



# WOMEN PATRONS OF EUROPE AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

Church of S.S. Trinità dei Monti  
SAINT TERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS





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

### Church of S.S. Trinità dei Monti

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## 4 themed routes to follow

The Jubilee is a great event for all people 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 S.S. Trinità dei Monti

## *Reasons for a Jubilee pilgrimage*

Thérèse of Lisieux prayed several times in the Chapel of the *Mater Admirabilis* (fig.1), in the Convent of the *Trinità dei Monti*. This happened during a pilgrimage she made to Rome in November 1887, when she was just 14.



fig.1

With her father, Louis Martin, and her sister Celine, she first visited Paris and then came to Italy. They visited Milan, Venice, Padua, Bologna, Rome (for 10 days), Naples, Pompeii, and Assisi. Thérèse would later write: *"These beauties [...] spread so widely did so much good to my soul! How they raised it towards Him who was*

*pleased to lavish so many masterpieces upon a land of exile destined to last only one day!"*

A pilgrimage to Rome was quite an event back then. Thérèse was a teenager, and this was the one big trip of her life. She brought back a series of impressions, insights and intentions which nourished her prayer, helping her to understand the world and above all herself, before entering into the seclusion of religious life forever: *"Ah, what a beautiful journey that was! [...] I understood my vocation in Italy, and I didn't have to go too far for such an important realization."*

From the pilgrimage she brought back various relics. When she visited the catacombs of St Callixtus and the Colosseum, she collected the earth "reddened by the blood of the first Christians" which she carefully wrapped in cloth bags. Of her visit to the Colosseum she wrote: *"My heart beat so strongly at that moment when my lips approached the dust reddened by the blood of the first Christians: I asked for the grace of being a martyr for Jesus too, and I felt in the depths of my heart that my prayer had been answered."* When describing her visit to the Basilica of Santa Croce, she wrote about her desire/need to have physical contact with the traces left by the incarnate Son of God: *"I always had to find a way to touch*

*everything: to insert my little finger into one of the openings of the reliquary which contained the nail which was bathed in the blood of Jesus."*

She arrived at St Peter's Basilica for a papal audience on Sunday 20 November, and found herself in the presence of Pope Leo XIII. A French newspaper of the time, *L'univers*, in the column containing news from Rome, carried this account of the day: "Among the pilgrims there was a 15-year-old girl who asked the Holy Father for permission to immediately enter the convent and become a religious sister. His Holiness encouraged her to be patient."

This, of course, was the real reason for her journey: she wanted permission from the Pope to enter Carmel before the required canonical age. Thérèse was a very young postulant and, according to the testimony of her sister Celine, the audience with the Pope ended with a refusal, since Leo XIII did not allow her to bring forward her entry to the Carmel. Thérèse, however, was patient. "*I sleep, but my heart keeps watch*" (Song of Songs 5.2) is the verse that reminded her to "abandon herself" totally to Divine Providence, because even if Jesus seemed to be doing nothing to help her early entry into Carmel, His heart nevertheless did not cease watching over her with love.

She did not have long to wait, for, on January 1 of the following year the bishop's positive response arrived and her entry into Carmel was set for April 9, 1888. Thérèse was just 15 years old.

Thérèse was not afraid to talk about the sufferings of life: "When Jesus has placed me on the blessed shore of Mount Carmel, I want to give myself completely to Him. His blows will not frighten me because, even when the sufferings are most bitter, one always feels which is his sweet hand that strikes. I experienced it in Rome when everything would have made me believe that the earth was about to disappear under my feet [...] Life passes so quickly that it is truly better to have a beautiful crown and a little to suffer, rather than an ordinary one without suffering."

In Rome Thérèse lived, as a plaque recalls, in Via Capo Le Case 56, in the Piazza di Spagna area, which at the time was the French quarter of the city. During the days of her stay she went to pray at the Church of the *Santissima Trinità dei Monti*, inside the then-convent of the nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart, in the chapel known as the *Mater Admirabilis*, which had been frescoed in 1844. It is still possible to go there to pray by knocking on the door of the convent.

Thérèse of Lisieux is a "doctor of the Church" because she teaches what spiritual childhood is all about, and shows us how to interpret in everyday life the Gospel expression, "if you do not become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven".

It is amazing how little Thérèse, the saint of "spiritual childhood", describes the need to emerge from "natural" childhood in order to truly embrace a different kind

of abandonment. "Spiritual childhood" does not mean the innocence of childishness (as a superficial 'take' might suggest), nor does it refer to a nostalgia for a return to the early years of life, seen as some kind of idyll.

