

Santo Spirito in Sassia



Santo Spirito in Sassia (Holy Spirit in Saxony) is a 16th century titular and former hospital church in Rome dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Historically, the church has been part of the complex of the Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia. This is no longer the case, and it is now the Italian shrine of the devotion to Divine Mercy. This devotion arose from revelations given to St Faustina Kowalska. There is a strong Polish presence here.

History

The church stands on land that Pope Gregory II donated to Saxon King Cedwalla first and then to his successor Ina. There, King [Ine of Wessex](#) built the *Schola Sacorum* (the Saxon School) in 728 which was a charitable institution for Saxon pilgrims. He endowed a pilgrim hospice, with a little church attached called Sanctae Mariae Saxonum which is the predecessor of the present edifice. It was later known as Santa Maria in Saxia. (1) (7) (d)

The hospice and church were gutted by fire in 817, were sacked by Muslim raiders in 846, and were again burned in 852. They were rebuilt by Pope Leo IV, as part of his project to create the walled Leonine City. (1)

The complex went into decline after the conquest of England by the Normans in 1066. In 1073, Emperor Henry IV seized and fortified it as part of his campaign against Pope Gregory VII. The end of the functioning institution seems to have been in 1167, when Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa made use of the premises during his fourth Italian campaign. (1)

In 1198, at the request of Pope Innocent III, the Holy Spirit Hospital and church was rebuilt with donations from King John of England. The Pope commissioned the construction and supervision of the work to Guido di Montpellier, the founder of the Hospital Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit in France. (6) (7) (f)

The Avignon captivity from 1309 to 1377, when the popes lived in France, was an absolute disaster for the hospital as well as the rest of the city. The latter was taken over by the local nobility who terrorized the population, plundered public institutions and engaged in vendettas with one another. The patients and residents at the hospital were "cleansed", and the buildings turned into an armed camp. The decay remained after the popes returned, for almost a century. A serious fire in 1471 destroyed the remaining usable buildings. (1) (7)

The Hospital of the Holy Spirit was rebuilt by Pope Sixtus IV for the Jubilee Year of 1475. He also had the church restored and a new campanile build. The architect was **Baccio Pontelli**. (1) (g)

When Rome was sacked in 1527, the church was almost entirely destroyed. Pope Paul III had the church completely rebuilt, and moved to a new position turned towards the new St. Peter's Basilica, taking the name of Santo Spirito in Sassia. The work began under **Baldassare Peruzzi** in 1536, and continued under **Antonio da Sangallo the Younger** from 1538 to 1545. Decorations were completed in 1545 and after, and the organ was installed in 1547. Several chapels more were decorated by 1551, and church was consecrated by Bishop Francesco Maria Piccolomini on May 17, 1561 in the reign of Pius IV. The church was probably consecrated in 1568. The exterior was restored under Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), giving the church its present façade and entrance stairs by **Ottavio Nonni**, inspired by a draft left by **Sangallo**. The result was the present edifice, which had its interior decoration completed about 1595 and has not been altered much since. (1) (6) (7) (d) (e) (f)

Pius V added two doors on the right exterior flank of the church. These are placed one each on either side of the side entrance into the church, which may have received a first or new architectural enframing at this time, but only the flanking doors bear the inscription PIVS. V. PONT. MAX. (d)

In the 19th century, before the accession to the new state of Italy, many restoration works were carried out by **Francesco Azzurri** by the will of Pope Pius IX. (7)

According to inscriptions painted on the outer face of the triumphal arch and over the pulpit on the left wall, the tribune was restored in the middle of the 18th century, and the frescoes were again restored in 1931. (6)

In general the church escaped the hand of 19th century restorers. In recent years, however, the whole building has been cleaned and repaired, with works of restoration on the ceiling and a number of the chapels. The work seems to have been concluded with the restoration of the pictures in the first chapel on the right in 1958. (d)

The Holy Father John Paul II appointed the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia to be The Divine Mercy Spirituality Center (from 1 January 1994). The church is served by the clergy of the diocese of Rome. Since the beatification of Sister Faustina (1993) the church is also served by the sisters from the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy. (6)

Exterior

The church is parallel to the Via dei Penitenzieri, and so faces the Borgo Santo Spirito at an angle. It is quite large, but is a single five-bay nave without aisles. The nave side walls are very thick, in brick, and each contains five apses in its thickness. Nine of these are side chapels, but the middle one on the right is a side entrance. There is a separate apsidal sanctuary. This and the nave are separately roofed. A tower campanile is attached to the far right hand side of the apse. (1)

Façade (1)

The present façade was added under Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), probably by **Guido Guidetti** to a design by **Ottaviano Nonni, Il Mascarino**. It is a typical example of Renaissance architecture. (1)

It has two levels, rendered in a creamy white. The first level has six Composite pilasters with limestone capitals, supporting an entablature with a blank frieze. Each of the four zones flanking the entrance in between the pilasters has an empty apsidal niche, with a scallop shell in its conch. Above and below this is a square raised frame, enclosing a blank tablet with incurved corners.

The single entrance has a large molded door case with a triangular pediment on raised strap corbels. It is approached by a contemporary set of stairs in two flights, which has an attractive curve.

