



JUBILEE CHURCHES

Basilica of Santi Silvestro
e Martino ai Monti





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 Basilica of Santi Silvestro e Martino ai Monti

Christians throughout the world, despite following different approaches to doctrine and life, recognize the synthesis of their faith in a prayer formulated many centuries ago. This prayer is the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, so called because it was officially composed in two stages, at the Councils of Nicaea in present-day Turkey (325) and of Constantinople (381). But it is more commonly known simply as *the Creed*. Its central part is reserved for Jesus: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God...", whose divine person, historical event and coming in glory at the end of time are highlighted in the text.

The basilica of **Saints Silvester and Martin**, commonly known as *San Martino ai Monti*, preserves within its cultural and material space the "memory" of the Council of Nicaea - the first assembly of bishops in history. Pope Sylvester I, in the year 324, held a meeting with his collaborators in this church, which he had founded shortly before, in preparation for the council: we might say that here, in the face of pressing controversy and heresies, the most important core of the great conciliar teaching took shape.

The church stands on the site of a house owned by the priest Equizio near the baths of Trajan and the famous *Domus Aurea* of Nero. It is possible, therefore,

that even before Constantine's edict of the year 313 which granted Christians the freedom to build their own places of worship and meeting spaces, this house hosted a *domus ecclesiae*, a space in a private environment intended for gatherings of the Christian community. The church, right from the start of the 6th century, was dedicated to the bishop St Martin of Tours, and was later also associated with Pope St Sylvester. Over the centuries various construction and ornamental modifications were made to it: the ancient structures can be seen on the exterior, on the right-hand side, then there was the construction of the crypt in the 9th century, the works of the Renaissance and Baroque period which profoundly changed the church's look, and then the 18th century interventions. Initially cared for and administered by the Benedictines and the diocesan clergy, from 1299 onwards (the year before the Jubilee of Boniface VIII, the first in history) the basilica was entrusted to the Carmelites.

The facade of the church is the work of Filippo Gagliardi. In its elegant layout over two orders, punctuated by cornices, double pilasters, a tympanum, false niches and a large window, we can see the dedication inscription by the Father General of the Order, Francesco Scan-

napieco, from 1676, the stuccos by Stefano Castelli with papal and episcopal symbols, and the profiles of Saints Sylvester and Martin. The architrave of the central door bears the commemorative inscription of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna and owner of the basilica (from the Jubilee of 1575). The cardinal himself oversaw the opening of a door and an access staircase in the rear area, next to the harmonious medieval apse. The small bell tower dates back to 1714.

The interior (fig.1) echoes the layout of traditional Roman basilicas, characterized by sequences of columns which divide the space into three naves. The columns, probably coming from the nearby Baths of Trajan, number 24 and are surmounted by a stucco architrave with Jewish and Christian symbols that

Paolo Naldini created in 1652. The floor is covered with multiple burial plaques. The walls above are embellished with 17th-century decorations with false balconies and lively perspectives, which invite the observer's gaze to go beyond its physical limits. Figures of various saints can be seen: on the right Ciriacca, Stephen, Sebastian and Nicandro; on the left Theodore, Pope Martin, Pope Innocent and Giusta, the mother of St Silvester. Naldini is also the sculptor of the statues of Saints Peter and Paul in the counter-façade, while Daniele Fiammingo is responsible for the statues of St John the Baptist and Saint Anthony the Abbot. The ceiling bears the date of the Jubilee of 1650 and displays the coats of arms of the Carmelite Order, of St Charles Borromeo (*Humilitas*) and of Pope Pius IV - further evidence of the



fig. 1

various the stages of the construction. The naves feature 18 frescoes (fig.2) by the great landscape painter Gaspard



fig.2

Dughet and two by Giovan Francesco Grimaldi illustrating the life of the prophet Elijah, believed to be the founder of the Carmelites. This relates to a title which, in our context, we give to the Virgin Mary - that of *Madonna del Monte Carmelo* or *del Carmine*, (Our Lady of Mount Carmel). It is a title with a strong symbolic signifi-

cance and refers to Carmel, a mountain in Israel. On that mountain, according to the Bible, the prophets Elijah and Elisha were inspired by God to overthrow the false divinities of the pagan world. On the slopes of that peak, many monks during the Middle Ages deepened their religious experience and, therefore, took the name of Carmelites, recognizing the two prophets as being, in a sense, their founders.

The right nave opens with the baptismal font from 1612, surmounted by the painting of the *Baptism of Jesus* and the lunette frescoed with *God in glory between two angels* by Giovanni Cavallucci. Here, as a plaque recalls, in 1786 was baptized St Gaspare del Bufalo. Next comes the altar of Saint Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, with a painting by Matteo Piccione; then that of Saint Teresa, with an altarpiece by Giovanni Battista Greppi from 1646. Next along is the altar of St Martin of Tours from 1645, in which Fabrizio Chiari presents the saint as a Roman soldier before his nomination as bishop; the altar of St Stephen with an altarpiece by Giovanni Angelo Canini from 1645 comes next; and finally we come to the altar of St Charles Borromeo, who was the titular cardinal of this basilica. This image was painted by Filippo Gherardi in 1693.

In this nave is located the urn with the body of Blessed Angelo Paoli (fig.3), who lived in Rome between the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century: his extraordinary generosity towards the needy and prisoners earned



fig.3

him the title of “Father of the Poor”.

