



# WOMEN PATRONS OF EUROPE AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

Basilica of Santa Cecilia  
in Trastevere

HILDEGARD  
OF BINGEN





DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION

SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS  
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD



MINISTERO  
DEL TURISMO  
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

# WOMEN PATRONS OF EUROPE AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

## Jubilee journeys

### Basilica of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere

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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.

# Basilica of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere

## *Reasons for a Jubilee pilgrimage*

The most suitable places to remember Hildegard of Bingen in Rome are the city's Benedictine monasteries and the church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere is one of these.

Benedict of Norcia, who as a layman had studied in Rome, living, according to tradition, in a house now transformed into the church of San Benedetto in Piscinula, is the one who brought stability to Western monasticism. Hildegard became a disciple of the way of life taught by his Rule. Not only that, but Hildegard was also confirmed in her ministry when the Bishop of Rome, Pope Eugene III, while presiding over a synod in Trier in Germany, read a text from the abbess which had been presented to him by Archbishop Henry of Mainz, and after reading it, authorized her to write down her visions and to preach in public.

From this detail we can already see how misleading are those interpretations of her life which present the saint as a New Age figure, a free thinker who was her own boss in all things. She was, in fact, a Benedictine cloistered nun who served the Church of her time, presided over her monastic community and preached Christ.

At the age of eight she was accepted as an oblate at the Benedictine abbey of Disibodenberg, and upon the death of the abbess (the name then given to an abbess was *magistra*) she herself became abbess around 1136.

About the year 1150 she founded a new monastery on Rupertsberg hill, near Bingen, and then one on the other side of the river and she served as abbess of both. She preached in many cities such as Cologne, Trier, Liège, Mainz, Metz, Bamberg and Würzburg, following the mandate of Pope Eugene III and his two successors, Adrian IV and Alexander III. From this we can see how Christian women, even in the Middle Ages, had an important role and also enjoyed a certain authority in proclaiming Christ.

Indeed, when the Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, fomented schism by having three antipopes elected one after another in opposition to Pope Alexander III, Hildegard, inspired by God in a vision, addressed him in writing, reminding him that he too was subjected to divine judgement. She wrote: «Woe, woe to this evil conduct of the wicked who despise me! Listen, O king, if you want to live! Otherwise my sword will pierce you!»

As in today's Benedictine community of

St Cecilia, Hildegard always lived with her sisters, though in her case she was accompanied by the monk Volmar, who was her secretary and spiritual advisor. In the miniatures that accompany her books, Hildegard is often portrayed with Richardis von Stade, her fellow nun, and all of this attests to her fidelity to community life lived in the love of Christ, in the monastery.

In proclaiming her a doctor, the Church intended to underline her charisms of theological enlightenment, of study, and of intellectual charity in her teaching. As Pope Francis wrote in reference to her: «This bond between holiness and the intelligence of divine and human things shines in a very particular way in those who have been adorned with the title of Doctor of the Church”.

It is typical of Benedictine monasticism to have come up with a formula for life which has remained with us through the ages: «Ora et labora et lege» that is, «Pray, work and study», three lights which illuminate monastic life.

In her works, often born from visions which helped her understand the Christian faith, Hildegard shows an awareness of the unity of the divine plan, and this allows her to write with admirable synthesis. For her, the creation, the incarnation, and the return of the Lord, when seen together, show how the whole of history makes sense.

A famous miniature shows one of her visions - man is at the center of the uni-

verse, embraced by the fire of the Trinity and the fatherhood of the Father. This representation shows how that centrality of man which is affirmed by humanism had always already been present in Christian theology. The Renaissance recognized this because it considered man to be a creature directly willed by the Creator and saved by Christ in the gift of the Spirit. It is our own modern age which no longer believes in the uniqueness and centrality of man, when it abandons the idea of creation and salvation, relegating man to just one of the many transitory realities in the flow of nature, reducing life to being of no importance.

The human body was seen by Hildegard, not as a burden for the soul, but rather as constitutive, a gift capable of reminding man of his own creatureliness.

Hildegard teaches in her writings how it is the grace of Christ that saves man through the work of the Church and its sacraments and how this communion with God is truly achievable, despite the sins of the Christian community.

The studies that Hildegard carried out and proposed to her monastic community covered the full gamut of human knowledge, from medicine to botany, from music, in which she saw a sign of the harmony of divine creation, to literature, always trying to place them in the proper light that theology gave them.

