

# Sant'Antonio da Padova a Via Merulana



**Sant'Antonio da Padova in Via Merulana** (also known as **Sant'Antonio al Laterano**) is a 19<sup>th</sup> century conventual and titular minor basilica of the Franciscan Friars Minor. The dedication is to Anthony of Padua. [1]

## History

The main Franciscan (OFM) convent in Rome used to be attached to the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Campodoglio, and overlooked the Foro Traiano. The convent buildings were historic, basically mediaeval in construction with a small two-storey cloister. They were completely demolished to clear the site for the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in 1885. [1] [4]

Meanwhile, the Franciscan Friars Minor (Capuchins) built a new Generalate (headquarters of the order) on the Via Merulana. The laying ceremony of the foundation stone took place on April 16, 1884 in the presence of the Minister General Bernardino da Portogruaro (1822 - 1895); it was consecrated on December 4, 1887 by the cardinal vicar Lucido Maria Parocchi, together with eight other Franciscan bishops. [5]

The site was originally part of the gardens of the Villa Giustiniani, and was substantial. It is a whole city block. Here also is the seminary for the entire order, the Collegio di Sant'Antonio da Padova, and the Pontificia Università Antonianum. [1] [4]

The architect of the complex of the convent with its church was **Luca Carimini**. The interior frescoes and paintwork was by one of the friars, **Bonaventura Loffredo da Alghero**, who finished the work in 1890. Unfortunately it did not meet with universal approval, and the church's website mentions that the use of blue especially was considered "strident". [1]

In 1931 Pope Iius XI elevated the church to the dignity of a minor basilica on the seventh centenary of the death of St Anthony. [1] [2]

The Generalate of the order moved to Santa Maria Mediatrix in 1950, leaving this church as the main center of devotion to St Anthony of Padua in the city. In the same year the interior was restored, which meant the loss of much of Loffredo's paintwork. There was another re-ordering in

1960, when the choir was enlarged. [1]

Very unusually for a modern church that is not parochial, it was given a cardinalate title in 1960. [1]

The church website uses the name Sant'Antonio al Laterano. This is because of a puzzling brief reference in the biography of St Francis of Assisi by St Bonaventure, where the saint and his early companions were at a church or chapel of St Anthony near the Lateran. This is the only historic evidence for such a church in the locality at the start of the 13th century (Sant'Antonio Abate all'Esquilino was founded later). However, the Diocese prefers the name Sant'Antonio da Padova in Via Merulana. [1]

## Exterior

Carimini provided a long, narrow nave with aisles and a five-sided apse for his neo-Romanesque design. The fabric is in red brick with white stone detailing. The church has an ancillary convent building attached on each side, and sits on a crypt so that it is well above street level. [1]

### Façade

The façade of the basilica, already completed in 1886, is built in exposed brick with architectural elements in travertine and rises on a high double ramp staircase that leads to a large five-arched portico, in the style of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger. [5]

The staircases have iron railings, which look late 20<sup>th</sup> century. [1]

The projecting portico is entered by five archways, and these are separated by six Doric columns with high plinths. They support an entablature with the frieze decorated with Eucharistic symbols alternated with triglyphs, and with a projecting cornice. The outer corners of this are supported by a pair of square pilasters in the same style. The portico ceiling is vaulted, and the roof is pitched and tiled. [1]

There are three portals leading to the church from the portico, two lateral with a tympanum and a central one, flanked by pilasters with phytomorphic decorations and cantilever capitals. Above a round arch, decorated with acroteri with palmettes and rosettes. Inside the lunette is a base relief of *Saint Anthony of Padua in glory among angels*. [5]

On the façade above the portico is a row of five arched windows with projecting molded archivolts resting on corbels, and above these is a row of six tondi containing relief sculptures of the symbols of the *Evangelists*, the *Lamb of God* and the *Sacred Heart*. Then there is a molded cornice, running from one aisle side roofline to the other. The aisle end rooflines are sloping, and the cornice is turned back to run along these. The nave frontage above the aisles has a circular recessed window flanked by a pair of arched ones, and finally the whole composition is crowned by a blank triangular pediment with a stone Greek cross on the pinnacle. Below the cornice of the pediment is a dedicatory inscription: [1]

