



JUBILEE CHURCHES

Church of Santa Caterina
da Siena





DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION
SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD



MINISTERO
DEL TURISMO
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

JUBILEE CHURCHES

Jubilee journeys

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4 themed routes to follow

The Jubilee is a great event for all peoples during which each and every pilgrim can immerse themselves in the endless mercy of God.

It's the Year of return to the essence of fraternity, mending the relationship between ourselves and the Father.

It's the Year that calls us to conversion, an opportunity to take stock of our lives and ask the Lord to direct them towards holiness. It's the Year of solidarity, of hope, of justice, and of commitment to the service of God, living in joy and peace with our brothers and sisters.

But, above all, the Jubilee year has at its center the encounter with Christ.

For this reason, the Jubilee asks us to get moving and to overcome the confines in our lives. When we move we don't just change place physically, but we transform ourselves too. For this reason, it's important to prepare well, to plan the route and



have a clear sight of our destination. In a sense the Holy Year pilgrimage begins before the journey itself: its starting point is the decision to do set out on the path.

To fully experience the 2025 Jubilee, through walking and prayer, four routes have been prepared for pilgrims within the city of Rome, each with its own theme.

Europe in Rome

The Pilgrim Path of the Churches of the European Union, includes visits to 28 churches and basilicas, historically linked to EU member countries for cultural or artistic reasons or because they served as places of welcome for pilgrims from individual member states of the European community.

Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches

Originally the idea of Saint Philip Neri in the 16th century, the pilgrimage of the Seven Churches is one of the most ancient Roman traditions. It's a 25 km route winding through the streets of Rome.

Jubilee Churches

This is one of the churches designated as a meeting place for pilgrims. Catecheses will be held in these churches in different languages to rediscover the meaning of the Holy Year. They will also offer the sacrament of Reconciliation and host events aimed at nourishing the faith with experiences of prayer.

Women Patrons of Europe and Doctors of the Church

This is a pilgrimage that involves stopping in prayer in those Roman Churches linked to Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Saint Brigid of Sweden, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, and Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

The Church of Santa Caterina da Siena

As is the case with many other churches in Rome, and outside Rome, the origins of the Church of Santa Caterina da Siena are



fig.1

linked to an association, in this case the *Archconfraternity of the Sienese*, which has been in existence since the end of the 14th century. This association, which is committed to helping the Sienese community passing through Rome and more generally assisting the needy, received further impetus and encouragement with the canonization of the most famous daughter of the great Tuscan city, Catherine of Siena, which took place in 1461, and was carried out by a Sienese Pope, Pius II. Another Tuscan who succeeded him on the throne of Peter, Leo X from

the Medici family (he was the son of Lorenzo il Magnifico) granted a further recognition to the Archconfraternity which, at that point, took the decision to build a more adequate church in Rome to reflect their human and Christian experiences.

Thanks to the help of important Sienese families operating in Rome, especially the Piccolomini (the family to which Pius II belonged) and the Chigi family, the necessary funds were soon raised to begin a significant construction project, the planning of which was entrusted to Baldassarre Peruzzi. This famous architect, also from Siena, began work in 1526 but a series of dramatic events which followed shortly afterwards (including the famous 'Sack of Rome' the following year) led to the halting of building works. They restarted a century later, based on plans by Francesco Contini and Pietro Ostini.

A restoration in 1764 enriched the space with new decorative features, and in the process brought about an almost total renovation of the church. The architect Paolo Posi is the architect of the current arrangement, which saw various artists and artisans work together in a major stylistic overhaul of the building.

The façade (fig.1) is structured over two orders, Doric and Ionic respectively, and is divided into three parts in a vertical and concave arrangement, so as to open out onto the street rather like a mother's

embrace which welcomes passers-by through two curvilinear wings. This close dialogue between straight lines and curved shapes clearly demonstrates how the façade was inspired by Borromini's dramatic architectural style. The heraldic shield of Siena stands out in the center, on the portal, while in the upper band there is a large window. In two stucco ovals we can see the symbols of the Senate of Siena and Romulus and Remus with the she-wolf. They are the work of Wander Elsken and echo the Roman origins of Siena - according to tradition the



fig.2

Tuscan city was founded by Senio, son of Remus who had managed to escape from Rome. We can see the she-wolf, the twins and the acronym SPQS (SENATUS POPULUSQUE SENENSIS - The Senate and the People of Siena, (fig.2) which give the church an even more solemn and 'official' appearance. The marble works on the façade are by Francesco Antonio Franzoni. The interior (fig.3), which we access after climbing the four travertine steps at the entrance, consists of a single nave with a barrel vault, four chapels and a slightly raised sanctuary area. The entire decoration is inspired by late Baroque tastes, and is effectively Rococo in style. This style became popular throughout Europe in the second half of the 18th century. The *Angels* by Ermenegildo Costantini appear in splendor on the vault, alongside the monochrome figures in bold perspective by Taddeo Kuntz. The gold leaf decorations by Pietro Tavanelli, the marble of the altars and the golden stucco capitals by Wander Elsken stand out for their



fig.3

brightness and display the classic symbols of Saint Catherine's spirituality: the lilies, the crown and the heart.



fig.4

On the walls of the nave (fig.4) a series of ovals depict episodes from Catherine's life. The first on the right depicts *Saint Catherine receiving the stigmata*. It is the work of Ignazio Morlà. Facing this we see the work *Jesus gives his heart to Catherine* by Tommaso Conca; then follow two ovals by Etienne Parrocel (*Jesus gives Catherine a pectoral cross* and *Jesus gives communion to Saint Catherine*). Pietro Angeletti painted *The holy young girl in prayer* and *Catherine renounces the golden crown for the crown of thorns*. These paintings, although limited in size, have a rich spiritual value, because they illustrate Catherine's progressive adherence to the heart of Christ and her total sharing in the mystery of the cross. With regard to the chapels, the first on

the right offers to the gaze of observers and the veneration of the faithful another extraordinary figure in the history of Siena:

the *Sermon of St Bernardine* by Salvatore Monosilio, from 1871, highlights the enormous importance that this saint had, largely due to an incisive, popular preaching style consistent with his Christian life.

