

Santa Maria della Consolazione al Foro Romano



Santa Maria della Consolazione is a 16th century devotional, confraternity and former hospital church just to the south of the Campodoglio at the foot of the Palatine Hill, in rione Campitelli. The dedication is to the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her title of Our Lady of Consolation. [1]

History

The church is named after an icon of the Virgin Mary which was placed on this site to console criminals who were tossed down off the cliff above the church, thought to be the Tarpeian Rock from where condemned Roman criminals were tossed to their death in Roman times. [1]

A nobleman imprisoned on the Campodoglio in 1385, named Giordanello degli Alberini, left two gold florins in his will for a painting of the Blessed Virgin to be executed on an outside wall visible from the execution site, as a consolation for those about to die. The location chosen was on an external wall of a granary belonging to the Mattei family, which stood below the rock. There it remained for the next eighty five years. [1] [2]

The icon came to prominence owing to a miracle recorded in 1470. According to the story, a young man was condemned to death for murder despite swearing that he was innocent. When he was hanged, it was found that he was not choking despite dangling off the end of the noose and so he was cut down. He testified that the icon had spoken to him, saying "Go, because you are consoled", and an invisible hand had supported him. As a result he was pardoned. Hence the name of the icon, and of the future church. The event made such an impression that a collection was started to build a devotional church to house the icon, and this was so well subscribed that one was built in the same year with the approval of Pope Sixtus IV. His family, the Della Rovere, put up much of the cost. [1]

The initial project was patronized by the Confraternita di Santa Maria delle Grazie, a pious confraternity which ran a hospital nearby with a little church containing a much older miraculous icon -Santa Maria delle Grazie al Foro Romano. However, a new confraternity quickly came together to administer the new outreach and to build a new hospital as well as the church. Despite being run by a private confraternity, the hospital was to become one of the most important in Rome. [1]

Built in just four months and consecrated on 3 November 1470, it was very small. The Marian icon was detached from the original wall and placed in the church, on a wall on the side of the Gospel. The decoration of the church was entrusted to **Antoniazio Romano**. Soon there was a need to expand the sanctuary and in 1583 Cardinal Alessandro Riario commissioned **Giacomo della Porta** to build the main chapel and the altar to welcome the Marian image, giving rise to a general reconstruction of the church, later entrusted to **Martino Longhi the Elder**. In 1585 the high altar was finished. In the new unitary design of the **Longhi** the ancient chapels Mattei and Pelucchi were preserved, built during the course of the century. **Longhi** died in 1591, leaving only the first storey of the façade completed. It was only finished two hundred years later. [1] [2]

Further private patronage by guilds involved in business activity around the Campodoglio increased the number of side chapels to ten -five on the left, three on the right and two flanking the sanctuary. In 1827 the façade was finally completed, the architect being **Pasquale Belli**. [1]

In 1876, the old church of Santa Maria delle Grazie was closed, and is now part of a police headquarters. The icon was transferred to the chapel at the end of the right hand aisle, and the idea was had to put a copy of the icon of Santa Maria in Portico in the left hand one. Hence the church has three icons of Our Lady enshrined in it, making it the Chiesa delle Tre Madonne. [1]

In 1896 the hospital and the Confraternity were suppressed, and the Franciscan Capuchins took over responsibility for the church. Due to the reorganization of the streets around the Campodoglio in the 1930's which left the church's neighbourhood very isolated, so the church now has few visitors. [1]

Exterior

The fabric of the church is in brick, rendered and with architectural details in travertine limestone. The left hand wall faces the street, and so has been embellished with six Corinthian pilasters in shallow relief. In between these are five wide windows with slightly curved tops, which light the side chapels. [1]

When the houses on the other side of the street were demolished in the 1940's, the street level was substantially lowered which is why the church is on a plinth. The same lowering affecting the piazza meant that a long access stairway had to be provided. [1] [2]

Façade (1)

The façade is entirely in travertine, and the different ages of the two storeys can be discerned from the way the upper 19th century work has weathered less. [1]

