

San Felice da Cantalice a Centocelle



San Felice da Cantalice is a modern parish, titular and conventual church in the Prenestino-Centocelle quarter. The parish is administered by the Friars Minor Capuchin. Appropriately the patron saint, Felix of Cantalice, was the first Capuchin to be canonized, in 1712. The church is referred to as a Centocelle because it located at the site of a former Roman imperial cavalry barracks. [1] [2]

St. Felix was from Cantalice in Apulia, and was a lay-brother at the friary at Rome from 1547 until his death in 1587. He wandered around the streets of Rome with a bag on his back for the contributions to the upkeep of the friary which he begged from the citizens while walking the street. He was buried in the church of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception. [1] [6]

He was a friend of SS Philip Neri and Charles Borromeo, loved the company of children and was nicknamed "Deogratias" from his habit of saying "Thanks be to God" all the time. [1]

History

In 14 November 1929, the Italian Marquis Achilles Muti-Bussi donated the land to the Roman Catholic Church as a gesture of goodwill for its impoverished peasants living nearby. [2]

The Capuchin friars arrived on 16 December 1930 and on 20 September of the same year the cornerstone was laid for their new Capuchin monastery. On 30 May 1932, the church itself was canonically signed and erected but the actual construction of the church began in 1934.

The parish was erected in 1935, and immediately put under the administration of the Friars Minor Capuchin. The church, which was begun in 1934, was completed structurally in the following year. It was built by the Pontifical Opera on a project by the architects **Mario Paniconi** and **Giulio Pediconi**.
[1] [4]

On 2 October 1941, the church was consecrated by Monsignor Luigi Traglia, who was then the titular archbishop of Caesarea in Palestine, and the Vice-regent of Rome. [2]

There was a restoration of the sanctuary in 1958, when the floor was raised and a new high altar provided. [1]

In July 1968, the Vicariate of Rome approved the fresco in the apse of the church featuring Saint Felix of Cantalice, its namesake patron saint, made by **Fr Ugolino de Belluno**, a Franciscan priest. At the time, the fresco was heavily criticized for its modern architecture, its polychrome colors, the poor natural lighting, and how to paint the wall of 480 square meters. [2]

The church made titular in 1969. The present cardinal priest, since 2012, is Luis Antonio Tagle. [1]

On 1 January 1970, on the occasion of the World Day of Peace, Pope Paul VI blessed the apse of the church. [2]

Exterior

The design is in a derivative neo-Romanesque style influenced by Modernism, typical for Roman churches at the time. The plan is based on a Latin cross, although the overall plan is rectangular since the transepts do not protrude beyond the external aisle walls. There is a semicircular apse. [1]

The roofs are all flat, except that of the entrance porch which is gabled with a double pitch. The roofs of the central nave and the two chapels flanking the entrance bay are at a lower level than that of the transept and apse, and those of the side aisles and the entrance bay are lower still. This allows for a window strip below the counterfaçade end of the central nave roof. [1]

The church is part of a complex including a school, meeting halls and a convent for the friars in charge. [1]

Façade

There is a monumental open entrance porch occupying almost the entire frontage, with an enormous central archway running up into the gable and two on either side, one above the other and the top ones shorter. These arches are completely undecorated, and lack imposts. [1]

The zones of the frontage containing these arches are brought forward slightly, and the tops of these zones have short string courses which connect to the gable to give the impression of a pediment broken by the central arch. Round the outer corner on each side, there is another arch as tall as the two flanking pairs together. [1]

Within this, the actual entrance wall of the church has no windows and three doors, the central one larger and all with simple door cases. Above the main entrance is a dedicatory inscription, and above this is a vast mural of *St Felix in Ecstasy* (1935), by Rodolfo Villani. Over his left shoulder is a sack for the contributions to the upkeep of the friary which he begged from the citizens while walking the streets. The portico vault above has a longitudinal barrel-vault in the central section and two transverse ones in the side sections, and is painted blue. [1] [5]

