

San Roberto Bellarmino



San Roberto Bellarmino is a mid 20th century parish and titular church in the Parioli quarter. The main entrance faces the Piazza Ungheria. The dedication is to the Jesuit cardinal [St Robert Bellarmine](#) (1542-1621).

History

The parish was founded by Pope Pius XI in 1933, after St Robert Bellarmine had been canonized in 1930 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1931. The architect **Clemente Busiri Vici** had begun the design in the latter year, and construction began in 1933.

This is a seriously impressive building structurally, and is one of the great Roman domed churches of the 20th century. However the work took more than two decades, and the church was only finally consecrated in 1959 by Monsignor (later Cardinal) Luigi Traglia.

The new parish was initially entrusted to the Jesuits, but they had to give it up in 2003 and it is now administered by diocesan clergy.

The church was made titular in 1969. Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (later Pope Francis) was titular priest here from 2001 to 2013. He was replaced in 2014 by Cardinal Mario Aurelio Poli.

Exterior

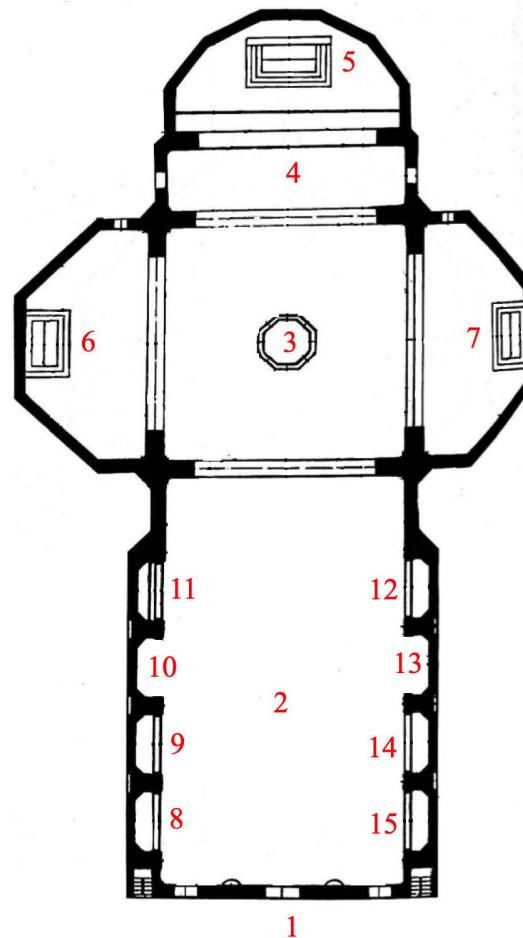
The plan of the church is basilical, based on a modified Latin cross. The exterior fabric is in finely laid pink brickwork, with some details in limestone. However, the load-bearing elements are in reinforced concrete.

Covered corridors run from each end of the entrance façade, along the backs of the nave side chapels, past these diagonal chapels and around the transept apses to meet at the sacristies behind the sanctuary apse. They also give access to the priests' house to the right of the sanctuary.

The dome has a very low octagonal drum with blind walls, supporting eight low tiled pitches meeting at a cylindrical lantern with eight window-slits. This has its own little cap with eight tiled pitches.

The roofing is pitched and tiled, and is quite complex. The double-pitched main nave roof runs as far as the transept, which has four diagonal pitches in the corners flanking the dome. The sanctuary bay has a double pitch, but the three apses are pitched in sectors. The diagonal chapels off the transept have little double-pitched and hipped roofs, with three sectors covering each apse and meeting on the hip.

Plan



Façade

At the entrance is an external narthex or loggia (1) occupying the full width of the central nave, flanked by a pair of octagonal campanili which are attached to the corners of the nave.

The façade is plain, but dignified by the campanili. The open narthex has four brick pillars with imposts but no capitals, supporting a stone frieze (no proper entablature) bearing a dedicatory inscription: *Deo optimo maximo, in honorem S[ancti] Roberti Bellarmino eccl[esi]ae doc[toris] dicatum* ("To God the best and greatest, dedicated in honor of St Robert Bellarmine, Doctor of the Church"). The tiled roof above this has a single upward pitch.

The gabled main frontage is undecorated, except for a stone-framed window shaped like a horizontally stretched hexagon with two vertical mullions. (This design feature is repeated in the nave windows.) In the gable apex is a relief coat-of-arms of Pope Pius XI, and the roofline has a projecting stone cornice.