Hildegard died in 1179 in the monastery of Bingen.



### Visiting the church

The Basilica of St Cecilia was built, according to tradition, on the site of the house where the saint lived, and already in the early years of Christianity there is

orders, including the Humiliati Friars, had already lived on the site.

The relics of the martyr Cecilia are placed under the altar and in front of them is the statue that Stefano Maderno sculpted at the age of 23, in 1599. In the period of the

counter-reformation many throughout the city, not only St Philip Neri and Cesare Baronio, wanted the roots of the Church of Rome and the stories of the martyrs and saints of the first centuries to be rediscovered. (fig.1)

Thus, Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati when he became titular priest of the basilica, organized excavations in 1599 which led to the discovery of the saint's body - a body which had been moved here in the 9th century.

The statue shows the Saint as she was found in 1599. On her neck we can see the marks of three sword blows inflicted by the executioner which did not, in fact, immediately kill her, and the gesture of the three fingers which has been interpreted as the ultimate testimony of faith in the Trinity.

What is certain is that Ce-



fig.1

reference to her name and the church. However, it was only in 1527 that Pope Clement VII established a Benedictine monastery here, after several religious

celia was a martyr and that she was much loved, since the ancient Roman Canon - today Eucharistic Prayer I - mentions her together with the other martyrs who are

highly venerated by the people of God: "Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia..."»

In the *Passio* composed in the 5th century, she is described as a Roman noblewoman engaged to Valerian who is a pagan. He discovers after the wedding that she wishes to live the marriage in chastity, for the love of God. This is where the iconographic tradition of the «mystical wedding of Saint Cecilia» comes from – the most famous version of which was painted by Guido Reni.

The saint's faith converts her husband and also his brother Tiburtius who get baptized, but the Prefect of Rome sentences first the brothers, and then Cecilia, to martyrdom, because they refuse to venerate idols.

The first attempt to execute her would have been conducted using the fumes of the thermal baths – which tradition locates right here on the site of the basilica – but only decapitation eventually led to her death, with an agony of three days between the sword blows and the saint breathing her last.

She was buried by Pope Urban in the catacombs of St Callixtus, but Pope Paschal then moved her body to the basilica in the early Middle Ages.

Saint Cecilia is the patroness of music and is always represented with a pipe organ or some other musical instrument.

This tradition derives from the *Passio* in which it is said that, while going to the wedding, *cantantibus organis*, Caecilia in corde suo soli Domino decantabat dicens: *fiat cor meum immacolatum*. [‘the organ was playing and Cecilia is her heart was singing only to the Lord, saying: make my heart pure’] This interior ‘song’ was then taken by tradition to express a love for



fig.2

music offered to God.

In Christian churches, the apse was traditionally seen to represent the east, from whence comes the light that gives orientation to existence and towards which the celebrating community is on its way. In St Cecilia's basilica the apse mosaic from the time of Pope Paschal I (817-824) in the so-called Carolingian age has been preserved, but the truth is, the entire basilica must have been covered in mosaics at one time.

(fig.2) In the center is Christ: he has a scroll in one hand, a sign that he is himself the Word, while in the other hand the ring

finger and thumb are joined in a sign of blessing. The hand of the Father appears above him and crowns him. In the arch we can see the monogram of Paschal I.

To the right and left of Christ stand Peter

astery) together with St Cecilia.

The two palm trees on the right and left, together with the flowers and vegetation, speak of the splendor of Paradise and its fruitfulness. On the left palm you can clearly

see a phoenix, the symbol of immortality.

In the lower band Christ is present, symbolized by the lamb, duplicating the upper image. The lamb is on a heavenly mountain from which the four rivers of life flow, an image taken from Genesis and the Apocalypse. Twelve sheep, symbolizing the apostles - and the entire church founded by the apostles - turn towards the lamb, leaving behind the two cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and approaching him. Pope Paschal I has a square halo to indicate that he was still alive at the time the mosaic was created. This pontiff was also responsible for the installation of the apse mosaics in the churches of Santa Prassede and Santa



fig.3

and Paul with their iconic symbols: the keys and the book. Beside St Paul, we can see St Cecilia presenting Pope Paschal I to Christ. The Pope holds in his hands the model of the church of St Cecilia which he offers to the Lord. On the other side we can see St Valerian and St Agatha, (she was patron saint of the ancient mon-

Maria in Domnica alla Navicella.