We come next to the sanctuary area (fig.4) raised above the crypt: the sumptuous 18th-century altar by Francesco Belli dominates the space, while in the apse basin, under the gaze of the *Eternal Father Bestowing a Blessing*, the *Madonna del Carmine* by Pietro Navarra is depicted in glory between *Saints Peter and Paul* and, in the lower band, *Saints Andrea Corsini, Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi, Teresa of Avila and Pier Tommaso d’Aquitania*, while in the triumphal arch we admire *Saint Martin and Saint Francis Xavier* on the right and *Saint Sylvester and Saint Charles Borromeo* on the left, an array of frescoes by Giovanni Cavallucci, Giovanni Micocchi, Giovanni Baglione and Feodrani. The sanctuary area is completed with the choir carved by Giovanni Panatta, the candelabra by Gioacchino and Vincenzo Belli and the 18th-century pipe organ. A staircase leads down into the crypt

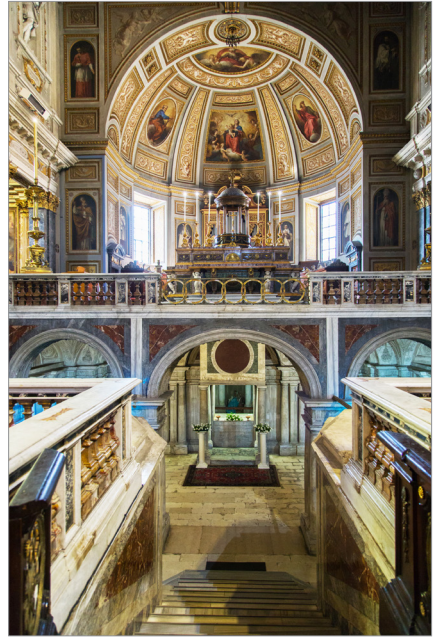


fig.4

(fig.5) designed by Gagliardi, enriched by Naldini’s stuccos, and enlivened by Benedetto Folchini’s marble coverings. In the center, placed on pillars and columns, we can see a rectangular reliquary similar to

a pulpit: on one facade a porphyry circle recalls the blood of the martyrs whose relics are kept here. A plaque on the wall of the staircase contains the list of their names. On the walls next to the staircase are the tombs of the two Carmelites who devoted themselves more than anyone to this church, Giovanni Antonio Filippini and Francesco Scarnapico.

Leaving the crypt, the visitor



fig.5

enters an ancient Roman building (fig.6), believed to be the remnant of the baths



fig.6

and the house of Equizio, where architectural remains share the space with medieval elements, and mosaic fragments seem to dialogue with frescoes. One of these mosaics, partially reconstructed in recent times, depicts the *Virgin Mary with Saint Sylvester*. A large rectangular brick room may be the location of the *domus ecclesiae*.

Re-entering the church, we turn towards the left nave. The first chapel is dedicated to the *Madonna del Carmine*. A painting by Girolamo Massei from 1595 is inserted into the fresco by Cavallucci depicting the *Souls in Purgatory* (fig.7). Cavallucci's brush was also responsible for the canvas with the *Vision of Elijah*, while the *Apparition of the Virgin to San Simone Stock* in the vault is the work of Tommaso Sciacca. In the course of this apparition Mary promised Simone, the Superior of the Carmelites, final perseverance and eternal salvation to anyone who devoutly

wore a special habit called a "scapular". Therefore in the fresco we see Mary giving the item to the seer.

The often-cited Filippo Gagliardi is the author of two very interesting frescoes on the wall of the nave, showing the Basilicas of St. Peter (fig.8) and St. John Lateran as they appeared during the Middle Ages and up to the Renaissance and Baroque transformations of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Another fresco, by Galeazzo Leoncini, is of extraordinary historical rather than aesthetic value: it is dedicated to the Council of Nicaea (fig. 9) and its message is highlighted by a quotation from a work



fig.7

by Cesare Baronio, written in the lower section, which recalls the commitment of



fig.8

Pope Sylvester, Constantine, Saint Helen, the prefect of Rome, Calfurno Piso, the Roman clergy and many bishops to the work of the Council, noting the approval of its decrees and the condemnation of the heretics Arius, Sabellius and Victorinus.

The fresco is preceded by the altar of *The Trinity with Saints Bartholomew and Nicholas* by Giovanni Angelo Canini, followed by the altar dedicated to the Carmelite *Saint Albert of Trapani* with a canvas by Girolamo Muziano from 1575; at his feet is the statue of *Blessed Giuseppe Maria Tomasi* who was once buried here. This is followed by the statue of *Saint Anthony of Padua*, after which we notice a plaque in memory of the young men of the parish who died during the First World War; finally comes the altar of another Carmelite

saint, the martyr *Sant'Angelo of Licata*, who we see depicted here in a canvas by Pietro

Testa from 1646. The counter-façade presents us with one final painting: it is a baptismal scene attributable to the Flemish artist Jan Miel, dating back to 1651, which mirrors the baptismal font of the church: it could depict the *Baptism of the Lord of Damascus by Saint Cyril of Constantinople* or, perhaps, the *Baptism of Constantine by Saint Sylvester*. This final

baptismal reference takes us back to the origins of the Christian life, which spring



fig.9

from faith and the waters of baptism. In this way the basilica, bearing witness to a centuries-old event, invites us to renew the faith proclaimed at the Council of Nicaea, and constantly re-presented throughout history, and to live out, in an increasingly coherent way, the promises of our baptism.