The second level has four pilasters in the same style, supporting another entablature and a crowning triangular pediment. In between the two pairs of pilasters are niches and panels identical to those below, but the central zone is dominated by an enormous oculus (round window) with a molded and dished frame. Above this is an ornate coat-of-arms of Pope Sixtus V. (1)

Campanile

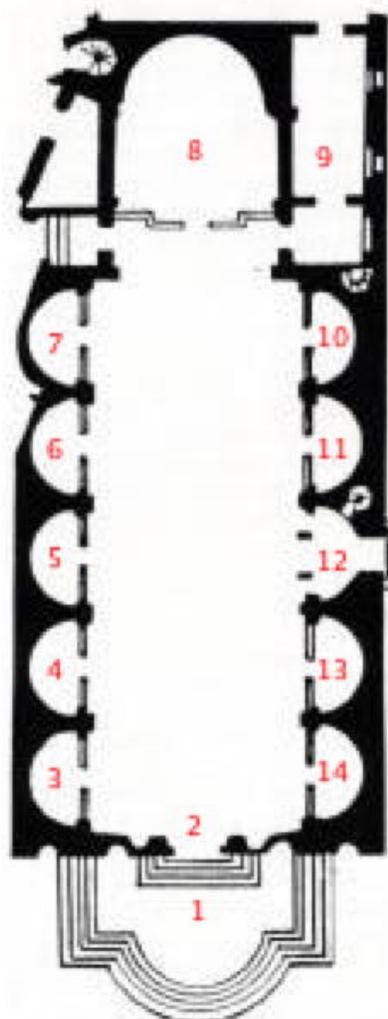
The attractively designed brick campanile is older than the church, having been built under Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) together with the hospital. It is at an angle to the major axis of the present church, and this hints that the previous edifice to which it belonged was on a different alignment. (1)

There are three levels in naked brick above the entablature of the side wall roofline. The first is blank and quite short, but the other two are tall. They are separated by full entablatures with projecting stone cornices. Each level has four brick Doric pilasters at the corners and one more in the centre of each face, supporting the entablature. (1)

Also, each face of these two levels has four identical apertures, in the form of two round-headed sound holes separated by a limestone Doric column with impost, enclosed in an arch with Doric imposts in brick and with a circle in sunk relief in the tympanum. Below each of these apertures is a row of circle-lozenge-circle in sunk relief as well. (1)

Across the road from the church is the Generalate of the Society of Jesus. (1)

Plan



Interior

During the last quarter of the 16th century the interior of the church was restored in keeping with the tastes of Popes Gregory XIII (1572-85) and Sixtus V (1585-90). The renovation left few surfaces undecorated. The decoration was managed by **Jacopo Zucchi**, but the work was parceled out among a group of painters. The person responsible for the overall design was the Perugian scientist and artistic director, **Padre Ignazio Danti**. (a)

The church has a single nave of five bays, with nine semicircular chapels along the sides. Five of these are to the left, and four of these to the right. The latter flank an apse containing a side entrance which is in the third bay. (1)

The actual nave ends in a triumphal arch. However, the sanctuary proper starts after a shallow bay beyond this arch, which has the doorway to the sacristy on the right and that to the hospital on the left. The sanctuary itself has two further bays, followed by a large apse with conch of the same width. (1)

The interior is covered in frescoes by several 16th and 17th century painters. The dominant theme of the paintings, on account of the hospital adjacent to the church, are evangelical scenes associated with the healing of body and spirit. (1) (6)

Nave (2)

The rectangle of the nave is articulated by single Corinthian pilasters. In the four corners these are half-pilasters which immediately abut full pilasters on the walls. On the inner facade wall the full pilasters are used as the basis for an arch springing across the whole clerestory area. In the center of the arch, or lunette, is a round window which opens through the façade. This same system is repeated on the end wall of the nave, creating in this case the triumphal arch entry into the high altar chapel. Along the sides the pilasters frame a total of ten open bays articulated by arches on pier-pilasters; these open into chapels on each side of the nave. The bays and arches are entirely framed by the pilasters and the continuous entablature they bear. Above the entablature the side walls have a clerestory into which are cut windows, one on axis with each bay below. The nave is then covered by a flat coffered ceiling. (d)

All the bays are built on a semi-circular plan, including the vestibule bay on the right side. The chapels, five on the left and four on the right are all fairly shallow. They are separated from the nave by balustrades, and their curved walls are articulated only by the altars and the picture frames except in the first chapel right where architectural members are used. The vaults are all decorated, blind semi-domes. (d)

In the nave itself the main decoration was the white pilasters along the nave wall and its white entablature. The spandrels of the arches contain painted figures, generally to be assigned to the artist who worked in the chapels within. The spandrel figures, all Sybils or Prophets with the exception of the Annunciation outside the Chapel of the Transfiguration, obviously belong conceptually to the chapels behind them. Above the chapels the clerestory contains windows on axis with the chapels. The rectangles between the windows now contain compositions of coats of arms. Originally, however, they must have been empty panels with moulded frames. (d)

The great decoration of the nave was that of the counter-façade. In the campaign of 1588-90 the wall below the entablature and above the door was covered with a large picture in oils painted by **Zucchi**, which has disappeared. In its place stands a modern painting of the *Descent of the Holy Ghost* about 1930 by **Antonino Calcagnadoro**. Round about the painting and in the lunette decorations of putti and prophets were painted by **Cesare Conti de'Ancona**. These ornamental frescoes still exist. (8) (d)

Dating from 1545 are two pictures on either side of the front door. The pair of paintings in wall aedicules, each of which has a pair of ribbed Corinthian columns supporting a triangular pediment and standing on wide strap corbels. The one to the right shows *The Conversion of St Paul*, begun in 1545 by **Francesco Salviati** and finished by his pupil **Pedro de Rubiales**, [*Il Roviale Spagnolo*], and the one on the left shows *The Visitation* (1545), the first Roman work of **Marco Pino Da Siena**.

(1) (8) (d)

The carved wooden pulpit with a relief of the *Pentecost* (1595) on the left hand pier between the third and fourth bays is by **Alessandro Castaldo**. Below is a monument to Salustio Taurusi, (d. 1597).