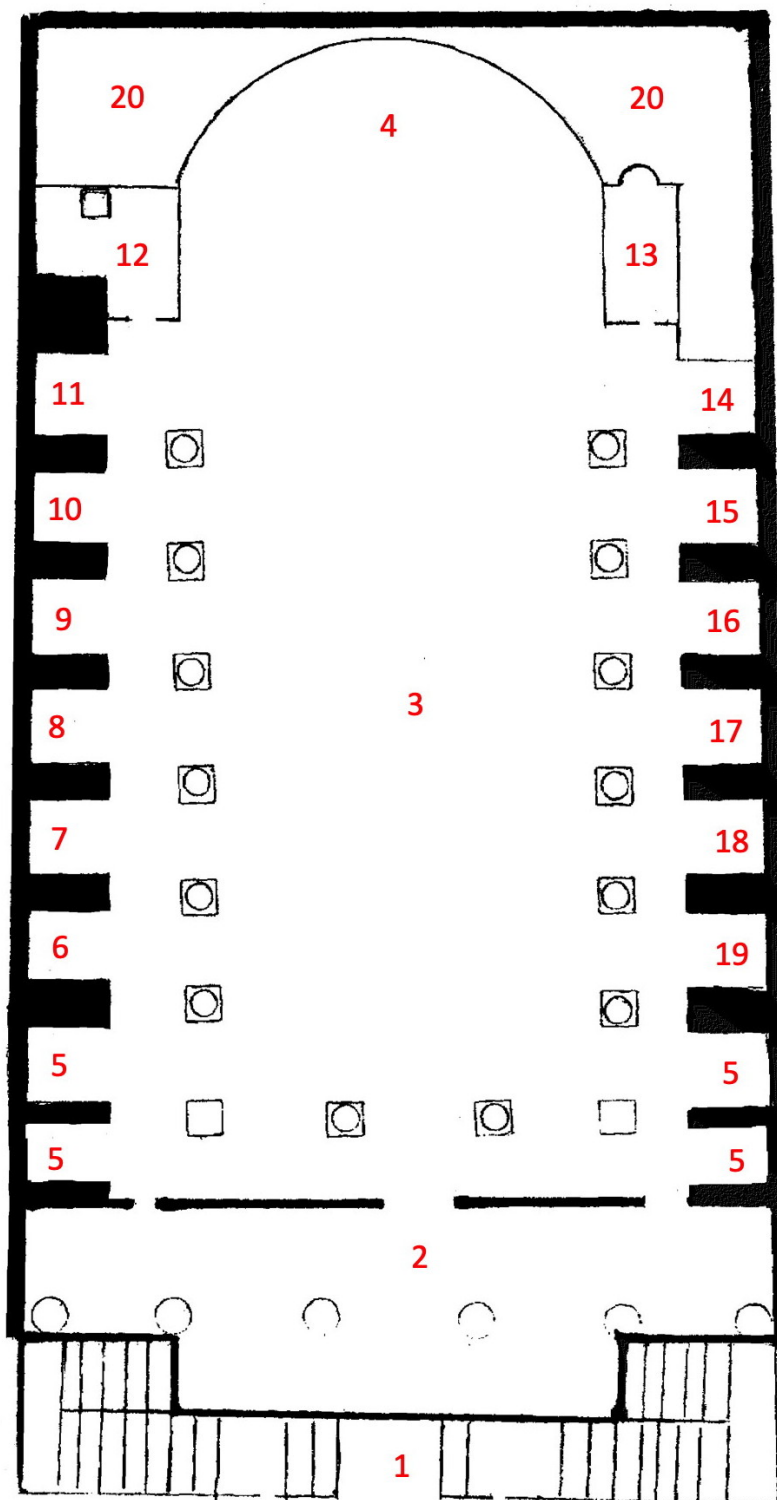
SS Trinitate in memoriam S. Antonii, AD MDCCCLXXXVI.

A bronze statue of *St Anthony of Padua holding the Christ Child* is placed in the middle arch of the portico. [1] [3]

### Campanile and spire

There is a little campanile attached to the far end of the left hand aisle, the cubical bellchamber of which is perched at the nave roofline. It has a double arched soundhole on each side, invisible from the street. Above this is an octagonal storey, with an arch on each face having a stone archivolt and with two little tondi above. There is a projecting dentillate cornice, and above this a segmental tympanum on each face. Then comes perhaps the most interesting thing about the exterior of the church, a stumpy spire in polychrome tilework mostly in gold but with purple and green zig-zags. There is a ball finial. [1]

## Plan



## Interior

The spectacular interior has a seven-bay nave with aisles, and then a presbyterium with a high apse. There are five side chapels in each aisle. The aisles are separated by seven monolithic Corinthian columns of grey Baveno granite on each side, which support entablatures instead of arcades. Above the aisles are galleries, which have matching Ionic granite columns. This makes the nave roof very high. The upper gallery is for the use of the friars. The nave is covered with the paneled and coffered wooded roof, with the characteristic Franciscan trusses, nicely decorated in 1898, by **Alessandro Morani**. The central nave walls above the colonnades have eight round-headed stained glass windows on each side. [1] [2] [4]

