

San Pasquale Baylón e Santi Quaranta Martiri



San Pasquale Baylón e Santi Quaranta Martiri is an 18th century convent church in Trastevere. There is a joint dedication, a combination of its original one and another one it received when rebuilt as a conventual church. This is to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, and to St Paschal Baylon. The church has had the nickname of the **Chiesa delle Zitelle**, or Church of the Spinsters. [1]

The dedication is to the 40 Roman soldiers who, during the persecution of Licinius (310), not having abjured their Christian faith, were immersed in a frozen lake in Sebaste, in Lesser Armenia (present-day Sivas in Turkey) and froze to death. Pasquale Baylón was a Spanish priest, canonized in 1690, popularly considered the protector of women. [3]

History

The original church is of unknown origin, but was possibly founded in the 10th century as a small parish church. If so, it was on the edge of the built-up area in Trastevere in the Middle Ages. [1]

The first documentary reference to the church is to a restoration by Pope Callixtus II in 1123, when it was dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Armenia, and was dependent on the basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere. [1] [b]

There were too many parish churches in Trastevere at the end of the Middle Ages, and this was one that lost its status. In the reign of Pope Alexander VI, it had a small hospital attached. The Archconfraternity of the Gonfalone, attached to the parish church of Santa Lucia del Gonfalone across the river, acquired the complex in 1608, and restored it. [1] [3]

The Confraternity was here for over a century, but in 1736 the church was purchased by the Spanish

Alcantarine or Discalced reform of the Franciscan Friars Minor. On this occasion the church was placed under the Crown of Spain with a royal decree of Philip V of 23 December 1738 , confirmed by Isabella II of 1856. [1] [3] [a] [b]

On obtaining the church as a Roman base, the Alcantarines totally rebuilt it by 1747 to a design by **Giuseppe Sardi**. In recognition of the congregation's dedication to poverty he used inexpensive materials such as stucco and paint to give the impression of something more sumptuous. A little convent was added next door. [1] [a]

The church was re-dedicated to St Paschal Baylon, who belonged to the reform and was perhaps their most famous member (becoming patron of Eucharistic confraternities). However, the friars were ordered to preserve the original dedication and so the two dedications were combined in the present name. [1] [b]

The complex continued under the protection of the Crown of Spain and this was confirmed in 1858. Therefore, the property was safe from seizure after the conquest of Rome by Italy in 1870. [1]

The interior was restored in 1896 when the fictive marbling was added to the walls. [c]

However, with the passing of time the several reformed congregations of Franciscans had become indistinguishable. The Church acted in the person of Pope Leo XIII in 1897, and forced the union of the Discalced (by then wearing sandals) with the Observants, Recollects and Reformed to form the present Franciscan Friars Minor (O.F.M.). They remain in charge. today [1] [b]

Exterior

The fabric is in brick, rendered in pale orange with architectural details in white. The decorative details on the façade are in stucco. [1]

Behind the apse is the convent, around a small square arcaded cloister. [1]

There is a little campanile or bellcote containing a single bell over the lower end of the right hand aisle, just behind the façade. It has a curved crowning cornice. [1]

Façade (1)

The two-storey façade has its central section brought forward, and both storeys in this section have a pair of very wide pilasters with the centers occupied by a long recessed rectangular strip. The first storey pilasters have sort-of Doric capitals, and support a dividing entablature bearing a dedicatory inscription. This entablature, with the inscription, also runs over the recessed side sections of the façade together with extensions of the pilaster capitals acting as sub-architraves. [1]

The inscription:

Deo in hon[orem] s[anctorum] XL martyru[m] ac s[ancti] Paschalis Baylon dic[at]um] Anno D[omi]ni MDCCXLV.

