

San Romano Martire a Pietralata



St Romanus the Martyr at Pietralata is a 21st century parish and titular church at Largo Antonio Beltramelli 18 in the Pietralata quarter, north of the Via Tiburtina and just east of the Tiburtina train station. The dedication is to St Romanus Ostiarius, who was a 3rd century Roman martyr associated with St Lawrence. His legend states that he was a soldier who converted to Christianity by the example of Saint Lawrence, who baptized Romanus after the soldier was imprisoned. He became a church doorman in Rome and was later martyred.

History

The parish was erected in 1973, the territory being taken from that of Sant'Atanasio a Via Tiburtina.

The permanent church was completed in 2004, to a design by **Igino Pineschi**. The mosaics in the apse are by **Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnick**, S.J, in 2006. It replaced a nearby temporary building on the Via della Cave di Pietralata.

It was made titular in 2015, the first cardinal priest being Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel. He is head of the Ethiopian Catholic Church.

Exterior

The church is part of a larger complex of buildings forming a sports and social center for the suburb. It is on a corner site with a street down its left hand side (Via Eugenio Torelli), but is set back from the street frontages at this side and at front. This provides an entrance courtyard, and a drive down the left hand side to the parish facilities at the back of the church. The property is enclosed by a wall in grey tufa ashlar blocks, with rough faces but very thin joints. The masonry is interspersed by thin bands of red brick, mimicking an ancient Roman building technique called opus vittatum.

This boundary wall has rectangular sections cut out of it from the top, into which are inserted glazed panels with metal mullion bars which are both vertical and diagonal, giving a superimposed X and cross pattern.

The plan of the church looks rectangular at first glance, but is actually a symmetrical irregular octagon with each long side of the apparent rectangle being formed from two sides of the octagon at a very obtuse angle. The short ends of the "rectangle" also have a slight outward angle.

Off the far left hand side is an external sacristy corridor, having the form of a very narrow triangle created by providing a wall on the same axis as the near left hand side of the octagon. On the near right hand side is a trapezoidal ferial chapel (for weekday Masses), with the base of the trapezoid abutting the near right hand side wall of the church. Behind this is a small semi-cylindrical annexe which is the confessional.

The structure of the church is actually quite accomplished, and takes some describing.

To start with, seven free-standing walls in high-quality pink brickwork stand on the sides of the octagon of the plan (the two back sides of the church are occupied by a single angled wall). There are wide gaps between the two front walls and the front side walls, matched between the back wall and the rear side walls. Similarly, there is a gap between the pair of walls on each side. These gaps are filled with fenestration in clear glass, having metal bar mullions in rectangles.

The top of each side wall slopes downwards towards the central side gap. The brickwork of these walls is finely laid, with thin mortar joints, and is mostly blank. However, each wall has a set of horizontal stripes formed by laying a course or courses of bricks vertically on edge and separating them from the main brickwork by wide mortar joints. There are four stripes. The upper one is quite far down from the top of the wall, and is two vertical bricks deep separated by another wide mortar joint. The other three (descending) are one brick deep, two and a half, and half -this lowest band is on a low concrete ground-plinth.

Inserted into slots in the tops of the side walls are four vertical white rectangles on each side, accompanied by drainpipes and with two flanking the central side gap. These are the ends of concrete beams supporting the roof, part of a structural frame which you only get to see if you go inside the church.

The actual roof is in anodized corrugated metal of a brownish-grey colour. It is a mansard with a hip at each end, and two long window strips under floating horizontal cornices are inserted into each steep side.

Façade

The entrance façade is in the same style of brick walling as the side walls. It has a central vertical obtuse angle, and a monumental entrance portal formed from a large square central void continued downwards to the ground by a smaller rectangular void (in keyhole style). You actually enter through the latter. The low screen walls either side of the rectangle are topped with stone slabs.

A thin vertical slit window continues from this entrance aperture up to the gable along the angle, splitting the façade into two symmetrical blank brick walls bearing the ornamental stripes already described. This slit also contains the bottom of a metal cross finial.

Unlike the side walls, the walling of the façade is load-bearing and has a reinforced concrete core. The lintel of the portal, which is given an inward batter, is part of a concrete beam which juts out on either side to bond with the ends of the side walls.