The stumpy octagonal campanili have blank brick walls, except that each outward-facing side has a window in the shape of a cross with intricate geometric stone mullions. The brickwork around each of these two windows is laid in the form of a hexagon. The towers have cornices formed by continuing that of the roof gable. Above these are the bellchambers, having an open rectangular soundhole on each face. The caps are pitched and tiled, and are only slightly higher than the gable end of the nave.

Inside the narthex are three entrances with stone doorcases, the central one being larger. These all lead into the central nave.

Interior

Nave

The interior of the nave (2) is rather sparse. The nave has a total of six bays, including a very shallow one at the entrance. The next four bays have very shallow side chapels, but the sixth bay does not. The four bays each have a large hexagonal window in each nave side wall below the roof and above each chapel. The windows are horizontally stretched and in a white frame. The chapels are separated by blind brick pilasters. The side chapels are topped by a cornice which is interrupted by blind pilasters supporting the roof.

The surfaces below the cornice are in a pale pastel yellow, while above the cornice and on the pilasters they are in white.

The ceiling is open truss, with a wide barge-board around its edge where it meets the walls. The walls just beneath and surrounding the windows are painted in a dark green.

The window above the entrance and the eight in the nave contain good quality stained glass by **Assia Busiri Vici**, featuring St Robert. The entrance one shows him in contemplation, and the nave ones depict him acting out the Beatitudes.

The *Stations of the Cross* along the nave wall are by **Corrado Vigni**.

Transept

The transept, main transept chapels and apse have good-quality mosaics by **Renato Tomassi**. The work is vaguely Byzantine in style, and the details are on a blue background with clouds intended to evoke the empyrean.

The low dome (3) has an octagonal lantern with a window in each side. On the triangular pendentives are the *Evangelists' Symbols*. The side walls in between these show four Christian symbols: *Cross*, *Star*, *Burning Bush* and *Anchor* (a symbol of Hope). The dome itself is undecorated but appears to be made of reused tiles.

The right hand chapel is dedicated to Our Lady (7), and has an icon of the *Madonna and Child* inserted into a hexagon frame fairly high on the wall. The left hand chapel is dedicated to the Sacred Heart (6), with a very similar arrangement for the altarpiece.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary apse (5) mosaic shows *St Robert in the Glory of the Holy Spirit*, and has a Latin epigraph: O Doctor optime, ecclesiae sanctae lumen, beate Roberte, deprecare pro nobis Filium Dei ("O best doctor, light of holy Church, blessed Robert, pray for us to the Son of God"). This is actually the Magnificat antiphon sung at Vespers in his honor on his feast-day.

The high altar was donated by Beniamino Gigli (1890-1957), the famous tenor, but unfortunately now has another altar in front of it used for Mass "facing the people". This was installed in 2000.

Side Chapels

The side chapels are shallow, with simple altars and an altarpiece of modern paintings. The chapels

on the left side, from back to front are:

- Baptistry (8)
- Chapel of St. Francis (9)
- the next bay has a door to the external corridor (10)
- Chapel of St. Joseph (11)

The chapels on the right side, from front to back are:

- Chapel of St. Anna (12)
- the next bay has a door to the external corridor (13)
- Chapel of the Crucifix (14)
- Chapel of St. Rita (15)

Access

The most convenient bus to get there on is perhaps the 53, which stops at Colosseo and Piazza Venezia.

Info:

Address: 13 Via Panama 00198 Roma

Phone: Tel. 06 85 53 413

Location:

Coord: [41°55'24"N 12°29'35"E](#)

Opening times:

Weekdays 7:00 to 12:00, 16:00 (17:00, July to September) to 20:00.

Sundays 8:00 to 14:30 (13:00, July to September), 17:30 to 21:30.

Liturgy

Mass times:

Weekdays 7:30, 9:00, 10:00 (not July to September), 19:00. These Masses are in the Sacred Heart chapel.

Sundays 9:00, 10:30, 12:00, 13:15 (not July to September), 19:00, 20:30.

The feast of St Robert Bellarmine is celebrated on 17 September.

Artists and Architects

Clemente [Busiri Vici](#) (1887-1965), Italian architect

Assia [Busiri Vici](#) (1906-1989) Russian-Italian artist

Renato [Tomassi](#) (1884-1978), Italian painter, mosaic designer

Corrado [Vigni](#) (1888-1956), Italian sculptor

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Info.roma web-page](#)

[cathopedia.org](#)

[When in Rome Blog](#)

