica

Domenico Cardinal RIVIERA, (1671-1752)

Buried in the tomb that he had built for himself. When the basilica was renovated in the last quarter of the 19th century, the simple inscription that had been placed on his tomb was replaced by a more elegant and detailed one composed by Canon Domenico Mariangeli.

Antonio Maria Cardinal ERBA-ODESCALCHI, (1712-1762)

Great-grandnephew of Pope Innocent XI Odescalchi

Giuseppe Cardinal SPINELLI, (1694-1763) {also see [here](#)}

Carlo Alberto Cardinal GUIDOBONO CAVALCHINI, (1683-1774) {also see [here](#)}

Francisco Cardinal de SOLÍS FOLCH DE CARDONA, (1713-1775)

Marcantonio Cardinal COLONNA, *iunior*, (1724-1793) {also see [here](#)}

Tommaso Cardinal RIARIO SFORZA, (1782-1857) {also see [here](#)}

Agostino Cardinal CASAROLI, (1914-1998) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the chapel of S. Antonio di Padua

Clementina Sobieska (heart only)

<wife of the Old Pretender, James III Stuart>

Raffaele della Rovere (d. 1477)

<brother of Pope Sixtus IV and father of Pope Julius II>

Count Giraud de Caprières (d. 1505)

Sigismonda Gherardino della Molza (d. 1527)

<Mother of Cardinal CORTESE>

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643)

<Composer, Organist>

Filippo Eustachio da Macerata

<Physican>

<in cloisters>

Vincenzo Valentini (d. 1842)

<Roman banker>

Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Bergondi](#) (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Andrea [Bregno](#) (1418-1506), Italian sculptor and architect of the Early Renaissance
Angelo [Liberati](#) (b. 1946), Italian painter
Antoniazio [Romano](#) (1430?-1512?), Italian Early Renaissance painter (also see [here](#))
Antonio [Canova](#) (1757-1822), Italian Neoclassical sculptor (also see [here](#))
Antonio Cianci (1891-1976), Italian Franciscan painter
Baccio [Pontelli](#) (c.1450-1492), Italian architect from Florence
Bartolomeo [Cavaceppi](#) (1716-1799), Italian sculptor
Bernardino [Ludovisi](#) (1694-1749), Italian sculptor
Benedetto [Luti](#) (1666-1724), Italian painter
Carlo [Fontana](#) (1634-1714), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period
Carlo [Rainaldi](#) (1611-1691), Italian architect of the Baroque period (also see [here](#))
Corrado [Giaquinto](#) (1703-1765), Italian painter of the Rococo period (also see [here](#))
Domenico [Bruschi](#) (1840-1910), Italian painter
Domenico [Guidi](#) (1625-1701), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period. (also see [here](#))
Domenico Maria [Muratori](#) (1661-1744), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Domenico [Morani](#) (1824-1870), Italian painter and sculptor
Filippo [della Valle](#) (1698-1768), Italian late-Baroque or early Neoclassic sculptor
Francesco [Fontana](#) (1668-1708), Italian architect
Francesco [Coghetti](#) (1804-1875), Italian painter
Francesco [Manno](#) (1754-1831), Italian painter and architect
Francesco [Pozzi](#) (19th cent), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Battista [Gauli](#) [aka *il Baciccio*] (1639-1709), Italian painter of the High Baroque
Giovanni Battista [Grossi](#) (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giovanni [Odazzi](#) (1663-1731), Italian painter and etcher of the Baroque period
Giuseppe Bartolomeo [Chiari](#) (1654-1727), Italian painter of the late-Baroque
Giuseppe [Cades](#) (1750-1799), Italian painter
Giuseppe [Napolini](#) (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe Nicola [Nasini](#) (1657-1736), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Giuseppe [Peroni](#) (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe [Valadier](#) (1762-1839), Italian architect and designer, sculptor, urban planner and archeologist, a chief exponent of Neoclassicism in Italy
Luca [Carimini](#) (1830-1890), Italian architect & sculptor
Ludovico Rusconi [Sassi](#) (1678-1736), Italian architect of the Rococo period
Luigi [Capponi](#) (1445-1515), Italian sculptor
Luigi Fontana (17th cent), Italian cabinet-maker
Luigi [Fontana](#) (1827-1908), Italian sculptor, painter, stuccoes and architect
Luigi [Gabet](#) (1823-1879), Italian architect and engineer
Luigi Roveri (19th cent), Italian sculptor
Melozzo [da Forlì](#) (1438-1494), Italian Renaissance painter (also see [here](#))
Michelangelo di Lodovico [Buonarroti](#) Simoni (1475-1564), Italian sculptor, painter, architect, poet, and engineer of the High Renaissance who exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western art (also see [here](#))
Michelangelo [Simonetti](#) (1724-1787), Italian Neo-Classical architect
Mino [da Fiesole](#) (c.1429-1484), Italian sculptor of the early Renaissance period
Niccolò [Lapiccola](#) (1730-1790), Italian painter
Nicola [Michetti](#) (1675-1758), Italian architect of the late Baroque
Pierre-Étienne [Monnot](#) (1657-1733), French sculptor in a late-Baroque period
Pierre [Le Gros](#) the Younger (1666-1719), French sculptor from Paris
Pietro Francesco Papaleo (ca. 1642-1718), Italian sculptor
Pietro [Lucatelli](#) (1630-1690), Italian Baroque painter
Pietro [Vassalletto](#) (1154-1186), Italian sculptor and architect
Sebastiano [Cipriano](#) [Cipriani] (1660-1740), Italian architect
Sebastiano [Ricci](#) (1659-1734), Italian painter of the late Baroque school of Venice
Vincenzo [Luccardi](#) (1808-1876) Italian sculptor

Location:

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Opening time

Open 07:00am-12:00pm 04:00pm-07:10pm

Bessarion Chapel, Open Mon – Sat 9am-12 noon. Four euros.

Masses:

Weekdays:07:30am-08:00am-09:00am-06:30pm

Holidays:07:30am-09:00am-10:30am-12:00pm-06:30pm

Days before a holiday:06:30pm

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[Rinaldi's photo gallery](#)