The canopy above the altar has the function of symbolically solemnizing the place of the sacrifice - Eucharistic liturgy. The St Cecilia canopy is quite magnificent.

The work is by Arnolfo and is dated to the year 1293. It follows by about ten years the Arnolfian canopy of St Paul's Outside



the Walls and the artistic evolution of the master is clear, as he becomes increasingly aware of his expressive capacity . Arnolfo carves, on the front left corner, St Cecilia wearing a crown, and on the front right corner St Valerian, her husband. At the top of the two rear columns are Pope Urban and Tiburtius, martyred together with his brother Valerian. That of Tiburtius is perhaps the most beautiful figure: he emerges from the corner with the horse on which he is riding. The entire canopy (or ciborium), but especially this last figure, demonstrates the novelty of Arnolfo's work, fully capable of referring to the classics, in this case Marcus Aurelius on horseback, and of characterizing the human figures in a modern realistic way. Giotto, according to new studies, may have learned in Rome or Assisi from Arnolfo and Roman painters such as Cavallini, the lessons he would later make his own in Assisi and Padua.

On the front of the arches, you can see two prophets who deliver their prophecies, almost bowing to the Lord who comes. On the right and left are the four evangelists and on the back two female figures represent the wise virgins of the parable.

(fig.3) Nothing remains in the nave of the ancient structures which were incorporated into the current design when the basilica was remodeled in 1724 on the initiative of Cardinal Francesco Acquaviva.



fig.4

The large fresco by Sebastiano Conca which adorns the ceiling with St Cecilia receiving the crown of glory for her martyrdom from the Lord Jesus, while she is illuminated by the Holy Spirit and receives the blessing of God the Father, dates back to 1725. (fig.4)

On the left there are no side chapels, be-

cause the church is built up against the monastic cloister, but on the right side there are several chapels.

The most important is the first, the Chapel of St Cecilia or «del Bagno», because it recalls the place where tradition places the first attempt at killing the saint through the fumes of the caldarium.



fig.5

The Chapel was built in 1599, as part of the renovations sponsored by Cardinal Sfondrati. The actual chapel is connected, through a grate in the floor, with the excavations below, which reveal the Roman bath which was the scene of the first attempt at executing the saint. The altarpiece is a Beheading of St Cecilia, an early work by Guido Reni who was also the author of the tondo with the Mystical Wedding of Cecilia and Valerian.

Then we come to the Ponziani Chapel, so called because it was once the property

of the Ponziani family, the birth family of St Frances of Rome. You can easily imagine her praying in the basilica. The paintings are by Antonio Massaro from Viterbo known as Pastura: the altarpiece is a Madonna of Mercy between Saints Stephen and Frances of Rome

Next comes the Chapel of the Relics on which Luigi Vanvitelli (1700-1773) worked. He is also the artist behind the painting on the right wall - the Apparition of the Angel to St Cecilia and of the ceiling fresco showing Musician Angels - these are the only surviving paintings of the maestro, who was better known as an architect, and were painted when he was still very young, at the age of 23.

At the end of the nave, a fragment of the 13th century frescoes that were created to decorate the narthex is still visible. It shows the Apparition of St Cecilia to Paschal I to indicate the place of burial and the discovery of the saint's body by the pontiff. The counter-façade was decorated with the Last Judgment by Pietro Cavallini, which was ruined by 18th-century works. The portico of the facade was built around 1200, as was the bell tower - most of the Romanesque bell towers of the churches of Rome were built between the 12th and 13th centuries, by skilled workers in the field. Above the columns, there is a band decorated with mosaics with a circular emblem in the center containing the cross from which the alpha and omega hang, symbolizing Christ, the beginning, and end of everything. In the same band

there are images of the titular saints of the basilica: St Cecilia repeated twice (perhaps one of the two was previously Valerian, but poorly restored), St Agatha, St Tiburtius, St Urban and St Lucius, perhaps Pope Lucius I (253-254).

The façade was reordered in the 18th century, at the time of Cardinal Francesco Acquaviva. Under the portico, the funeral monument of Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati has been reconstructed. Above the bust of the deceased, you can see a bas-relief showing the discovery of the body of St Cecilia. The monument dates back to the early 17th century and Pietro Bernini, father of Gian Lorenzo, worked on the designs of the sculptures. (fig.5)

The courtyard is also 18th-century, as is its external façade which is the work of Ferdinando Fuga who built it in 1742 (Fuga is the same man who designed the 18th-century façade of St Mary Major's). It is possible that in place of the current courtyard there was originally a quad-

riportico, but its current arrangement fulfills the same functions. In the center of the courtyard there is a Roman 'cantaro' vase which may have been placed in front of the basilica as early as the Middle Ages.

