

Sant'Anselmo all'Aventino



Sant' Anselmo all'Aventino is a complex located on the Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta on the Aventine Hill in Rome's Ripa rione and overseen by the Benedictine Confederation and the Abbot Primate. The Sant'Anselmo complex, also known as the "Primatial Abbey of Sant'Anselmo" (Italian: Badia Sant'Anselmo) because it is the residence of the Abbot Primate, consists of: an ecclesiastical residential college known as the "College of Sant'Anselmo" (Italian: Collegio Sant'Anselmo); a university known as the "Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm" (Italian: Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Anselmo); the "Church of Sant'Anselmo" (Italian: Chiesa Sant'Anselmo); and the curial headquarters of the "Benedictine Confederation" and Abbot Primate. The complex and associated institutions are named in honor of the Benedictine monk Saint Anselm of Canterbury. [1]

Since 1962, the church has also been the starting point of the penitential procession presided over by the Pope on Ash Wednesday, and which ends at the basilica of Santa Sabina where the first stationary mass of Lent is celebrated. [1]

History

On January 4, 1887, Pope Leo XIII issued a papal brief ("Quae diligenter") that formally commissioned the re-establishment of a residential college for the new Benedictine Confederation. The previous College of Sant'Anselmo that had been founded two hundred years earlier by Pope Innocent XI for students from the Cassinese Benedictine Congregation was to now be re-established for Benedictine monks from around the world. Housing would become a critical challenge so the Benedictines began a search for more permanent accommodations for this college. [1]

Abbot Gaetano Bernardi began the search for suitable land and was approached by Count Allesandro Barbiellini Amidei who owned property on the western Aventine Hill which had contained the previous fortifications of a house for Pope Paul III. Arrangements were made for the purchase of the 43,000 square meter property for 270,000 lire which was formally titled to the Vatican as it remains to this day. In his July 26, 1890, circular letter, Abbot Bernardi wrote that "It is on the Aventine Hill on which our St. Odo (of Cluny), thanks to the generosity of Alberich from the family of the Counts of Tusculum, built a monastery and church in honor of Mary...." He further mentioned that Pope Gregory VII had spent his youth in a monastery there and recounted, "Of all the places in Rome what better placed could we have wished for!" The newly envisioned complex would allow for the housing of the residential college, a church, and the central offices of the Benedictine Confederation. [1]

The entire "Sant'Anselmo" complex on the Aventine Hill was constructed under the control of the Belgian Benedictine Abbot [Hildebrand de Hemptinne](#) and Fidelis von Stotzingen and built by **Francesco Vespignani** between 1892 and 1896 in a Lombard-Romanesque style. Construction began in 1892 and the cornerstone was dedicated on April 19, 1893. The final cost was 2,500,000 lire and was dedicated in honor of the Benedictine monk Saint Anselm of Canterbury. To honor the founding vision of Pope Leo XIII, a large sculpture of him was crafted in 1891 by **Giuseppe Luchetti** and is located in the interior sacristy of the church. A large marble plaque of dedication is also found on the north exterior wall as you approach the entrance to the complex. [1] [2] [3]

The church was consecrated on November 11, 1900, by Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro, assisted by twelve cardinals, sixteen archbishops and bishops, fifty-two abbots, rectors of all the major colleges of Rome, superiors general of the major religious orders, and all ambassadors accredited to the Holy See. [1] [3]

In 1952 there was a renovation of the church interior by architect **Fritz Metsger**. This saw the construction of elevated choir stalls for the monks in the transepts, the addition of an altar under the arch that allowed the priest to face either direction in celebrating mass, and the creation of three main mosaics by the German monk **Radbodus Commandeur**. [1]

The church is well known for the emotional Gregorian chants performed by the Benedictine monks during the liturgical celebrations, besides being one of Rome's most famous churches for weddings.

Exterior

The church and monastery grounds are accessed through an entrance arch from the Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta at the top of the Aventine Hill. Past the arch is a tree-lined avenue leading to a small piazza and the façade of a four-sided portico (quadriportico). In the atrium, there is a bronze statue of *St Anselm*, made in 1966 by Swiss sculptor **Albert Wider** from Widnau. From here, it is possible to see Santa Maria del Priorato, which lies in a complex that is closed to the public.

Next to the church is the imposing bell tower with three-light windows, four-light windows and five-light windows. In 1956, four new bells were placed. [3]

In the entrance to the monastery, reached from the atrium, is a Roman mosaic of Orpheus that was found when the college was built.

Interior

The church has a basilical plan. The interior has a nave and two side aisles separated by two lines of granite ionic columns, plus two Corinthian capital columns on which the triumphal arch rests. It has one main altar and two side altars. The nave has a wooden truss ceiling. [1] [3]

The apse mosaics are in an uncommon style, with only the figures in mosaic and no background. The image depicts the jeweled cross between angels and Saints Benedict and Anselm. **Commandeur** also completed the mosaic under the main altar covering the reliquary containing the relics of Saint Alexander of Rome.

The paschal candlestick is in the Cosmatesque style, but it is a modern reproduction.

In the aisles there are two altars, one dedicated to the Mother of God and the other to the Blessed Sacrament. The flooring of the church was created in Cosmatesque style. These are colored marble inlays with the insertion of large marble slabs. Above the central altar hangs the cross made in 2010 by a Belgian iconographer monk, Fr. **Marcus Du Four**.

The present organ by Österreichische Orgelbau was installed in 1967 and renovated by **Vincenzo Mascioni** in 1999. It is located on the eastern wall transept above the monastic choir.

The crypt has now been converted to the use of the library for the University. It has five naves and twenty red marble columns. It occupies the entire lower area of the church. The crypt can be visited; it is accessed through a door by the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. Behind the altar is a statue of St Benedict, with his arms raised in prayer - the posture in which he died.

Note

Men may visit the monastery, and it is possible to ask for a guided tour from a student - they will certainly have some english-speaking students, and it may also be possible to get a tour in other languages. There is no charge, but please offer a donation if you are able to.

Artists and Architects:

Albert Wider (1910-1985), Swiss painter and sculptor
Fritz [Metzger](#) (1898-1973), Swiss architect
Francesco [Vespignani](#) (1842-1899), Italian architect
Giuseppe [Luchetti](#) (1823-1907), Italian sculptor
MarcusDu Four (20th cent.), Belgian iconographer monk
Radbodus Commandeur (20th cent.), German monk and artist
Vincenzo [Mascioni](#) (20th century), Organ makers

Location:

Addr: Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta 5, 00153 Roma
Coord: [41° 52' 55" N, 12° 28' 41" E](#)

Info:

Open 09:00-18:00
Telephone: 06-57.91.319

Links and References

1. [Wikiwand web site](#)
2. [ROMAPEDIA blog](#)
3. [Church web site](#)