(1) (g)

The impressive flat wooden ceiling is geometrically coffered, and painted in red, blue and gold. It was installed ca. 1580, and bears the coats of arms of Popes Paul III, Pius IX and Benedict XIV. It was restored in 1748, and again in 1856.. (1) (d) (g)

Sanctuary (8)

The sanctuary is elevated above the nave and distinguished from it in two ways. Firstly, it is set back from the nave by a pair of pilasters on each side, each pair flanking a door; on the left the door opens into the adjacent palazzo and on the right into the vestibule of the sacristy. Secondly, a prominent balustrade closes off the high altar chapel from the nave. (d)

The monumental tribune, from floor to ceiling, was frescoed by the Florentine painter **Jacopo Zucchi**, assisted by his brother **Francesco**, completed in 1583. This chapel received its first great decorative campaign in 1583, but obviously the architectural articulation and the altarpiece existed before this. On each side of the chapel three single Corinthian pilasters line the wall in front of the semi-circle of the apse. Each of the two bays formed by the pilasters contains a door, either real or false. Over the doors of the first bay are balconies, that on the left wall containing an organ; over the right balcony is a painting attached to the inscription recording the restoration of 1745. Over the doors of the adjoining bay are sham windows. The decoration of these bays undoubtedly belongs to the restoration of 1745 or perhaps to that of 1748. The pilasters support an entablature which is broken out over them. (1) (a) (d)

The most comprehensive depiction of the *Descent of the Holy Spirit* to a large crowd of women and men is to be found in the apse and choir, painted by **Jacopo Zucchi** between 1582 and 1585. The barrel vault is divided by arch strips on axis with the pilasters. In the vault over the second bay are windows, one on each side. In the oval between the windows is a figure of *God the Father* surrounded by putti. In the spandrels created by the windows are reclining male decorative nudes. In the arch soffit between the two halves of the vault is the inscription naming the donor of the decorations, Giovanni Battista Ruini, and the date, 1583. The vault in front contains three pictures in rectangular frames: from left to right the pictures are *The Holy Ghost over Saint Peter Preaching*, *Putti and Music-Making Angels*, and *The Holy Ghost over Saint Paul Preaching*. In the conch of the apse is the *Risen Christ* sending the dove of the Holy Spirit to those gathered below. (1) (c)

In the lower part of the of the apse, **Zucchi** painted a large crowd of disciples that includes women in addition to the small group around Mary, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit as in Acts 2:1. In fact, the iconography of the apse consistently reflects the Pentecost liturgy in the new Missal. Furthermore, the painted architecture that encloses the crowd is an illusionistic extension of the real church, thus drawing the congregation into the scene which appears to take place in a raised choir and ambulatory. This painted space is articulated with columns whose capitals simulate the real pilaster capitals at the beginning of the apse. In the center of the real and the illusionistic apse is a burst of light (there are no tongues of fire) which pours over the crowd and, by extension, over those assembled in the actual church. In the midst of the light are the words

"VENIS ANCTES PIRITVS"

The opening phrase of the medieval hymn or Sequence. To the left and right of this inscription (as seen from the nave), two charming putti perch on painted garlands and show the congregation inscribed tablets which must be read together:

"ET REPLETI SVNT OMNES SPIRITV SANCTO/
ET LOQVEBANTVR VERBVM DEI CVM FIDVCIA"

(Acts 4:31)

"and all were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." (c)

The arms of Pope Sixtus V appear on the outer pilasters of the tribune. (a)

A new high altar was made by the **Pietro Ripoli**, with carved wooden angels by **Giovanni Maria Giorgetti**, 1674–75. In the altar are the relics of Sts. Tryphon, Respicus, Nymph, Agapitus and

Severa. (8) (g)

The wooden choir stalls bear the coat of arms of Francesco Landi, Governor of the hospital in 1535–45. The large metal candlesticks bear the coat of arms of Girolamo Agucchi, Governor of the hospital in 1602–04. (g)

On the pavement is the marble tomb slab to Monsignor Giovanni Maria Lancisi (d. 1720) by the **Niccola Corona** to a design by **Tommaso Mattei**, 1722. The balustrade was made by **Giacomo Antonio Ferrari** to a design by **Tommaso Mattei**, 1699. (g)

There are good funerary monuments flanking the sanctuary. The two to the right is for Antonio Vargas y Lacuna, 1827, in the style of Canova and for Cardinal Jean Suau (died 1566). The left hand one is to a surgeon called Pietro Giavina from Domodossola, and is by **Raffaele Secini** 1782. (d. 1720). (1) (8) (g)

Sacristy (9)

The sacristy is entered through a doorway to the right of the sanctuary balustrade rail. The elegant set of wardrobes are in walnut, 1650. The altarpiece a painting on canvas by **Zucchi** representing *Christ appearing to Sts Helen, Jerome, Peter, and Paul*, from 1586. (1) (4) (g)

The frescoes on the vault and upper walls (1648) depict scenes from the history of the hospital (*Schola Saxonum*) by **Guido Ubaldo Abbatini**: (g)

Over the altar:

- *Pope Gregory II and King Ine Found the Schola Saxonum*
- *Church Dedicated to the Virgin in 725*
- *Charlemagne and King Offa of Mercia Enlarge the Hospital and Church in 794*
- *Pope Pasquale I Orders the Reconstruction of the Church After it is Damaged by Fire in 817*
- *Pope Leo IV and King Æthelwulf Order the Restoration of the Schola and the Church in 847*
- *Burial of King Burgred of Mercia in 874*
- *Death of King Edward the Elder in 924*
- *Pope Innocent III Gives the Insignum to Guy of Montpellier in 1197*
- *Pope Innocent III Orders The Members of the Hospital to Look after Abandoned Children and the Sick in 1204*