The tall central entrance almost reaches the entablature. The doorcase has an interesting Baroque curve to its top, incorporating a post on which sits the heraldic shield of the king of Spain within a wreath tied with ribbons. This breaches the base of a segmental pediment, which is supported by a pair of posts bearing tassels and decorated with rosettes. Below the tassels are a pair of devices amounting to little U-shaped double volutes. [1]

The aisle entrances are much smaller, with triangular tops to the doorcases also involving tassels and U-volutes. Above these doors is a pair of panels containing the crossed-arms device of the Franciscans. [1]

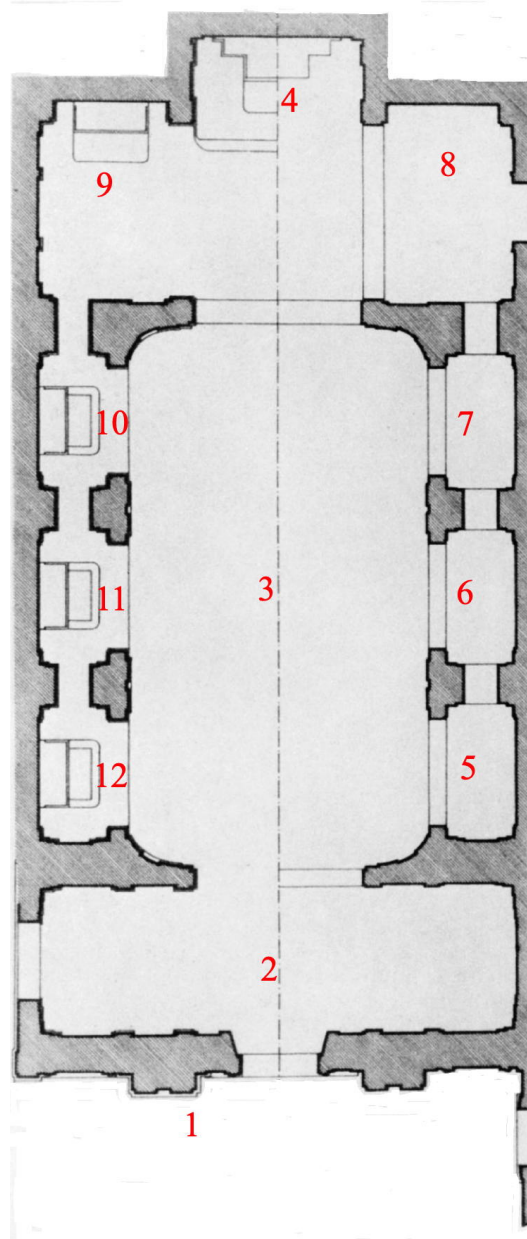
The second storey has an attic plinth, in front of which the wide pilasters stand. These frame a very weathered fresco of *St Paschal Baylon in Glory* by Matteo Panaria, in a large vertical elliptical tondo decorated with ribbons and flower sprays. [1] [a] [c]

The topmost triangular pediment contains a putto's head with swags in its recessed central section.

Very oddly, there is a gabled attic over this looking like an architectural echo. [1]

Interior

The plan of San Pasquale consists of an elongated rectangular vestibule with a choir loft above, a rectangular nave with three interconnecting chapels on each side, a presbytery with two recessed altars at right and left, and a rectangular high altar chapel. [a]



The first or entrance bay is distinct, having its own slightly lower roof. The main nave roof is higher also than the transept roof, and the apse roof is also separate. [1]

The entrance vestibule is separate from the main nave, and has a pair of modern chapels flanking it. The nave has three chapels on each side, and ends in a triumphal arch leading into the transept. This has a cupola over the crossing with incorporated pediments, and a chapel at each end. Finally, there is the sanctuary apse. [1]

The entire church has been decorated in modern times with bouquets and festoons by the Roman painter **Antonio Castagnini**. [b]

Vestibule (2)

The separate entrance vestibule has a room over it, so is provided with a low ceiling-vault which is done as a little saucer cupola. This is frescoed with the emblem of the Franciscans, comprising the crossed arms of Christ and St Francis displaying the wounds in their hands. [1]

This vestibule is flanked by two modern chapels, one dedicated to the Crucifix and the other to St Anthony of Padua. They contain devotional statuary, but nothing of artistic interest. [1]

In the floor of the vestibule, covered by glass panels, are stairs leading to the crypt.