The next chapel is also dedicated to a great Siennese saint, St Bernard Tolomei, to whom the Calabrian painter Niccolò La Piccola dedicated the altar panel in 1776.

The Apparition of Jesus to

Tolomei recalls the terrible plague that decimated the entire population of Europe in the first half of the 14th century. It was this plague that Giovanni Boccaccio talks about in his *Decameron*, when many left the cities and sought refuge in more deserted areas. Bernardo Tolomei took the opposite path: from the Monte Oliveto hermitage he had founded and where he lived, he returned to Siena to serve the sick before he too fell victim to the plague. Serving brothers in need means serving Jesus Christ - this is the meaning of the Lord's appearance to his faithful servant.

The high altar seems to glow with its warm and joyful marble decorative design, thanks also to the painting of the *Marriage of Catherine with Jesus* (fig.5) by

Gaetano Lapis, inserted in a fine golden frame supported by palms and crowned by cherubs, the angels of wisdom. The style of the painting, which tends towards the monumental, heralds the artistic evolution that was taking place in those years, namely the transition from rococo to neoclassicism. In the presence of Saints Paul on the left, Dominic on the right and John the Evangelist in the foreground, the Virgin Mary presents Catherine to Jesus, who, as though she were a bride, gives her a wedding ring. It is a scene representing the highest form of religious experience: the human heart uniting itself intimately with the heart of God until they become a single reality. The apostle Paul, identified here by the book and the sword, had written: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (cf Gal 2:20), profoundly interpreting this experience in words. Even John, whose symbol - the eagle - appears at his feet, strongly underlines the believer's intimate communion with divine life itself. Finally, St Dominic, on whose head a star shines, testifies to Catherine's membership of the Dominican family. Above, amidst musical angels, King David appears, singing of the glory and mercy of God.

Gaetano Lapis is also the author of two ovals from 1769 - *Christ carrying the cross appearing to Catherine* and *Christ showing Catherine the signs of his side*, which provide us with further insights into the Sienese saint's participation in the life of her divine Spouse.



fig.5



fig.6

The fresco that appears in the apse basin focuses on another stage in Catherine's life, a highly significant period which highlights her enormous historical and social importance. The painting, dating back to 1773, is by Laurent Pecheux and represents *Catherine accompanying Gregory XI from Avignon to Rome* (fig.6). As is well known, for about 70 years the papacy moved to France, to the town of Avignon. It was a period of great ecclesiastical and political turbulence and marked a time of declining influence for the city of Rome, which was deprived of its spiritual and civil authority. In those years St Catherine campaigned incessantly for the Pope to return to his Roman see and, in addition to dictating several letters, she personally went to Avignon to plead with the Pope. All this happened - let's not forget - during the late Middle Ages, when it was not at all normal for a woman to play a key role in events of such great public importance. The 'miracle', was finally accomplished and the Pope did indeed return to Rome. The Pope in question

was Pope Gregory XI who came back to Rome in 1378. But St Catherine had died the year before, so the painting has to be interpreted symbolically as though the saint herself prepared this return and accompanied the Pope on his journey.

We can also grasp two profound lessons from this story: on the one hand, we learn that experiencing religious and mystical experience does not mean distancing oneself from the world and its problems, but, on the contrary, it means embracing them and generously searching for solutions. Secondly it teaches us that the task of Christians is not only to listen to the Pope but also to assist him in the exercise of his supreme and universal ministry.

In the second chapel on the left, *The Assumption* (fig.7) by Tommaso Conca, from



fig.7

1770, Mary can be seen in all her glory. It is a choral painting, with robust and well-defined figures, seen in complex and elaborate poses, twisting and turning. Ultimately, each element contributes to the balance of the whole and its rich symbolism. The painting depicts the scene of the apostles' visit to the tomb of the Virgin Mary after her burial. Perspective is respected, but, at the same time, also overcome in the handling of the scene. Note that the floor, the base of the columns and the subsequent terrace are shown. The arrangement of the characters, in turn, represents different levels; but the explosion of energy around the figure of Mary assumed into heaven disrupts the scene, dissolving shapes and perspectives.

The first chapel houses the altarpiece by Domenico Corvi, *Gregory VII puts out the fire lit by Henry IV in the Vatican*, an episode that refers to the shady medieval incident known as the investiture fight: the painter captures with great skill the turbulent atmosphere of the era through diagonals, chiaroscuro technique and the use of empty space. On the left wall is the memorial to Paolo Posi and a bust from 1778, the work of Giuseppe Palazzi.

Attached to the church, on the first floor of the adjacent building, is the highly decorated and refined oratory, above whose altar the *Resurrection of Jesus* (fig.8) by Girolamo Genga, a masterpiece from 1520 seems to reign in glory. Other significant works are the *Cross* by Rutilio Manetti from 1625 and the statue of *Saint Cather-*

ine by Ercole Ferrata, dating back to 1662. They are among the only surviving links to the church prior to its 18th-century renovation. The architectural complex covers the area from Via Giulia to Via di Monserrato, and here, in 1912, a facade was built



fig.8

in imitation of St Catherine's house in her home district of Fontebranda in Siena.

St Catherine of Siena, now a Doctor of the Church, is the patron saint of both Italy and Europe. In recognizing her as an extraordinary and generous teacher of faith and a peacemaker, we invoke her intercession and commit ourselves to imitating the testimony of her life.