Right wall, adjacent to the altar:

- *King Charles II of Sicily and Ivo Odrowaz, Bishop of Cracow, Found the Hospitals of the Holy Spirit in 1222*
- *Pope Innocent III Institutes the Station of the Sudarium in 1308*
- *King Charles VIII of France and His Nobles Inscribed as Members of the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit*

Left wall, by the entrance:

- *Queen Charlotte and Other Noble Women Inscribed as Members of the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit*
- *Pope Sixtus IV Transfers the Relic Of the Holy Face to St Peter's*
- *Pope Eugene IV Reorders the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit*

Vault:

- *Glory of the Holy Spirit*

Stucco decorations by **Giovanni Maria Ferreri** and **Battista Besano**, 1647–4830. On the short wall, the Coat of arms of Pope Innocent X is by **Giovanni Maria Baratta**, 1650. (g)

The sacristy also houses a silver reliquary by Francesco Ossani and silver chalices made by Antonio Vendetti, Giuseppe Colein and Vincenzo Belli, 1835. (g)

Side Chapels

The five bays on each side of the nave form one of the richer deposits of 16th century painting in Roman churches. Taking these in order and using the 16th century titles of the chapels, beginning with the first chapel at the left rear and proceeding counterclockwise.

Chapel of St Aloysius Gonzaga (3)

The chapel was built between 1593 and 1594. Under the pictures left and right of the altar are two inscriptions, each recording the name of Giovanni Amico de Montorio. The inscriptions bear the arms of Clement VIII rather than a specific date. The chapel was re-fitted in 1880. The frescoes by **Cesare Nebbia** with assistance from **Marcantonio del Forno** and **Ferdinando Sermei**. Stucco decorations are by **Giovanni Casolano**, **Giacomo Solaro** and a **maestro Girolamo** to designs by **Cesare Nebbia** (restored in 1656 by **Agostino Bernascone**). (1) (d) (g)

The altarpiece frame is simple aedicule of single columns bearing a segmental pediment in two planes. The altarpiece marble sculpture of *St Aloysius* by **Ignazio Jacometti**, (1885). Altar built by the Michele Lucchesino. (g)

The wall and the vault are articulated by the picture frame on them. Left and right of the altar are the side frames: rectangles formed by pilasters on a corbeled base and a triangular pediment over which rises a second rectangular frame with projecting ears. (d)

On the wall to the left of the altar the pictures are a *Saint Francesco* in the upper frame and *St Respicuus* in the lower; the right-hand pictures are a *Saint James the Great* above and *St Nympha* below. (d)

The vault contains five panels. At the center is an oval crowned with a triangular pediment; the oval is flanked by two smaller ones. Finally the ends are filled in with frames of a rectangle combined with an oval and broken with a broken segmental pediment. The pictures in the vault are *St Clare of Montefalco* (left), *St Clare of Assisi* (right), *God the Father* at the center. (d) (g)

The pier-pilasters and arch soffit are also decorated. The pier-pilasters are divided into two rectangular frames; these contain figures of saints. The soffit is divided into five thin rectangles; an inscription is in the center and angels are in all the others. (d)

There is a baptismal font bearing the coat of arms of Cardinal Pietro Carpine and Francesco Landis (ca. 1545) on the left side of the chapel. (g)

In the pavement before the chapel is the tomb slab of Agostino Molaro (d. 1595). Another tomb slab in the pavement is for Lelia Elena Gherardi (d. 1786). (g)

Chapel of the Coronation of Our Lady (4)

The second chapel on the left was originally dedicated to St. Augustine, which is the subject of the frescoes. Stucco decorations by **Pompeo Cesura**, who was also commissioned to paint the frescoes; they were probably completed after his death in 1571 by his assistant **Giovanni Paolo di Pietro di Donato**. (g)

The altarpiece is the *Coronation of the Virgin with Sts Augustine and Trifone* (1589-95), by **Cesare Nebbia**. It has a rectangular frame around the arched picture crowned by a broken triangular pediment which extends into the vault. (1) (d) (g)

The chapel is articulated by the frames on its wall and vault. To the left and right stand rectangular frames with corner projections, both capped by segmental pediments and surmounted by roundels. The left-hand picture is a standing figure of *Saint Augustine*; on the right is *Saint Monica*, mother of St. Augustine. In the roundels over the flanking side pictures is the *Annunciation*, *Archangel Gabriel* on the left and *Mary* on the right. The frescoes flanking the altar are by **Pompeo Cesura**.

The vault has the *Holy Spirit* in a semi-circle at the boss. Below this are three small trapezoids containing grotesques. The rest of the field is taken up by three large trapezoids containing figural compositions. Viewing from left to right the pictures are: the *Conversion of Saint Augustine*, *Baptism of St Augustine by St Ambrose*, and the *Apparition of the Trinity to Saint Augustine*. (d) (g)

The pier-pilasters are divided by painted frames into two rectangular panels on each side with the depictions of the *Evangelists* by **Andrea Lilio**. The arch soffit above is decorated by squares with stucco rosettes in them: the work looks 19th century in style. (1) (d)

Two memorial inscriptions on the walls. On the left is for two canons of the church, Fr. Nicola Cyrillo, dated 1635. On the right wall the inscription is for Count Vincenzo Fontanellio, dated 1600. In the pavement is a tomb slab of Francesco Mariano (d. 1758). (g)

Chapel of the Crucifix (5)

The third chapel on the left was one of the earliest in the church to be decorated. The chapel was under the patronage of Alessandro Guidiccioni, whose name and arms appear on the keystone of the arch. He died and was buried here in 1552. Thus the date for the decoration of the chapel is in the years around 1551. (d)