The choir over the vestibule looks into the nave via a gallery. Here is a 19th century painting of the *Immaculate Conception*, by **Luigi Tossi**, of the exact same dimensions and the same shape as the canvases in the Church's chapels. It also has a saucer-cupola vault. [1] [c]

Nave (3)

The interior is richly decorated. The three chapels on each side have high arches, forming arcades separated by wide piers. These piers have double gigantic Corinthian pilasters painted to resemble alabaster, and these support a deep entablature which runs around the nave. The frieze of this is decorated with scrollwork, and the architrave bends slightly over the tops of the chapel arches. Also, over each arch is an elliptical aperture with a mesh grille, which interrupts the frieze and has the cornice run over its top. [1] [b]

The barrel-vaulted ceiling does not spring from this entablature cornice, but from a second cornice which is slightly higher up. This cornice touches the first cornice where it bends over the apertures, and the panels in between thus created are embellished with swags. The ceiling itself has lunettes for windows over the chapel arches, and a large central panels frescoed with *St Peter of Alcántara with the Trinity and the Virgin in Glory* by **Matteo Pannaria** from Palermo. [1] [2] [c]

The nave is brightly illuminated by large clerestory windows over each bay while the chapels have no windows and the presbytery is dimly lighted by a single window at one of its short ends and by a small lantern cut into the handkerchief vault in front of the main altar chapel. [a]

The corners of the nave are rounded, either side of the sanctuary triumphal arch and the counterfaçade arch in between the entrance vestibule and the nave. These two arches are similarly treated, with very deep archivolts springing from the second, higher cornice and flanked by doubletted (not double) pilasters in the same style as in between the chapels. The counterfaçade arch contains the balconied gallery into the aula over the vestibule, and has on its archivolt a stucco relief containing the motto *Domus orationis est* ("It is a house of prayer") with cornucopias and flower sprays. The triumphal arch has the Spanish royal shield with festoons and winged putto's heads. Over both stucco reliefs is an arc of square coffers bordering the ceiling vault. [1] [b]

In the center of the floor of the nave are two large tombstones. The first tombstone is that of Dona Leonor, daughter of D. Felipe Gaetano and wife of D. Francisco Caracciolo, Duke of Martina, who died at the age of 79 in the year 1762. The second, first in the central corridor as you enter from the street, also has his family coat of arms. The deceased was named Gregorio Nacienceno Porcary y Coll, who died in 1765. [b]

Transept

The transept crossing has a cupola with integrated pendentives, and a fresco by **Pannaria** again covers the entire surface. It depicts *St Paschal Baylon in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament* and the *Dove of the Holy Spirit* in the oculus. [1] [2] [c]

The nave entablature runs around the transept and the sanctuary apse, and the end walls of the transept have the same Franciscan device as is found on the façade and in the vestibule vault. [1]

Sanctuary (4)

The sanctuary is very shallow, and is rectangular with a strip of barrel vaulting having an arc of square coffers. There is no proper altar aedicule, but the back wall has the interior entablature supported by a pair of pilasters with gilded winged putto's heads in place of capitals. Over the entablature is a low triangular pediment, and in the lunette over this in turn is a tondo containing a fresco of *God the Father* (not easy to see). [1]

The round-headed altarpiece depicts the *Martyrdom to the Forty Martyrs*. Rodolphinus Venuti, writing in 1766, described the artist as **Luigi Tussi** from Genoa. The scene of the altarpiece takes place in a

pool of frozen water. On the right the guardian observes a choir of angels that descend from the highest carrying 40 palms and 40 crowns. [1] [b]

The entire main altar, with its marbles, was paid for by Cardinal Troiano Acquaviva, protector of the Alcantarinos whose marble coat-of-arms are on both sides of it. On the cornice and the triangle of the tympanum that closes the entire structure of the Church, the *Lamb of God* appears, glorious, within the circle of perfection and radiant with gold. [b]

Side chapels

The six nave side chapels are similarly designed, with an ornately framed round-headed altarpiece on the far wall without an aedicule and a little saucer cupola with pendentives above. The altars are dedicated to Franciscan Saints and a the Immaculate Conception, patron saint of the Franciscan Order. [1] [b]

The chapels are described counterclockwise, beginning to the right of the entrance. [1]

Chapel of St. Diego of Alcalá (5)

The first chapel on the right is dedicated to Diego of Alcalá, and has an altarpiece by **Giovanni Sorbi**, around 1745-47. The picture on the altar itself is a copy of the icon of *Our Lady of Pompei*. [1] [b]

The altarpiece shows *San Diego de Alcala*, in the habit of a pilgrim, when he visited Rome to gain the indulgences of the Jubilee Year of 1450. He is received by a Franciscan religious in the Church of Ara Coeli and they both contemplate a painting of The Virgin that the former shows him. Very good composition. Here he would stay as a nurse attending to those affected by the plague, very numerous in that Holy Year. [b]

On the right wall is a small shrine to *St. Rita of Cascia*. In the vault is a fresco of the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*.