This keyhole-portal is completely open, as the gate in the property boundary wall (hopefully) provides security from those tempted to urinate, fornicate or sleep rough in it.

Immediately within the portal, at the sides, are two flanking rectangular brick-clad reinforced concrete piers, which are load-bearing elements. These support three horizontal concrete beams partway up within the portal, and these in turn support the structure of the entrance vestibule. This

is a glass box, with clear glass rectangular panels in metal frames (this includes the doors) both below the beams and above. The top far side of the box is sloped. The entire structure is sheltered by the main roof of the church.

To the right of the façade is the main entrance of the ferial chapel (for weekday Masses), where the Blessed Sacrament is also reserved.

Old parish center

Further to the right is a yellow-rendered earlier 20th century three-storey house, which was the original parish headquarters before the new complex was built. It has a statue of the Immaculate Conception in a niche on the façade.

Campanile

The very odd campanile can be regarded as a result of church bells losing their importance as a signal, and becoming mostly symbolic. The bells are close to the ground -they must be over-loud to those nearby (especially to those living in the apartment blocks to the left) but the sound doesn't carry very far.

The structure is right on the street corner, and combines its function with that of a gateway to the drive running down the left side of the church to the parish offices. It is in the form of four white concrete slabs in two closely placed pairs facing each other, supporting two horizontal concrete beams. On the beams is a green-painted metal bar cage containing the bells.

Interior

The interior consists of one single nave, with the ferial chapel accessed at the bottom right and the baptistery at top left.

The interior walls are in the same style of brickwork as the outside. The floor is attractively laid in a right-angled geometric pattern in white and light grey around rectangles in dark grey.

The dominant feature of the interior is the exposed concrete frame supporting the roof. The rectangular piers flanking the entrance, already mentioned, are actually the inner ones of two pairs and these are duplicated by four more piers at the other end of the church, flanking the sanctuary. These are oriented longitudinally. The ends of the side walls have four more engaged piers, oriented transversely, and these create alcoves in the corners of the church. Halfway down the church, where the side walls are interrupted by a window gap on each side, are four more piers engaged with the ends of the walls. Thus, the roof frame is supported by a total of sixteen piers

The inner four longitudinal entrance and sanctuary piers support an open concrete box-frame formed of four enormous reinforced concrete slabs on edge. These slabs continue over the piers both longitudinally to embed in the façade and sanctuary walls, and transversely over the side-wall end piers to terminate in the side walls. The four midway side piers support four short transverse beam-slabs which join onto the main longitudinal beams. Finally, each side wall is topped by a slab-beam fixed to the slabs at either end, and sloping downwards to form a canopy.

The inside of the roof is panelled in varnished pine planks, with rafters forming large square coffers. A row of these squares on either side are each fitted with a metal bar-frame support in the shape of inverted pyramids, which spring from the longitudinal slab-beams in the concrete frame.

Artworks

The major artwork owned by the church is a large figurative mosaic occupying the entire the back wall behind the altar, by **Marko Ivan Rupnik**. It depicts the risen Christ accompanied by St Romanus, and being adored by St John the Baptist and Our Lady.

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated (parish website, July 2018):

Weekdays 8:30 (not July or August), 18:30;

Sundays and Solemnities 8:30, 10:00 (not July or August), 11:30 (11:00 July and August, 18:30 (19:00 July and August).

The Rosary is recited at 17:50 daily (18:00 July and August).

The Divine Office is celebrated with Lauds at 8:10 from Monday to Thursday, and Vespers at 19:15 from Tuesday to Thursday.

There is Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 9:00 to 23:30 on Thursdays.

Artists and Architects:

Igino [Pineschi](#) (21st cent.), Italian architect

Marko Ivan [Rupnick](#), S.J. (b. 1954), Slovenian mosaic artist, theologian and priest

Burials:

Location:

Address: Largo Antonio Beltramelli 18

Coord: [41°54'38.67"N 12°32'17.24"E](#)

Links and Refewrences:

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Info Roma web site](#)

[Beweb web site](#)

[Wikipedia page](#)