

Santa Maria delle Grazie alle Fornaci



Santa Maria delle Grazie alle Fornaci, the most imposing monument of the area around Porta Cavalleggeri, is an 18th century Baroque parish and titular church just south of Vatican City in the Aurelio quarter. The dedication is to the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title of Our Lady of Graces. [1]

History

The original small wooden church founded in the 15th century, and served a small village, called "Borgo delle Fornaci", which became important as a site for preparing materials for the building of the new St Peter's. The name Fornaci refers to kilns used for making bricks for the work. [1] [a]

The church was rebuilt, starting in 1694, from drawings by **Francesco Multò** for the Discalced Trinitarians (a Spanish reform of the Trinitarian order), whose monastery was adjacent, and in 1720 **Filippo Raguzzini** added the Baroque façade. [1] [2] [a]

After the French occupation of Rome in the early 19th century, the church was stripped of almost all the sacred furnishings, the real estate confiscated and the church was abandoned. Restorations began by the architect **Filippo Niccoletti** in 1817.

During the Roman Republic of 1849, as we have seen, the church of S. Angelo alle Fornaci was razed to the ground, and the parochial responsibilities for the area was transferred to S. Maria alle Fornaci. In the process, it underwent a thorough restoration by **Andrea Busiri Vici**. [1] [a]

In the years 1951-52 important restoration works were carried out in the church, especially on the roof, and the bell tower begun thirty years earlier and remained unfinished was completed. Also, at this time the high altar was moved from the center of the apse to the back wall. [a]

The Trinitarians remain in charge of the parish. [1]

Exterior

The plan is based on a Greek cross, with a very short nave and two transepts of the same length. The sanctuary has an integral semi-circular apse. There is a very low central octagonal drum dome which was never completed but which was capped by eight tiled roof pitches which meet at the apex without a lantern. The other roofs are also pitched and tiled, and the walls are of brick. [1]

The church is built on a high basement with a double ramp access staircase. On the access stairway a plaque commemorates the foundation of the Apostolic College for the Missions, 1721. [2]

Façade

The two-storey façade (1) is false, as it is substantially higher than the nave behind it. It features eight Corinthian pilasters, the inner two pairs flanking the door being double. The entrance is surmounted by a beautiful relief, like a heraldic coat of arms that depicts the *Liberation of Slaves*, the original purpose of the Trinitarian Order. [1] [2]

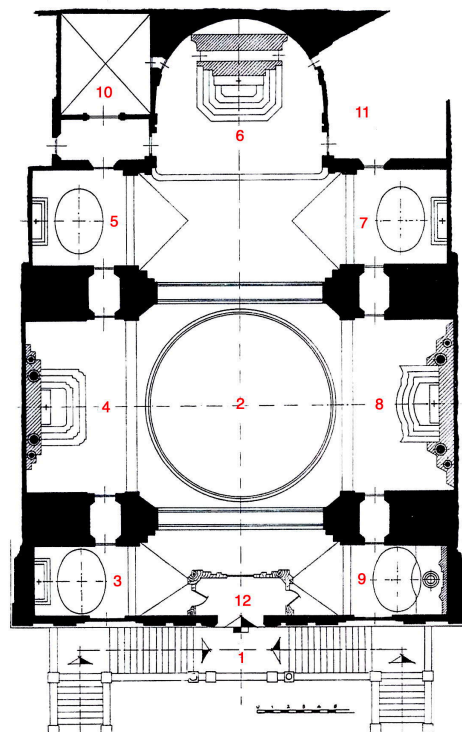
In between the pilasters are two pairs of round-headed niches crowned by triangular pediments. The top story has one window with triangular pediment, flanked by six pilasters (inner ones double) and crowned by an ogee pediment with a little segment on top. [1]

Next to the facade stands the Convent of the Trinitarians. The ancient part corresponds to the three closest windows and is characterized by the magnificent "Borromini" portal; it was enlarged in recent times. Founded in 1721 and opened four years later, the Apostolic College for the Missions did not last long: its activity, which began regularly only around 1740, suffered a long interruption during the two French invasions, and completely ceased before the middle of the last century. [a]

Campanile

A campanile (11) was built on the right hand side of the apse; a square Baroque tower with pale yellow walls and white architectural details. It was completed in 1951-52. The large open sound-holes are balustraded, and there is a double pagoda cap in lead. [1] [2]

Plan



Interior

The interior decoration is restrained, being mostly in pale yellow with white detailing. [1]

The interior of the church is quite solemn, with a central Greek cross plan. The dome, never built, has the circle of the drum on which rests a closed hemispherical cap which is hidden from the outside by the polygonal lantern. In the corbels are depicted couples of musician angels, modern art nouveau painting, with delicate and nuanced colors. [2] [a]