The altarpiece is a 17th century painted wooden Crucifix. The frame is a simple aedicule motif which may be of the 19th century. (1) (d)

Frescoes by Michele Grecco. The walls to the side of the altar are decorated with grotesqueries, the arch soffit shows a kind of abstract geometric ornament, and the lowest of the frames on the pier-pilasters contain arabesques. In the pier-pilasters are frescoes of figures from the Old Testament; three even have labels: ISAIAS, DAVID, and MICHAEA. All this work has the tone and character of a 19th century restoration. (d) (g)

The vault, however, is elaborately compartmented and the pictures, though somewhat difficult to see, seem to belong to the 16th century. The vault is divided into three tiers or pictures. In the topmost row are three frames, an octagon flanked by circles; the octagon contains a *Christ before the High Priest* and the circles a *Christ among Soldiers* and a *Flagellation*. The next row is a series of decorative panels in square frames. Below this is a row containing three rectangles with additional scenes from the Passion, the center rectangle's being flanked by two vertical frames with figures of saints. The fresco on the left is *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, and on the right is *Christ falls carrying the Cross*. In the center, above the altar, is *Christ before Pilate*. (1) (d) (g)

The chapel has two memorials on the right wall. One is to Antonio Foderato 1548, with a *Pietà* by Jacopo Del Duca, in the style of Michelangelo. The other was set up to St Agostina Pietrantonio, who was a religious sister killed by an anti-clerical patient in 1895 while working as a nurse in the hospital. She was canonized in 1999. The two memorials on the left wall are for Alessandro Guidiccioni (d. 1552), and Girolamo Guidiccioni (d. 1547). (1) (8) (g)

On the pilaster between the two chapels is a memorial for Francesco Torchi (d. 1625). (g)

Chapel of Pope St John Paul II (6)

The second chapel on the left, originally dedicated to St Stephen, was designed and executed by Livio Agresti of Forli (1556) and it is notable for the rich profusion and unusual character of its paintings and stuccoes. All the paintings in the chapel are executed in oils, applied directly to the wall. (1)

Figures of *Moses* and *Saint Paul* are shown seated in the spandrels of the entrance arch. The soffit of the arch above is divided into seven small fields of various shapes. The pictures have darkened considerably, but one can determine from three of the pictures--*Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, and *David Cutting off the Head of Goliath*--that the cycle was of scenes from the Old Testament. Pairs of standing saints and prophets ornament the pilasters flanking the entrance. (1) (b)

The wall of the chapel is richly organized. The modern altarpiece depicting St John Paul II was donated by Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz in 2006. It is flanked by a pair of allegorical female figures in stucco. In the left-hand panel is a large stucco figure of *Fortitude*; in the right is a large stucco figure of *Mercy*. The altarpiece is crowned by a broken triangular pediment with stucco angels on the pediment sections flanking an oval containing a painted figure. (1) (d)

The pictures on the side walls are crowned by rectangles containing arches; within the arches stucco figures of angels flank an oval containing a painted figure, but very faded. The picture to the left is an *Adoration of the Shepherds*. That to the right is a *Resurrection of Christ*. (d)

At the boss of the vault is a stucco eagle. Below it is a row of five small square pictures, too dark to be read. Below this is another row of pictures, five in all, in which three ovals alternate with two

rectangles and contain, from left to right: a *sybil*, a *Temptation of Adam*, a *Prophet*, an *Expulsion from Paradise*, and finally another *sybil*. (d)

On the right wall is a monument for Stefano Vai (d. 1650) and on the left wall is a monument for Maria Maddalena Fischari (d. 1741). (g)

The funds for this unprecedented decorative scheme were provided by Giulio Cesare Gonzaga (1505-50), the wealthy Count of Novellara and Patriarch of Alexandria, for his burial chapel. His memorial plaque is the earliest inscription in the chapel. (1) (b) (d)

The actual patron may have been one Fra Niccolo Cirillo. In an inscription of 1635 commemorating an endowment of the chapel by a Fra Lorenzo Castellino, this man is mentioned. The chapel was restored in 1741 by Giovanni Battista and Giuseppe Maria Carnovaglia. In the memorial plaque they put in the pavement here, they mention burying their mother. (d)

Chapel of Our Lady and St John the Evangelist (7)

The earliest dedication of the chapel was to Saint John the Evangelist alone. The patron was Francesco Landi of Bologna, Governor of the hospital from 1536 until his death in 1545, and who also supervised the building of the new church. The date of 1545 marks this as the earliest chapel in the church to have been decorated. The name of the artist who did the decorations is not given to us. The style is of the 16th century. (1) (d) (g)

The chapel is now dedicated jointly to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. The aedicule has a pair of rather thin Ionic columns in grey marble which looks like bigio antico and, if so, are ancient spolia. They support a triangular pediment broken by an inserted tablet crowned by a segmental pediment; the tablet contains an inscription dedicating the chapel to the Virgin and Saint John. (1) (d)

There are two altarpieces, one above the other. The lower depicts *St John* and is by **Andrea Giorgini** 1835, while the one above is a 19th century copy of an old icon that was the altarpiece of the church before its 16th century rebuilding. By tradition it was donated by King Ine of Wessex, hence is called *La Madonna del Re Ina*. (1)

The side pictures, both scenes from the life of Saint John, are framed simply by rectangles with vertical projections at the bottom corners and with horizontal moulding strips above. They are by **Marcello Venusti**. On the right wall is *St John in the Cauldron of Boiling Oil* and on the left wall is *St John Raises Drusiana*. (1) (d) (g)