Inside the monastery, we can admire what remains of the famous Last Judgment by Pietro Cavallini. (fig.6) The fresco was – according to tradition – on the counter-façade of the church. It was definitively covered and irremediably ruined in the 18th century when it was decided to renovate the church according to the tastes of the time. The section which has been revealed in the restorations is the central one, the most important perhaps, and the key to the whole composition which ran the entire length of the wall. At the center is Christ the judge, that same Christ before whom the whole world is gathered for the resurrection of the dead at the Last Judgment. The gesture of Christ is more composed than that of Mi-



fig.6



Michelangelo's Christ in the Sistine Chapel, but nevertheless he is the main actor in the drama. Seated, he looks to his right where the elect will ascend, and with his hand, which clearly bears the wounds of the crucifixion, invites them forward.

The Last Judgment is not primarily designed to instill fear in the viewer, but rather aims to remind us that hope exists, even when everything seems to fail. The modern age has, tragically, stopped showing the parousia and the judgment of Christ in the decoration of our churches – not because the world has overcome fear, but because it has lost hope! Works like this one by Cavallini remind us that only if God exerts justice, only if history does not have the last word on the life of the world, only then will those who are treated unjustly not be treated unjustly forever! In Cavallini's fresco, Jesus is represented inside a mandorla – an almond-shaped aureole of light surrounding the entire figure – to show him fully belonging to eternity. Note, however, that he is also the incarnate Christ, who shows his wounds clear-

ly; even those of his feet are clearly visible. He is shown with a halo (or nimbus) with the cross and you can see his name in abbreviation, with the Greek characters. We can see the Greek chi – which now fades towards Latin – iota eta sigma is becoming IHS, that is *Iesus hominum salvator* (Jesus savior of man).

Around Christ stand the extraordinary angels with their colorful wings: they are «his» angels, the angels of Christ, as he himself states in the Gospels. Everyone looks at him, adores him, praises him, all the while loving him. Immediately next to this scene are the Virgin on the left and John the Baptist on the right, that is, the *deesis* (a Greek term meaning «supplication» or «intercession»). In the Judgment scene, the man has Mary and John the Baptist as his intercessors, and all the saints are praying for him. It is the constant teaching of the Church that we are saved by the grace of God and by the merits of Christ and of all the saints who love us and pray for us.

Then come the 12 apostles, (fig.7-8) with their names and the iconographic



fig.7



symbols of their martyrdom: Peter, unlike the usual keys, has the cross of his martyrdom, Paul has the sword, John the poisoned chalice which according to tradition was offered to him, and so on. Below we can see, though not complete, further images which allow us to better understand what the overall system must have looked like. In the center, at the feet of Christ, are the instruments of the passion. On both sides, the angels with their trumpets who - according to the account of the Apocalypse - call the dead to resurrection. Further to the left we see the ranks of the saved: first two isolated figures, then the group of martyrs, then that of the ecclesiastics, then that of the women... On the other side, the angels drive away the damned and, beneath them, hell must certainly have been represented. On the adjacent walls it is possible to see even smaller fragments of the frescoes that decorated the entire nave.

On the right wall of the church, stories of the Old Testament were represented, certainly those of Jacob and Esau. Only fragments

of this can now be seen from two scenes which have survived: after the small twisted column that acts as a break with the Last Judgment, we see Jacob's Dream and, further on, Jacob stealing the birthright from Esau - we can also see part of Rebecca's body and the weapons of Esau. There are also visible fragments of an Annunciation scene which points to a New Testament cycle showing the life of Christ. Finally, part of the large body of a Saint Christopher figure can be seen.

Cavallini's frescoes show how the new way of painting at the end of the 13th century, a form more closely representing human reality, was not present only in Florence, while the rest of Italy - and Rome in particular - was stuck in a Byzantine rut. Rather, Rome is shown to be one of the driving forces of artistic development encouraged by papal patronage. The «modern» was tried out, supported, and finally encouraged by the ecclesiastical circles of the time and by the pontiff himself - indeed even Giotto's construction site in Assisi was the result of a papal commission!



fig.8