The first storey has three planes, a wide central one fronting the nave and the inner side aisles and two recessed ones fronting the side chapels. The former has six Ionic pilasters with swagged capitals in shallow relief, two conjoined pairs flanking the central door and a further pair at the corners. Two more pilasters are on the outer corners of the chapel frontages. These all support an entablature, and above this is an attic on which the second storey sits. In between the capitals of the pilasters are panels with swags. [1]

There are three entrances, the central one being larger with a triangular pediment raised on strap corbels while the aisle entrances have raised segmental pediments. Above the latter is a pair of rectangular framed tablets. The chapel frontages have a pair of little windows with slightly curved tops. [1]

The four statues standing on the corners of the attic are 19th century, and represent the four prophets *Isaiab*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Daniel*. [1]

The second storey has two pairs of Ionic pilasters supporting an entablature and a crowning triangular pediment. A large rectangular central window has a segmental pediment supported by a pair of spindly columns, and over this is a pair of swags. Because the church is very wide in comparison with its height, the pediment is actually false, the roof ridge only comes up to the level

of the entablature. [1]

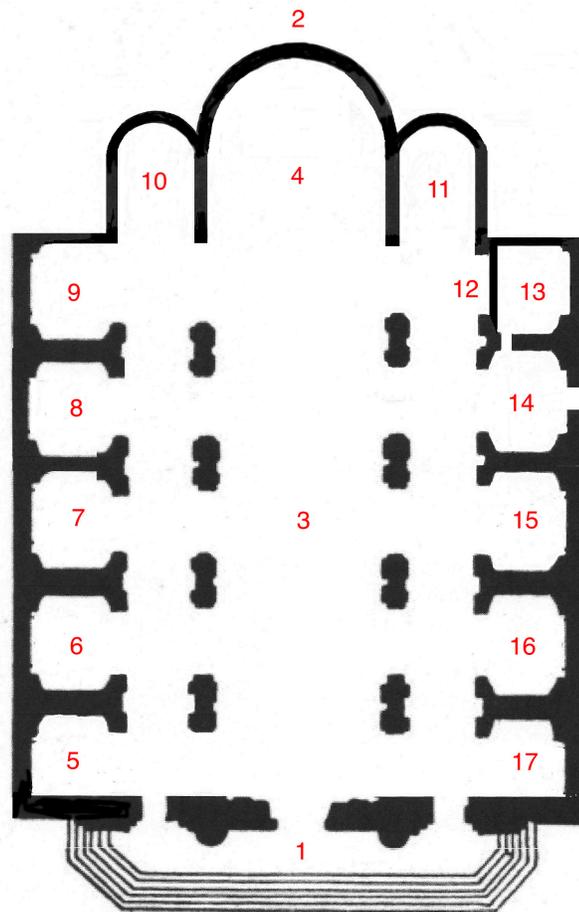
Campanili

There are two identical campanili on the far walls of the chapels at the end of the aisles, flanking the central apse. Each is a stone frame of two stories with the second one narrower than the first, with two round-headed apertures to contain a pair of bells and a pair of pilaster buttresses either side. On top is a little tiled pediment. The lower storey of the right hand campanile has had a clock inserted into it. [1]

Apse (2)

The apse end is embellished architecturally, as it faces down the street next to the former hospital. The gable is outlined by a cornice with modillions to create a false pediment, and the lead-sheathed conch of the central apse protrudes from this. Below the pediment are two levels of almost square windows, one above the other in the side chapel frontages and three above two in the central apse. In the middle of the apse wall in the place of a window is a fresco of the *Madonna and Child*, protected by a little lead canopy. This was by Niccolò Berrettoni, a pupil of Carlo Maratta, but was restored in 1787. [1]

Plan



Interior

Nave (3)

The nave, of five bays, has side aisles separated by arcades with rectangular piers. The arcade arches have Doric archivolt, but the sides of the piers facing inwards have gigantic ribbed Corinthian pilasters in shallow relief, which support a deep entablature running around the entire church and above the arcade arches. The central nave has a barrel-vaulted ceiling, with lunettes for five windows on each side. The vault is entirely undecorated. The color scheme for the nave is very simple. It used to be creamy white, but has not been renewed for a long time and is now greyish with dirt. The

ceiling and pillars are undecorated. [1]