The vault is articulated with a trapezoid at the center flanked by two circles: all the compositions are scenes from the life of Saint John. They are attributed to **Perin del Vaga**. On the left is *The Greeting of St John on His Return to Ephesus*; in the center, *St John and the Parable of Contemplation*; and on the right is *St John Condemned by the Emperor Diocletian*. Intrados: frescoes of Evangelists, (right) *St Matthew*, (above) *St John* and (left) *St Mark* (above) *St Luke*. The gilded stucco reliefs depict, (left) *St John the Baptist Preaching*; (center below) *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ*; (right) *Baptism of Christ*. (g)

On the left wall of the chapel is a monument for Domenico Berti (d. 1682). (g)

On the pier between the chapels is a monument for Filippo Calligaria (d. 1581). (g)

Chapel of the Transfiguration (10)

The decoration of this chapel is for Romolo Neroni with frescoes and stucco decorations by **Giuseppe Valeriano**. The altarpiece, *The Ascension*, (1570) is framed by two short vertical strips from which hang stucco garlands. The strips support a broken segmental pediment in two planes which rises into the vault. (1) (g)

Flanking the altarpiece are simple rectangular frames which are supported by corbels and crowned by broken triangular pediments. The picture on the left is of a *St Paul* and that on the right shows a *St Augustine*. The altar which bears the inscription, SS APOSTOLIS/PHILIPP. ET. JACOBO/

The vault is treated as a single field rather than as a series of panels. On it is painted the *Descent of the Holy Ghost to the Virgin and the Apostles*. In the spandrels are *Virgin of the Annunciation* (left) and *Angel of the Annunciation* (right), 1569–71. The pier-pilasters and soffit are by Ercoli Perilli. The altar frontal by **Giovanni Moneta**, 1745. (g)

The first of the patrons of the chapel is unknown. However, in 1669, the chapel was taken over by Antonio de Chrysolino for use as a private family chapel. Assigning a date to the Valeriano frescos is thus not helped by evidence from inscriptions, but the treatment of the vault as a whole field in this chapel suggests a date close to the decade 1580-90. (d)

Between the chapels is a monument for the Italian painter Domenico Zolio (d. 1576). (g)

Chapel of The Divine Mercy and Saint Sister Faustina (11)

The 4th chapel on the left was originally dedicated to the Trinity, is now dedicated to The Divine Mercy and to Saint Sister Faustina. The statue of St. Sister [Faustina Kowalska](#) (d. 1938), the Apostle of The Divine Mercy; and her reliquary donated by the Holy Father John Paul II after her canonization in 2000. The chapel was decorated by **Livio Agresti**, completed in 1574. (1) (d) (g)

The altarpiece is *The Sacred Heart* by **Raffaele Gagliardi**, but in recent years it has often been covered by a modern representation of *Christ Bestowing Divine Mercy* (1994) by **Piotr Moskal**. The frame of the altarpiece is highly elaborate: the rectangular picture is flanked by full-length angels standing on corbels. These caryatids supporting sections of a broken triangular pediment on which recline smaller angels. Over the picture and between the sections of pediment is an oval containing an inscription, obviously altered from the original, dedicating the chapel to the Holy Ghost and S. Filippo Neri. (1) (8) (d)

To the left and right of the altarpiece are pictures in simpler frames. These are only rectangles with projecting ears top and bottom and crowned by ovals between volute scrolls. Both ovals contain busts of *Old Testament Prophets*. On the left the picture is a *Healing of the Paralytic*; on the right it is a *Healing of the Blind Man*. Both are by **Raffaele Gagliardi**. (6) (d)

The vault contains only three pictures by Domenico Zoilo, an oval at the center flanked by trapezoids. The middle picture is an *Abraham and the Three Angels*. The other two are scenes of miraculous healings taken from the Old Testament, on the right, *Tobias restoring sight to his father* and on the left *Elisha cures Naaman of leprosy*. In the spandrels; *Moses* (left) and a *Sybil* (right). (6) (9) (d) (g)

The pier-pilasters are decorated with frescoes showing the *Four Doctors of the Church* (*Saints Augustine, Athanasius, Ambrose and John Chrysostom*); over them the arch soffit contains the *Holy Ghost* in the center and two *Evangelists* in frames on either side. (d)

The stucco decorations are by **Marcantonio Petta** to designs by **Livio Agresti**, 1573–75. (g)

Also on the right side are two memorials. The top one is for Francisci Caroli, dated 1796. Below that is another one for Francesco Albizzi, undated but it looks older. On the left side is a memorial for Francesco Cafarelli (d. 1778). (g)

One pier has a memorial to Bernardino Cirillo, who ran the hospital before his death in 1575. (1)

Organ bay (12)

The door (previously used as a side entrance), and consequently the flight of semi-circular steps leading down to it, belongs to the plans of **Sangallo**.

Above the side entrance is an organ loft commissioned in 1547 by Alessandro Guidiccioni and made by **Nicol Tezzani** and the carpenter **Vico di San Cassino** to a design attributed to **Antonio da Sangallo**. The organ was modified in 1604 by **Luca Blasi** and the wooden balustrade was added by **Francesco Mazzi**, 1646. Over the organ are the arms of Paul III. (g)

The organ is supported by two pairs of Doric columns which create three narrow openings into the bay. The walls of the bay and the sides of the entry pilasters are treated with paintings by artists of the school of Livio Agresti. On the pilasters are two narrow vertical scenes, on the left an *Ecce Homo*, attributed to Jacques Stella, and on the right a *Christ Before Pilate*. (8) (d) (g)

On the interior the walls on either side of the door are framed by painted Ionic columns. Then the upper part of each wall and the wall over the door are further articulated by painted frames around figural scenes. On the left *The Washing of the Feet*, on the right is *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. Over the door is *The Last Supper*, attributed to **Litardo Piccioli**. (8) (d) (g)