A large choir loft has recently been placed over the counterifacade. [2]

The oil paintings found in this church were almost all commissioned in the 18th century to Roman painters considered among the best in that period. [2]

Apse and High Altar (6)

This part of the church dates back to 1726 and was very original. Pope Benedict XIII consecrated the altar, which he made privileged, also granting perpetual plenary indulgence to the church. [2] [a]

In the center of the apse, the high altar has the shape of a small temple with precious marbles: ancient yellow, ancient green, alabaster. What we see today is a remake of the ancient temple that housed the venerated effigy of Santa Maria delle Grazie inside: the temple was moved and leaned against the curvature of the apse, raising everything on a high base. [2]

The altarpiece is a venerated icon of *Our Lady of Graces*, painted by **Gilles Halet** in the late 17th century on the comission of Don Giuseppe Faraldi. Above, stucco angels hold a large crown. [1] [2] [a]

In two framed niches on the sides are statues in Carrara marble depicting the two founders of the Trinitarian Order: *San Giovanni de Matha* and *San Felice di Valois*. The statues are by **Publio Morbiducci**, and date from the reconfiguration of the sanctuary in 1952. [2] [a]

Chapels are described in a clockwise direction, starting at the left rear:

Chapel of the Crucifix (3)

The first chapel at the left is inspired in the altar by the one facing it dedicated to San Giovanni Nepomuceno. [2]

The 18th century canvas represents the *Crucifix between the Virgin, Magdalene and St. John*. It is the work of the Roman painter **Odoardo Vicinelli**, pupil of Morandi. [2]

Altar of the Nazaarene (4)

In the left transept, the altar is in imitation of the one in the chapel across from it. The chapel was was completed in 1751 by the master builder **Domenico Giorgioli**. Under the altar a precious old green basin. [2] [a]

The altarpiece above the altar represents the *Nazarene redeemed by the Trinitarians* and the patron saints of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity, *Sts. Agnes and Catherine*, by an unknown painter of 1800. The figure of the Nazarene is linked to a Trinitarian tradition. [2]

Chapel of the Holy Family (Asnaghi Chapel)

The third chapel on the left (5). The decoration of the chapel was commissioned in 1713 by Giuseppe Asnaghi, a rich merchant from Como, who died in 1716 and was buried here. The chapel was completed in 1747 by his son-in-law, Giovanni Bernardino Pontici, knight of the order of St. James and secretary of Card. Neri Corsini. On the floor of the chapel is the sepulchral plaque placed in 1748 by Pontici for himself, his wife Maddalena Asnaghi and their children. [a]

The chapel is striking for the total cladding in warm reddish Cottanello marble. Noteworthy are the stucco festoons of the arches, of very fine workmanship, reminiscent of those of Borromini in the interior of San

Giovanni in Laterano. [2]

Interesting chapel for the pictorial set of artists among the best of the Roman School around the first half of 18th century. The oil on canvas altarpiece of the *Holy Family and young John the Baptist*, by **Giuseppe Chiari**. [2] [a]

The lateral painting on the left, *Rest on the flight into Egypt*, is by **Pietro Bianchi**. The painter died at the age of 46 and the painting was finished by one of his pupils. [2] [a]

The lateral painting on the right over the entrance to the sacristy, *The Nativity and Adoration of the Shepherds*, is by **Niccolò Ricciolini**. [2] [a]

Two lunette frescoes are by **Marco Benefial**, detailing scenes from the *Preaching and Beheading of John the Baptist*. The cupola fresco, *The Assumption*, by **Pietro da Pietri**, was unfortunately damaged by moisture. It is one of the last works of the painter. [1] [2] [a]

Chapel of San Giovanni de Matha (7)

The third chapel on the right is dedicated to St John of Matha, a founder of the order. The chapel is the most modest of the church. In the small dome, four medallions contain *Scenes from the life of St. Luigi Gonzaga*. [1] [2] [a]

The frescoes in the vault and the altarpiece were painted **Francesco Fusi**. The very simple painting represents the *Virgin with Child who gives to San Giovanni de Matha the money for the ransom of the slaves*, venerated by the Trinitarians with the title of *Mother of Good Remedy*. [1] [2] [a]

On the left wall is a mosaic of *Jesus Christ*, used as the emblem of the Trinitarians.