The floor looks original. It is in red brick, laid in a herringbone pattern with marble strips marking out the major axis and dividing the bay areas. [1]

Sanctuary (4)

Our Lady has four shrines in this church; one on the outside of the apse wall, one at the high altar and two in the chapels flanking the high altar. The main one is the high altar, where the icon of *Our Lady of Consolation* can be found. It was originally executed in 1385, and reworked by **Antoniazio Romano** at the end of the 15th century. It is enshrined in a polychrome marble aedicule with a pair of Corinthian columns in a pinkish marble supporting an entablature surmounted with a pediment. The pediment has two stucco angels either side of what is now a cross, but it formerly had a tablet extolling the work of Cardinal Riario. This was moved in 1967 to the wall on the right of the altar under the window because its weight was cracking the pediment. [1]

The altar contains the relics of the holy martyrs Felicissimo, Agapito, Vincenzo. The elegant Tabernacle in marble is dated 1493. On the left, a plaque refers to the ample privileges granted by Sixtus V to the Archconfraternity of St. Mary of the Consolation, in 1585. [2]

The magnificent chapel, commissioned by Cardinal Alessandro Riario in 1585, designed by **Giacomo della Porta**, was then executed by **Martino Longhi the Elder** and decorated by **Cristoforo Roncalli**. The cardinal's coat of arms can be seen on the Balustrade. The large apse has five windows, three over two, and a conch. The latter is coffered in diapers with rosettes, while the single-bay sanctuary has a short barrel vault with octagonal coffering. This is slightly lower than the nave vault, leaving a crescent-shaped wall over the triumphal arch. [1] [2]

On the sanctuary side walls are two pictures by **Cristoforo Roncalli**, '*Il Pomarancio*'. To the right is *The Birth of Our Lady*, and to the left is *The Annunciation*. Still on the left, at the top, a balcony cantoria, with a Baroque organ. The organ was built in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and presently in not functional. Among the many writings, engraved on the case, we read the oldest: **Antonius Paradisius Veiens** 1674, an organ maker. [2]
[1]

The chapels are described in clockwise order, beginning from the back left.

Left Aisle Chapels

Cappella Dondola (5)

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. The altarpiece is an important marble relief sculpture of the *Mystical Marriage of St Catherine of Alexandria* (note that the saint is carrying her famous Catherine Wheel), firmly attributed to **Raffaello da Montelupo** about 1539. In other words it was in the old church, and is arguably the best thing in this one. The central figure is the Madonna and Child, hence it has been thought that the left hand figure is St Joseph. A more likely identification is with St Sigismund, after the founder of the chapel who was Sigismondo Dondoli. The saint was a king of Burgundy, hence the sceptre. [1]

Above the three figures in the relief is *God the Father* giving a blessing from the clouds. [1]

The founder's tomb on the left wall has a strikingly realistic portrait bust of him wearing a beret. [1]

Cappella Sacchi (6)

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St Francis of Assisi. Perhaps as appropriate to the dedication, it is not much embellished with decoration. The altarpiece showing the saint receiving the stigmata is an anonymous 16th century work.

On the left is a monument to Antonio Bernardino Sacchi, 1615, and opposite is one to his wife Vittoria Arrigoni.

Cappella dei Garzoni degli Osti (7)

In the third chapel on the left was granted in 1575 to the University of the Garzoni degli Osti (Boys of the Host), which decorated it richly. The frescoes were the work of Milanese painter **Francesco Nappi**. The rich stucco decoration framing the various frescoes, sometimes take on grace and freshness. The altarpiece is an oil painting of the *Assumption*. In 2010 the altarpiece was mutilated. only the upper part remains. [2] [a]

The frescoes of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* to the right and of the *Magi* to the left, with all the other frescoes are by **Francesco Nappi**. The frescoed vault, divided into four trapezoids, tells stories of the Virgin, her *Presentation in the Temple*, *Annunciation*, *Marriage of Cana*, *Coronation*. In the four ovals appear four *Doctors of the Church*. On the pillars, *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*, standing, and four busts of saints. [a]

The chapel is protected by a heavy iron gate wrought embroidery scrolls, branches with leaves, stems, flowers, and five stars with eight rays. [a]

Cappella dei Pescatori (8)

The fourth chapel on the left is dedicated to St Andrew, the patron of fishermen whose guild fitted it out in 1618 to the design of **Longhi**. The fresco work is all by **Marzio Ganassini**. The painter is little known, but was in his time known and skilled decorator of Roman churches. [1] [a]

The altarpiece is a fresco of *St. Andrew*. (The altarpiece is badly damaged, with about a third of the lower right of the fresco missing.)