On the walls are two memorials. On the left, for Faustina Alciata (d. 1596), and on the right, for Giuseppe Anselmo (d. 1630). Between the organ bay and the next chapel is a monument to Francesco Maria Piccolimini (d. 1561). (g)

Chapel of the Assumption (13)

This chapel was decorated for Cesare Glorieri ca. 1575-79 and repaired in 1583, the latter date given in the inscription on the frieze of the altar: CAESAR GLORERIVS PIETAT. STVDIOS. FACIENDVM CVRAVIT. The chapel is richly articulated by the frames on the wall. At the center the altar frame is composed of spiral columns flanked on the outside by caryatids over volutes. Above, the altar frame is crowned by a broken pediment with reclining stucco angels on the pediment sections and an angel with a scroll on the molding between them. (d)

Livio Agresti, who was active in the chapel from ca. 1576 until his death in 1579, was responsible for the stucco designs, although he was unable to fresco the chapel. His student, **Litardo Piccioli**, completed the fresco work. (g)

To the left and right of the altar the frames are simpler: rectangular moldings frame an arched picture within, the whole crowned by a segmental pediment with stucco angels on the pediment sections, a donor portrait at the center of the pediment, and a painted reclining sybil over the donor picture. (d)

The altarpiece is an *Assumption of the Virgin* which was painted by **Piccioli**. To the left of the altarpiece the picture is *The Birth of Our Lady*, painted by **Giovanni Battista Lombardelli**, and to the right is a *The Circumcision of Christ*, painted by **Paris Nogari**. Above the side paintings are portraits painted in ovals, by **Livio Agresti**; Over the left painting is *Cesare Glorieri* and over the right one is *Bernardino Cirillo*. (1) (d) (g)

In the semi-dome, stucco moldings create a semicircle at the boss containing a stucco *Dove of the Holy Spirit* and five variously shaped panels containing painted compositions. The paintings in the vault are also by **Piccioli**. From left to right the five pictures are: a *Sybil*, an *Annunciation*, a *Coronation of the Virgin*, a *Visitation*, and finally another *Sybil*. (d) (g)

The frescoes on the entry pilasters are attributed to **Giovanni Battista Lombardelli**, *Old Testament Prophets*; and the spandrels: *Sibyls*. (g)

Chapel of Pentecost or Tolfa Chapel (14)

The first chapel to the right, commissioned by the Marchesa Vittoria della Tolfa, wife of Camillo Orsini and niece of Pope Paul IV. The architect was probably **Ottavio Mascarino** as it was constructed at the same time as the façade. The chapel, however, must have been completed by 1588, the year on the inscription in the dado to the left, an inscription which was placed there by Theseo Aldovrandi, and the year on the memorial stone of Vittoria Tolfa, owner of the chapel. (d)

The whole of the painting in the chapel is to be attributed to **Jacopo Zucchi**, 1587-88. The chapel makes use of a combination of marble, stucco, and paint (both fresco and oil). Over a dado a molding forms the base of the architectural members. The chapel has an altarpiece of the *Pentecost*. Flanking the altar-piece are a pair of detached columns of agate marble with Corinthian capitals. Between each pilaster and column the wall is further articulated by an altar frame, a rectangle with a triangular pediment. The pilasters and columns support an entablature which is broken out over the columns. On the sides two stuccoed architectural frames contain representations of *Saint John the*

Baptist and the *Prophet Joek*; the background of these vertical panels is dark except for the soft light which enters the compositions from an oblique angle and places the figures in relief. Resting on the columns is a large cornice supporting four pairs of stuccoed putti. (a) (d) (g)

The conch vault is divided into rectangular and oval panels framed in gilt stucco with fanciful architectural motifs leading to a semi-circular oculus at the summit. In the oculus is the foreshortened figure of *God the Father*; immediately below Him, in the central rectangular panel, is the *Risen Christ* flanked by panels of putti on gilded grounds. On the keystone of the arch facing the nave is the coat-of-arms of Vittoria Tolfa and in the spandrels two prophets. (a) (d)

The completed ensemble, the principal parts of which survive, represents the Mannerist style of decoration. (a)

In the floor is a tomb slab for Otto Retter, native of Vienna who died in 1722.

Special notes

At the adjacent hospital, you can see the rotating hatch where foundling babies were left. (1)

Pope Innocent III instituted a station for the first Sunday after the octave of the Epiphany. A procession carried the *veil of Veronica* from San Pietro in Vaticano, and the Holy Father celebrated Mass in the church. Indulgences were granted to those that took part, and money was given to the poor. (1)

Artists and Architects:

Alessandro Castaldo (17th cent), wood carver
Agostino Bernascone (17th cent), Italian architect
Andrea Giorgini (19th cent), Italian painter
Andrea [Lilio](#) [aka L'Anconitano] (1555-1642), Italian painter
Antonino [Calcagnadoro](#) (1876-1935), Italian painter
Antonio Vendetti (19th cent.) Italian silversmith
Antonio da [Sangallo the younger](#) (1484-1546), Italian Renaissance architect from Florence
Baccio [Pontelli](#) (c.1450-1492), Italian architect from Florence
Baldassare Tommaso [Peruzzi](#) (1481-1536), Italian painter and architect from Siena
Battista Besano (17th century), Italian sculptor
Cesare [Conti de'Ancona](#) (1550-1622), Italian painter
Cesare [Nebbia](#) (c.1536-c.1622), Italian Mannerist painter
Domenico Zoilo (d. 1576), Italian painter
Ercoli Perilli, Italian painter
Ferdinando Sermei (17th cent), Italian painter
Francesco [Azzurri](#) (1827-1901), Italian architect
Francesco de' Rossi [aka [Il Salviati](#)] (1510-1563), Italian Mannerist painter and stucco artist
Francesco Mazzi (17th century), Italian woodcarver
Francesco [Zucchi](#) (1526-1622), Italian painter, sculptor. Brother of Jacopo.
Francesco Ossani (19th cent.) Italian silversmith
Giovanni Moneta (18th century), Italian stone mason
Ignazio [Danti](#) (1536-1586), Italian priest, mathematician, astronomer, cosmographer and architect
Jacopo [Zucchi](#) (1541-1590), Florentine painter of the Mannerist style. Brother of Francesco.
Jacques [Stella](#) (1596-1657), French painter
Giacomo Antonio Ferrari (18th century), Italian stonemason
Giacomo (Jacopo) [del Duca](#) (1520-1604), Italian sculptor and architect during the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period
Giacomo Solaro (17th century), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Battista [Lombardelli](#) (ca. 1540-1592), Italian painter
Giovanni Casolano (17th century), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Maria [Baratta](#) (1617-1680), Italian architect from Carrara
Giovanni Maria Giorgetti (17th cent), Italian woodcarver
Giovanni Maria Ferreri (17th cent), Italian scuptor

Giovanni Paolo di Pietro di Donato (16th cent), Italian painter, assistant to Pompeo Cesura
 Giuseppe Colein (19th cent.) Italian silversmith
 Giuseppe [Valeriano](#), S.J. (1526-1596), Italian painter and architect
 Guidetto [Guidetti](#) († 1564), Italian architect
 Guido Ubaldo [Abbatini](#) (1600-1656), Italian painter of the Baroque period
 Ignazio [Jacometti](#) (1819-1883), Italian sculptor
 Litardo [Piccioli](#) (16th century), Italian painter
 Livio [Agresti](#) aka Ritus or Ricciutello (1508-1580), Italian painter of the late Renaissance or Mannerist period
 Luca Biagi/Blasi (1548-1608), organmaker
 Marcantonio dal Forno (17th cent), Italian painter
 Marcantonio Petta (16th cent.), Italian sculptor
 Marcello [Venusti](#) (1515-1579), Italian Mannerist painter from Como
 Marco [Pino](#) da Siena (1521-1583), Italian painter of the Renaissance / Mannerist period
 Michele Grecco (16th century), Italian painter
 Michele Lucchesino (17th century), Italian stonemason
 Niccola Corona (18th century), Italian stonemason
 Nicolo Tezzani (16th century), Italian organ maker
 Ottaviano [Nonni](#) [aka *Il Mascherino*] (1536-1606), Italian architect, sculptor, and painter from Bologna
 Paris [Nogari](#) [aka *Roman*] (1536-1601), Italian painter of the Renaissance period
 Pedro de Rubiales [aka *Il Roviale Spagnolo*], (1522-1582), Spanish painter
 Piero Bonaccorsi [aka *Perin del Vaga*] (1501-1547), Italian painter of the Late Renaissance/ Mannerism
 Pietro Antonio Ripoli (17th cent), Italian stonemason
 Piotr Moskal (20th cent), Polish painter
 Pompeo [Cesura](#) [aka *Aquilano*](1500-1571), Italian painter and engraver
 Raffaele Gagliardi (19th cent.), Italian painter
 Raffaele Secini (18th cent.), Italian sculptor
 Tommaso [Mattei](#) (1652-1726), Italian architect
 Vico di San Cassino (16th cent.), Italian carpenter
 Vincenzo Belli (19th cent.) Italian silversmith

Burials:

Jean Cardinal [SUAU](#), (1503-1566)
 Buried near the main altar

Francesco Landi of Bologna, Canon of S. Pietro in Vincoli
 Buried near the main altar

Doctors who worked in the hospital

Burgred of Mercia

according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
 Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia from 852 to 874

Location:

Via dei Penitenzieri 12, 00193 Roma

Coordinates: [41° 54' 4"N 12° 27' 40"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 0039 06 6879310

Open Times:

Open 07:30am-12:00pm 03:00pm-06:30pm

Sunday 09:30am-01:00pm 03:00pm-06:30pm

Masses:

Holidays: 11.00am-12.30pm-06.30pm

Weekdays: 07.30am-06.30pm

Links and References:

1. [Roman Chuches Wiki](#)
 2. [English Wikipedia page](#)
 3. [Rome Art Lover web site](#)
 4. [Info Roma web site](#)
 5. [060608.it web site](#)
 6. [Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy](#)
 7. [Divine Misericordia web site](#)
 8. [Romapedia blog](#)
 9. [Italian Wikipedia page](#)
- a. Pillsbury, Edmund; "Jacopo Zucchi in S. Spirito in Sassia"; *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 116, No. 857, International Mannerism (Aug., 1974), pp.434-444
 - b. Bross, Louise S.; "New Documents for Livio Agresti's St Stephen Chapel in the Church of S. Spirito in Sassia,Rome"; *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 135, No. 1082 (May, 1993), pp. 338-343
 - c. Valone. Carolyn; "The Pentecost: Image and Experience in Late Sixteenth-Century Rome"; *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), pp. 801-828
 - d. Lewine, Milton; THE ROMAN CHURCH INTERIOR, 1527-1580; 1963, pp. 451-484
 - e. Beny, Roloff & Gunn, Peter; THE CHURCHES OF ROME; Simon and Schuster; 1981
 - f. Information plaques from church
 - g. Erwee, Michael; THE CHURCHES OF ROME, 1527-1870; Pindar Press, 2013; pp. 643-648

Other links

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_V95r_G2zg