Altar of the Holy Trinity (8)

The altar of the right transept is very monumental and of Baroque layout. It is dedicated to the Holy Trinity and the founding Saints of the Order of the Trinitarians, San Giovanni de Matha and San Felice di Valois. [2]

This altar is in plastered masonry, with columns painted in imitation marble. On a high cornice with a broken tympanum, two angels in stucco and plaster rest. The altar was consecrated in 1737. [2] [a]

The oil altarpiece, inserted in a floral frame, is the academic work of **Onofrio Avellino**, *Holy Trinity with Saints of the Order of the Reformed Trinitarians*. The painting is precise, accurate, the attitudes studied, the very bright colors and the whole composition very crowded. [2]

Chapel of San Giovanni Nepomuceno (Baptistry) (9)

This chapel of St. John of Nepomuk, when in 1850 the church became a parish, was transformed into a baptistery. The baptismal font, placed in 1902 in place of the altar, came from the destroyed parish of San Michele Arcangelo (razed to the ground in 1849 by Napoleon's soldiers. The artistic baptismal font, with a bardiglio cup, has a very elegant eighteenth-century line. It is surmounted by a slender roof of gilded and painted carved wood, of late execution, coming from Santa Maria della Luce in Trastevere. [2]

The altar has been removed; there remains the splendid exhibition in light-colored brick, consisting of a concave base and a high part with a convex architrave supported by columns, surmounted by a bent and broken tympanum. The stuccoes in the corbels of the small dome (bundles of palm trees) and the heads of the cherubs on the side cornices are part of that Borromini repertoire widely used in the church. [2]

The altarpiece is an oil painting whose author is not mentioned and depicts *St. John of Nepomuk*, a non-Trinitarian saint, but "in vogue" in 17th century, having been sanctified at that time. [2]

Interesting are the lateral works that represent episodes from the life of the saint to whom the chapel is dedicated. They are works of **Francisco Scaramuzza**. [2]

Sacristy (10)

From the Asnagli chapel you enter the simple but beautiful sacristy, built together with the church but

finished later, together with the facade and inside. The structure is of Borromini style, but above all for the very fine stucco decorations (the star motif returns in the vault as in the church). Very original is the partition with an elegant wavy line, which leads to the sacristy, dominated by two beautiful eighteenth-century vases. The mosaic, which represents the Charisma of the Order, reproduces that of San Tommaso in Formis al Celio. It was commissioned in 1998, on the occasion of the 8th centenary of the approval of the rule and the 4th centenary of the reform of the Order. [2]

Access

The church is open:

Weekdays 7:00 to 12:00 (9:00 July and August), 16:00 (17:30 July and August) to 19:30.

Sundays 7:30 to 13:00 (12:00 July and August), 17:00 (17:30 July and August) to 19:30.

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated:

Weekdays 7:00, 9:00 (not July, August), 18:30.

Sundays 8:00, 9:00 (not July, August), 10:00, 12:00 (not July, August), 18:30.

Rosary and Vespers at 17:50.

Location:

Addr: Address: Via delle Fornaci,

Coord: [41° 53' 51.3"N 12° 27' 17.4"E](#)

Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Busiri Vici](#) (1817-1911), Italian architect

Domenico Giorgioli (18th century), Italian master builder

Filippo Niccoletti (18th cent.), Italian architect

Filippo [Raguzzini](#) (1690-1771), Italian architect

Francesco Fusi (18th cent.), Italian painter from Milan

Francesco Multò (17th cent.), Italian architect

Francesco [Scaramuzza](#) (1803-1886), Italian painter

Gilles [Hallet](#) [aka Egidio Allet] (c.1620-1694), Flemish painter

Giuseppe Bartolomeo [Chiari](#) (1654-1727), Italian painter

Marco [Benefial](#) (1684-1764), Italian proto-Neoclassical painter

Niccolò [Ricciolini](#) (1687-1772), Italian painter

Odoardo [Vicinelli](#) (1684-1755), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period

Onofrio [Avellino](#) (1674-1741), Italian painter of the Baroque period

Pietro [Bianchi](#) (1694-1740), Italian painter of the Baroque period,

Pietro [da Pietri](#) (1663-1716), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period

Publio [Morbiducci](#) (1889-1963), Italian sculptor

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)

2. [Church web site](#)

a. Calio', T.; "Santa Maria delle Grazie alle Fornaci". In S. Boesch Gajano, T. Calio', F. Scorza Barcellona, L. Spera (a cura di), Roma (pp. 316-318). Roma : De Luca Editori d'Arte; 2012

[English Wikipedia page](#)

[GCatholic Web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

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

[Info.roma web-page](#)

["Romartlover" web-page](#) with 18th century engraving and photos

[Facebook page](#)

[ROMAPEDIA blog](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Roman Despatches blog with gallery](#)

[Tourist info](#)

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