The polychrome marble pulpit on the left hand side of the nave is of 1939, and is by the firm of Gazzeri di Querceta who also did the attractive bas-relief Stations of the Cross in the aisles. The

pulpit has bas-relief panels on the sides. The nave floor is of marble, in a geometric pattern of circles and squares. [1]

### Presbyterium

The main altar used to have a marble balustrade in front of it, but this was removed in 1960 when the altar was moved forward to make room for more choir stalls. It has a very large slab, and a relief carving of the *Last Supper* as a frontal. The latter is a work by **Caramini** himself. [1]

The floor of the sanctuary has the same pattern as the nave except the center of the circle contains the symbol of the Franciscan Order.

Behind the altar is the choir, and above the stalls is a fresco of the *Apotheosis of the Saints of the Franciscan Order*, the surviving work by **Loffredo**. Below the fresco are numerous small portraits of Franciscan Saints. Above the fresco in turn is the organ in a niche framed by a pair of Corinthian columns in pink granite. The conch above this is blank whitewash, but the barrel-vaulted ceiling of the presbyterium bay is coffered and gilded in a Classic style with rosettes in square coffering panels. [1]

Behind the apse is the sacristy, which has a copy of the Pinturicchio fresco of *St Francis in Santa Maria in Aracoeli* by **Eugenia Pignet**. [1]

### Side chapels

The church has eight bays in each aisle. The first two bays on each side have confessionals, while five bays on each side have altars. The remaining bays have no altars, but do have paintings. Either side of the sanctuary is a chapel. [1]

The description of the chapels is clockwise, from the rear left hand side.

#### Chapel of Saint Gregory Grassi and Companions (6)

In the third chapel bay on the left side does not contain an altar. It contains a painting of Saint Gregory Grassi and Companions. They were martyred in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion in China. According to the plate on the frame, the painting is titled *The last Absolution*, by T Ridolfi in 1946. There is also a painting of Bl. Gabrielle Allegra painted by **Bruce Atherton** in 2002. There is also a modern statue of St. Anthony here.

#### Chapel of St Claire (7)

The next chapel on the left is dedicated to St Claire of Assisi, and the altarpiece showing *St Clare Exposing the Blessed Sacrament to Raiding Muslims* is by **Giuseppe Bravi**, and was presented to the church on 10 December 1891. [1]

#### Chapel of St Elizabeth (8)

The third chapel in the fifth bay on the left is a chapel with an altar and tabernacle. It is dedicated to St Elizabeth of Hungary, and the altarpiece showing the Sacred Heart with *King St Louis of France* and *St Elizabeth*. The painting is by **Fra Caio D'Andrea** (1887). [1]

#### Chapel of the Martyrs of Japan (9)

The fourth chapel on the left is dedicated to the Japanese Martyrs crucified in 1597 in Nagasaki, and the altarpiece is by **Cesare Mariani** (1887). [1]

#### Chapel of St. Francis (10)

The fifth chapel on the left is dedicated to St Francis of Assisi, and the altarpiece is a triptych showing *SS Francis, Paschal Baylon* (right) and *Peter of Alcantara* (left) is by **Franz von Rohden**. The two other saints were noted reformers of the Franciscan order. [1]

#### Chapel of St. Louis (11)

The last chapel on the left is dedicated to St Louis of Toulouse, an altarpiece is a triptych showing *SS Louis, Diego d'Alaca* (left) and *Francis Solano* (right). The original altarpiece was by Caio D'Andrea.

However, the church's website advises that this has been replaced at some stage by **Eugenia Pignet**. This wealthy late 19<sup>th</sup> century female secular tertiary of the order was a noted religious painter and copyist of antiquities, and here she was inspired by the Pinturicchio work at Aracoeli. [1]

#### Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament (12)

A small chapel at the end of the left aisle, next to the sanctuary is the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. Above the tabernacle hangs a San Damiano Cross. There are a number of icons in this chapel. The small altar and ambo are also decorated with icons. There is access into the sanctuary from a doorway on the right of this chapel. [1]

#### Chapel of St. Anthony (13)

At the top of the right aisle is the entrance to the Chapel of St Anthony of Padua which flanks the sanctuary. This is a great center of devotion to the saint and a box is provided for petitions addressed to him. The main feature is a polychrome statue of *Saint Anthony and the Child Jesus with Children*. On the walls of the chapel are two paintings signed De Meo 1987. They show *St Anthony Preaching to the Fish* and *St Anthony and the Miracle of the Mule*. This chapel gives access to the sacristy through an anteroom containing numerous ex votos for favors received from St Anthony. [1]