Chapel of St. Peter of Alcántara (6)

The second chapel on the right is dedicated to St. Peter of Alcantará, and has an altarpiece (1751-56) by **Lambert Krahe**, this is an important work. The altarpiece shows *San Pedro de Alcantará giving communion to Santa Teresa de Avila, with St Francis of Assisi and St Antony of Padua* appearing as deacon and subdeacon, according to the vision of Saint Teresa, known for her testimony. In the small dome is a fresco of the consecrated host. [1] [b]

On the altar is a small picture of *The Sacred Heart*.

In the chapel is a marble tombstone for Domingo Andolfi, a Roman, whose tomb was prepared by his sons shortly after he died on January 8, 1779. [b]

Chapel of St. Paschal (7)

The third chapel on the right is dedicated to St. Paschal (since the high altar is dedicated to the Forty Martyrs), and the altarpiece (c. 1745-1747), by **Salvatore Monosilo**, shows *St. Paschal Baylón in adoration before the Eucharist*. In the cupola the monogram of the Blessed Virgin. [1] [b]

There is a tombstone in this chapel for Miguel Tuya Catriacensis to whom his wife Mrs. Teresa Fazzani dedicated it when he was buried, at the age of 47, in the year 1799. [b]

Altar of Bl John of Prado (8)

The altar on the right, in the transept, is dedicated to Bl John of Prado, who was a Franciscan missionary martyred in Morocco in 1631. The altarpiece shows him being burned, and is by **Pannaria**. [1]

The door to the sacristy is here. In the sacristy is a painting by **Matteo Pannaria**, *Crucifixion with Sts John and Mary Magdalen*. [c]

Altar of St. John the Baptist (9)

The altar on the left, in the transept, is dedicated to St John the Baptist. The altarpiece is a copy of a work by Spanish painter **Joaquin Duran**. [1] [b]

Chapel of the Holy Family (10)

The third chapel on the left is dedicated to the Holy Family, and has an altarpiece, showing *The Holy Family with St Elizabeth and the Infant St John the Baptist*, is by **Francesco Preciado**, approximately from the year 1745-47. [1] [b] [c]

On the left wall is a small painting of Saint Lucy, with some small reliquaries around the painting. In the dome is the monogram of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi (11)

The second chapel on the left is dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, and has an altarpiece of *St Francis Receiving the Stigmata* by **Sorbi** again. In the dome the *Sacret Heart of Jesus* with the cross and the crown of thorns. [1] [b]

Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (12)

The first chapel on the left is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, and has an altarpiece by **Tussi** again. In the painting she is represented according to the Franciscan theological theory: she is the child who wields the spear against the serpent. In the saucer dome in the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*. [1] [b]

An inscription on the side wall commemorates cleaning and restoration work in the chapel in 1899. [b]

Artists and Architects:

Antonio Castagnini (20th cent), Italian painter
Francisco [Preciado](#) de la Vega (1713–1789), Spanish painter
Giovanni Sorbi (18th cent), Italian painter
Giuseppe [Sardi](#) (1680-c.1768), Italian architect
Joaquin Duran (18th cent.), Spanish painter
Lambert [Krahe](#) (1712-1790), German painter
Luigi Tussi (18th cent.), Italian painter
Matteo [Pannaria](#) (18th cent.), Italian painter
Salvatore [Monosilo](#) (died 1776), Italian painter

Location:

Address: Via di San Francisco a Ripa 20
Coord: 41° 53' 16" N 12° 28' 18" E

Links and References:

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
2. [Wikipedia page on Pannaria](#)
3. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
 - a. Mallory, Nina A.; "The Architecture of Giuseppe Sardi. And the Attribution of the Façade of the Church of the Maddalena"; *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 1967), pp. 83-101
 - b. Navarro, Anastasio, O.F.M.; [SANTI QUARANTA, SEMBLANZA HISTORICO-ARTISTICA](#); 1988
 - c. Erwee, Michael; [THE CHURCHES OF ROME, 1527-1870](#); Pinder Press, 2013; pp 550-551