On the right hand wall, within a stucco frame, is the *Martyrdom of St. Andrew* in the lunette above *St. Andrew in front of the tyrant*. On the left hand wall, also in a stucco frame, is the *Martyrdom of St. Peter*, and in the lunette is *St. Peter Liberated from Prison by an Angel*. Angels bearing the symbols of martyrdom also feature. On the two pillars supporting the arch, the evangelists *St. Mark* and *St. John*, standing, widely cloaked, carry a book in their hands and hold their respective symbol (lion and eagle). [a]

The vault, well painted, and divided into four trapezoidal spaces, connected to a central rectangle. In the rectangle, *the Eternal Father*, in the trapezoidal spaces, scenes from the life of *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*. In the corners of the vault, Gospel scenes in chiaroscuro.

The chapel is closed by a wrought iron gate. The lower part of the railing is simple and austere, formed by parallel vertical bars. Above this, the gate has a hedge of roses blooms. In the center, above the door that opens in the gate, are floral design in the bezel, which bears on the top an embossed plaque on which the figure of St. Andrew with his characteristic cross shaft. And a fine job from the beginning of 1600. [a]

This chapel contains a wooden statue of Jesus the Nazarene, brought from Santa Maria delle Grazie and the subject of popular devotion. Note the ex-votos on display. Together with the ancient icon, it was reported to have moved its eyes in 1796. [1] [a]

Cappella dei Vignaroli (9)

The fifth chapel on the left belonged to the guild of vignaroli (vine dressers?), who took it over at the end of the 16th century and had it frescoed by **Antonio Circignani**. Over the altar is an oil on canvas painting by an anonymous 17th century artist, *The Madonna with Saint John the Baptist*. (It appears that an attempt was made to remove the paint from the marble columns on the altar.) [a]

The frescos are; Right: *Wedding at Cana*. The lunette: *Presentation of Jesus at the temple*. Left: *Resurrection of Lazarus*. The lunette: *Slaughter of the innocents*. In the pillars and the ceiling, two figures of saints and Sibyls and Gospel scenes. (Apparently, an attempt to clean the left side fresco was made on the bottom right corner. There is also substantial damage to the frescoes on the ceiling, although the gilded stuccowork is in excellent condition.) [a]

Cappella dei Santa Maria in Portico (10)

The chapel to the left of the sanctuary is dedicated to Our Lady in Portico, with a reproduction of

the tiny ancient icon now in Santa Maria in Campitelli. This is enshrined in an enormous neo-Baroque glory inserted into a cove, with a crowd of angels and putti in stucco. Above the shrine the icon is echoed in grey and blue in an oval rayed tondo.

The late 19th enshrinement of this copy was owing to the initiative of one Suor Carmela, a Sister of Charity, who also painted the two rather bad pictures on the side walls: *St Galla Gives a Meal to Poor People*, and *St Galla and Pope St John I Venerate the Icon*.

In the floor is the tomb slab of Giuseppe Faraldo, 1692, and outside is a monument to Giovanni Battista Pieri, 1705, a noted surgeon of his time who worked in the hospital.