#### Chapel of St. Bernard (14)

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to St Bernard of Siena, and has an altarpiece showing *SS Bernardine, John Capistrano* (left) and *James of the Marches* (right) by **Michelangelo Cianti** who was one of the friars. He was inspired by the famous fresco by Pinturicchio in Santa Maria in Aracoeli. [1]

#### Chapel of St. Bonaventure (15)

The fifth chapel on the right is dedicated to St Bonaventure. The anonymous altarpiece shows *SS Bonaventure, Archangel Michael* (right) and *Archangel Raphael* (left). [1]

#### Chapel of the Martyrs of Gorinchem (16)

The fourth chapel on the right is dedicated to the Martyrs of Gorinchem, and the altarpiece is an anonymous copy of a work by **Cesare Fracassini**. The original is now in the Vatican museum. [1]

#### Chapel of Immaculate Mary (17)

The fifth bay on the right is a chapel (with a tabernacle on the altar) dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, and the altarpiece is a triptych with *Our Lady with SS John and Margaret of Cortona* by **Francesco Szoldaticz**. [1]

#### Chapel of St. Joseph (18)

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to St Joseph, and the altarpiece is *The Death of St Joseph* by **Giuseppe Rossi**, a Franciscan friar. [1]

#### Chapel of Bl. Duns Scotus (19)

The third bay on the right contains a painting by **Silvia Polizzi** commemorating the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Bl. John Duns Scotus who died in 1308. It depicts the Madonna and Child in the center crushing the head of a serpent (a reference to the Immaculate Conception, of which Duns Scotus was a great defender), with Bl. Duns Scotus kneeling in prayer. These figures are flanked by Pope's Paul VI and John Paul II who hold in their hands two of the titles given to Duns Scotus - The Subtle & Marian Doctor and The Doctor of the Immaculate. This bay also contains two icons - one of Duns Scotus, the other of Venerable Maria of Jesus of Ágreda. [1]

#### Crypt

The crypt amounts to a lower church, and itself has aisles separated by travertine columns and an apse. In here are an amazing total of forty-five altars, which used to be used by the Franciscan priests studying here. Before 1970 the Latin rite had no concelebration at Mass by several priests, so each priest without a public ministry had to say his own Mass in private every day. The reason for the number of altars was that there should only be one daily Mass on any altar (this ancient rule is now often ignored). The layout here is now a historical curiosity. [1]

## Artists and Architects

Alessandro [Morani](#) (1859-1941), Italian painter, decorator and set designer  
Bonaventura Loffredo da Alghero (1830-1903), Italian painter and Franciscan Friars Minor  
Bruce Dalzell [Atherton](#) (b. 1968), British painter  
Fra Caio [D'Andrea](#) (1849-1906), painter from Innsbruck and Franciscan Friars Minor  
Cesare [Fracassini](#) (1838-1868), Italian painter  
Cesare [Mariani](#) (1826-1901), Italian painter  
Eugenia Pignet (d. 1940), painter, Franciscan tertiary  
Francesco Szoldaticz (1820-1916), Hungarian painter  
Franz von [Rohden](#) (1817-1903), German painter of the Nazarene school  
Giuseppe Bravi (1864-1936), Italian painter  
Giuseppe Maria Rossi (1843-1890), Italian painter, Franciscan friar  
Luca [Carimini](#) (1830-1890), Italian architect & sculptor  
Michelangelo Cianti (1840-1923), Italian painter  
Michele [De Meo](#) (b. 1928), Italian painter  
Silvia [Polizzi](#) (21<sup>st</sup> cent.), Italian painter  
T. Ridolfi (20<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian painter

## Location

Address: Via Merulana 124

Coord: [41° 53' 19.7"N 12° 30' 14.2"E](#)

## Info:

Telephone: +39 06 703739

Email: [basilica@antonianum.eu](mailto:basilica@antonianum.eu)

Open times:

6:45 to 12:00; 16:00 to 19:00

Summer: 17:00 to 19:15

Mass schedule

Weekday: 7:00, 8:00 , 9:00, 18:00

Weekend: 7:00, 8.30, 10:00, 11:30, 18:00

## Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wikia](#)
2. [Info.Roma web site](#)
3. [Wikipedia page](#)
4. [Basilica Home Page](#)
5. [Cathopedia.org web page](#)

[Tourist info](#)