The ends of the aisles either side of the portico are also in red brick, and have chamfered corners each bearing a vertical set of large vertically rectangular stained glass windows. There is a little campanile or bellcote, in the form of a flat-roofed kiosk with two bells in a pair of open rectangular

housings, over the roofline of the left hand aisle. [1]

Interior

On entering, you find yourself in an entrance bay. There is an enclosed rotunda chapel on each side, the right hand one being the baptistery. The font is carved out of a block of peperino stone, with an inscription *Sume fidem* ("receive faith"), surmounted by a lid and a bronze cross. Over the entrance bay is the gallery, supported by a pair of columns encased in monochrome yellow tiling so that they look as if they are of yellow marble. These columns have no capitals. The pipe organ was built in 1956 by the Tamburini company of Crema, made up of 24 real registers which are distributed in two bodies with two keyboards. Above the organ is a strip of window containing stained glass in brightly colored abstract patterns. [1] [4] [5]

Nave

The main nave has five bays. The aisles do not have arcades, but a horizontal trabeation in grey stone, supported by simple round yellow marble columns without capitals or imposts like those supporting the organ. Above the trabeation are three little square windows in each bay of the low upper central nave walls. The far column on the left hand side has an interesting pulpit or ambo, a semi-cylinder in white suspended on the column with a matching semi-circular soundboard above it. [1]

The ceiling is flat, with transverse concrete ribs giving a washboard effect. [1]

The outer zone of each aisle is divided into five side chapels by means of screen walls in concrete. Some of these chapels were never fitted out properly, but contain devotional statuary. Each has a large rectangular window with brightly colored semi-abstract stained glass, including a set with the theme *The Canticle of Creation*. [1] [3]

The church also contains a series of polychrome ceramic tiles representing various devotional and Biblical subjects. [1]

Transept

In contrast to the nave, which has no arches anywhere, the ends of the transept are entered through a pair of large undecorated arches without imposts. These ends are also chapels. In the transept, other works by **Fr Ugolino**, from 1975, depicting the *Apparition of Jesus among angels* and a *Vision of Saint Francis*. [1] [3]

Sanctuary

The apse, illuminated by a large semicircular skylight, is double. The inner one is semicircular, and this is structural, but it has a large void behind the altar with the top edge supported by two concrete columns. The flat wall behind these has a fresco of the *Madonna and Child with St Felix* (1968) made by **Fr Ugolino de Belluno**. [1] [4]

The fresco in the apse features the Madonna as *Virgin of the Flowers*, wearing a robe of Lilies while handing down the child Jesus to Saint Felix, hooded and prostrating. Below are images of the Jewish children of Terezin who were exterminated by Nazi's followers, while a newspaper image of *Mario Dominici* is featured, the boy found dead in the area during World War II as a result of Nazi Anti Semitism. It also features cherubic angels, and Zodiac sign constellations which tell the story of creation. [2]

The curved walls of the apse either side of the void have reliefs in colored concrete by **Fr Ugolino**. Concrete mixes in different colors were laid on the wall in turn, and the artist used chisels to cut away into the different layers to obtain the multi-colored reliefs. These were completed in 1970. [1]

The flat ceiling has a large semi-circular skylight, edged in three steps. [1]

The high altar, completely rebuilt in 1958, consisted of slabs and blocks of red marble, the so-called Chiampo Rosso of Vicenza. [4]

Artists and Architects:

Fr [Ugolino](#) de Belluno, O.F.M. Cap. (1919-2002), Italian painter and mosaicist

Giulio [Pediconi](#) (1906-1999), Italian architect

Mario [Paniconi](#) (1904-1973), Italian architect

Rodolfo [Villani](#) (1881-1941), Italian painter

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Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [English Wikipedia page](#)
3. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
4. [ArchiDiAP web page](#)
5. [Catholic.org web page](#)
6. [Romapedia blog](#)