Right Aisle Chapels

Cappella dei Santa Maria delle Grazie (11)

The chapel to the right of the sanctuary is the shrine of Our Lady of Grace, designed by **Augusto Carnevali** and furnished with polychrome stonework as well as pictures salvaged from the nearby church of Santa Maria delle Grazie that was deconsecrated in 1876. This was the year that the ancient miraculous icon from the same church was also enshrined here. [1] [2]

The Byzantine icon was, by tradition, the one that Pope Vitalian received from the emperor Constans II in 657. By further, very dubious tradition it had been painted in Jerusalem by St Luke the Evangelist while Our Lady was still alive. The pope built a church for it between the Lateran and Santi Quattro Coronati, and it was noticed in 680 that those living near it escaped an outbreak of plague that ravaged the rest of the city. [1]

In 1045 Pope Gregory VI founded a hospital next to its church, which took the same name. However, it did not last long because in 1084 both hospital and church were burned by the Normans under Robert Guiscard. The icon was found unharmed in the ruins, and taken to the sacristy of the Lateran. The complex was rebuilt just west of the ancient Basilica Iulia in the Forum, and the icon was ceremonially re-installed in the new church in 1088. There it remained until 1876. [1]

The ancient icon was stolen in 1960, and replaced by one painted by Roberto Cocci Marconi in a strictly traditional Byzantine style. This in turn was substituted by a 12th century copy of the original icon, which is what is to be found here now. [1]

The side walls of the chapel have two late 18th century paintings, *St Luke Painting Our Lady* on the right, and *St Peter Curing a Cripple* on the left. The right hand wall also has a 17th century picture of one Pietro Antonio Florenzi, who paid for a restoration of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie and whose transferred tombstone is in the floor. [1] [2]

The first chapel bay at the top of the right aisle is walled up as the sacristy is there. On the wall is a large 18th century oil on canvas painting of *Madonna of the Seven Sorrows*. (12)

Sacristy (13)

The next chapel recess on the right is actually the antechamber (14) to the sacristy, and also used to be the entrance from the hospital. On the right on entering the sacristy is a large wooden crucifix dating from the start of the 16th century. The altarpiece is a marble relief of a Crucifixion by **Luigi Capponi**, about 1490. In a stucco tondo is a fresco of the *Madonna and Child* by **Antoniazio Romano** in 1465. In a corridor outside the sacristy is a fresco of *Christ Rising from the Tomb*, also attributed to **Antoniazio Romano** from 1470, that was discovered in 1942. The wardrobes are by **Giovanni Antonio de Rossi**. [1] [2] [3]

There are several epigraphs: one, located above the entrance, recalls the translation in 1657, by the will of Pope Alexander VII, of the icon of Santa Maria in Portico in the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli; the one on the left wall recalls the annual offering which, according to the will of the pontiff, was to be paid to the church. As evidenced by the small plaque above the door, the sacristy was built in 1610 on the initiative of the custodians of the Archconfraternity of Santa Maria della Consolazione. [2]

Cappella dei Pastori (15)

The third chapel on the right is the most sumptuous chapel in the church, erected in 1583 under the patronage of the Compagnia dei Pastori, as attested by the inscription on the fine wrought iron gate made between the late 1500s and early 1600s. Designed by **Antonio Ferreri**, and decorated by the Roman **Giovanni Baglione**, the decorations, many and varied, giving the chapel a lively appearance, almost verging on the baroque. The dedication is to the Nativity. [1] [2] [a]

The altar, in polychrome marble, with pediment moved by garlands, heads of angels and cherubs, with the altarpiece, *The Adoration of the Magi*. Also by the same artist are *St. Antony Abbot* in the oval on the altar, and *St. Antony Abbot* and *St. James* on the pillars of the arch. On the side walls, lavish in frames of gilded plaster, right: *The Adoration of the Shepherds*; left: *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*. In the vault including decorative stucco putti and lively, with four panes made of the *Life of Santa Maria*. [1] [a]

Cappella Pelucchi (16)

The second chapel on the right is the Cappella Pelucchi, also richly decorated and also being destroyed by damp. The chapel was built by Andrea Pelucchi of Citta di Castello, a man of the court, buried here with his wife in the middle of the 16th century. The altarpiece, *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, (1575) is by **Livio Agresti**. This painting also appears as if it has been vandalized. The pictures on the side walls are anonymous Mannerist works; to the left is *The Call of St Peter*, and to the right *The Martyrdom of St Andrew*. The three canvases, hung on either side of the altar and chapel were restored in 1953. The decoration and the frescoes of the vault, much deteriorated, are now unreadable. [1] [2]

In the center of the side walls, two 16th century tombs, niches with busts and ovate form. On the left, the tomb and portrait of Lucrezia Pierleoni (d. 1582). Daughter of lawyer Luke, she was the last survivor of the ancient and powerful Roman family, who boasted of having started the Habsburg dynasty. And sculptured with much detailed face, head covered with a veil, with tight-fitting and slightly low-cut bodice. On the right, portrait of Andrea Pelucchi (d. 1575), from Citta di Castello, the founder of the chapel. He was a man of the court and, for its elegance and urbanity, liked by many.

Cappella Mattei (17)

The chapel was erected after 1550 by Giacomo Mattei, whose coat of arms appears in the middle of the entrance arch accompanied by an elegant decoration of flowers and grotesque masks. The dedication is to the Crucifixion. The frescoes of *The Passion* were painted by Taddeo Zuccari in 1556 (that is, when the chapel was still part of the old church). The chapel contains a complete story of Christ's passion. This first work by Taddeo Zuccari reveals robustness of design, movement of composition, dramatic color sensibility. Taddeo was buried in the Pantheon, next to the tomb of the other urban painter Raffaello Sanzio, he too, like Taddeo Zaccaria, died at the age of 37. The damage by damp here is truly tragic, but has apparently been going on for a long time. [1] [2]

Over the altar, in a rich stucco frame, *The Crucifixion*. Alongside the stucco frame are two imposing figures of prophets. On the left wall, *The Flagellation*, and in the lunette above is *Christ Before Annas*. The right hand wall has *Ecce Homo*, and the lunette has *Christ Brought Before Pilate*. [1] [2]

The vault of the chapel is in the form of a Greek cross with a central oculus and pendentives, with four main panels. The frescoes here are especially good. They depict: *Christ in Gethsemane*, *The Last Supper* (a masterpiece), *The Washing of the Feet* and *The Arrest of Christ*. The pendentives depict the *Evangelists*. [1]

In the center of the floor, a circular stone closing the tomb of the Mattei. It lies within a square stone, which was finely embroidered corners. [2]

Artists and Architects:

Livio [Agresti](#) aka *Ritius* or *Ricciutello* (1508-1580), Italian painter of the late Renaissance or Mannerist period

Giovanni [Baglione](#) [aka *il Sordo del Barozzo*] (1566-1643), Italian Late Mannerist and Early Baroque painter
Pasquale [Belli](#) (1752-1833), Italian architect
Niccolò [Berrettoni](#) (1637-1682), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Luigi [Capponi](#) (1445-1515), Italian sculptor
Augusto Carnevali (19th cent.), Italian architect
Antonio [Circignani](#) aka *il Pomarancio* (1567-1630), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance/Mannerism period
Giovanni Antonio [de Rossi](#) (1616-1695), Italian architect of the Baroque period
Raffaello [da Montelupo](#) (1505-1567), Italian Renaissance sculptor and architect
Giacomo [della Porta](#) (c.1533-1602), Italian sculptor and architect
Antonio Ferreri (16th cent.), Italian architect
Marzio di [Colantonio Ganassini](#) (1580-1623), Italian painter
Martino [Longhi](#) the Elder (1534-1591), Italian architect
Francesco [Nappi](#) (1565-1630), Italian Mannerist painter from Milan
Antoniazio [Romano](#) (1430-1510), Italian Early Renaissance painter
Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) [aka *Il Pomerancio*] (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter
Taddeo [Zuccari](#) (or Zuccaro) (1529-1566), Italian painter of the Roman Mannerist School

Location:

Address: Piazza del Consolazione 94, 00186 Roma

Coordinates: [41° 53' 29"N 12° 28' 59"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6784654

Open 06.30am-06.30pm

Mass schedule:

Holidays: 11.00

Weekdays: 06.30

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [PoloRomano web site](#)
3. [Info Roma web site](#)

a. Descriptive plaques in the church

[English Wikipedia page](#)

["De Alvaris" gallery on Flickr](#)

[Panoramicearth page](#)

[GCatholic.org](#)

[TripAdvisor](#)

[Amoroma web page](#)

[PoloRomano web site](#)