Indeed, these first years of life are seen by her as an age of hypersensitivity and excessive attachment to oneself.

This is well explained in her description of the grace of Christmas - as she calls it - which she received in 1886, the grace of "conversion". Thérèse writes about it like this:

*"Although God showered His graces upon me, it wasn't because I merited them, because I was still very imperfect. I had a great desire, it is true, to practice virtue, but I went about it in a strange way. Here is an example ... After Marie's entrance into Carmel, it sometimes happened that I tried to make up the bed to please God, or else in the evening, when Céline was away, I'd bring in her plants. But as I already said, it was for God alone I was doing these things and should not have expected any thanks from creatures.*

*"Alas, it was just the opposite. If Céline was unfortunate enough not to seem happy or surprised because of these little services, I became unhappy and made it clear to her with my tears. I was really unbearable because of my extreme touchiness; if I happened to cause anyone I loved some little trouble, even unwittingly, instead of forgetting about it and not crying, which made matters worse, I cried like a Magda-*

*lene and then when I began to cheer up, I'd begin to cry again for having cried.*

*"I don't know how I was lulled into the cherished thought of entering Carmel, still finding myself in the swathes of infancy!"*

But then she writes of leaving childhood behind - a passage which she recognizes as a gift of the Lord:

*"It was December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of leaving my childhood behind, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion. We had come back from Midnight Mass where I had the happiness of receiving the strong and powerful God. Upon arriving at Les Buissonnets, I used to love to take my shoes from the chimney corner and examine the presents in them; this old custom had given us so much joy in our youth that Céline wanted to continue treating me as a baby since I was the youngest in the family. Papa had always loved to see my happiness and listen to my cries of delight as I pulled each surprise out of the magic shoes, and my dear King's gaiety [here she is referring to her father] increased my own happiness very much. However, Jesus desired to show me that I was to give up the defects of my childhood and so He withdrew its innocent pleasures. He permitted Papa, tired out after Midnight Mass, to experience annoyance when seeing my shoes at the fireplace, and he spoke words which pierced my heart: "Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!" I was going upstairs, at the time, to remove my hat, and Céline, knowing how sensitive I was, and seeing the tears already welling*

up in my eyes, wanted to cry too, for she loved me very much and understood my grief.

*"She said, 'Oh, Thérèse, don't go downstairs; it would cause you too much grief to look at your slippers right now!' But Thérèse was no longer the same; Jesus had changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I felt I had the happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing; Céline believed it was all a dream! Fortunately, it was a sweet reality.*

Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, [at the death of her mother] and she was to preserve it forever!

*"On that night of light the third period of my life began, more beautiful than the others, more full of graces from Heaven [...] I felt that charity entered my heart, with the need to forget myself to please others, and I was happy from then on!"*

While it is true that we need to move away from a childish view of life, for Thérèse, it was also important to remain a child in one sense. She saw that "spiritual childhood" means being children in the arms of the Father. Being a child means trusting the providence of God who never abandons us. Faith is total confidence in the mercy that God has for Thérèse, whether

she desires small or large things. Thérèse had the desire to study theology and also to learn Hebrew, to leave for the missions and to die a martyr, but she understood that this was not what perfection consisted of. As she wrote to Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart:

*"How can you ask me if you can love the good Lord like me? [...] My desires for martyrdom are nothing and, anyhow, that is*



*not where the unlimited trust I feel in my heart comes from. To tell you the truth, it is precisely spiritual riches that make a person unjust [cf Luke 16:11], when that person rests on his laurels with complacency and believes he is already something special[...] What God likes, is to see me loving my own littleness and my poverty, the blind hope I have in his mercy. This is my only treasure, dear godmother. Why shouldn't this treasure be yours too?"*

And in her Diaries she writes:

*"I am truly far from being a saint, and here is the proof of it ... instead of rejoicing in my aridity, I attribute it to my lack of fervor and faithfulness, I should feel desolate because I have been falling asleep (for 7 years) during my prayers and my thanksgivings, but I am not desolate [...] It seems to me that little children charm their parents when they are asleep just as much as when they are awake. I reflect that to carry out operations, doctors put patients to sleep. Finally, I think that "the Lord sees our fragility, and remembers that we are but dust."*

As the exegete J Jeremias put it : *"learning to become a child again means learning to say 'abba' [daddy ] again."*

For this reason Thérèse, in the end, chose charity and only charity as her watchword: *"Thinking of the mystical body of the Church, I could not see myself in any of the parts Saint Paul described, or rather, I wanted to see myself in all of them."*

*"Charity offered me the cornerstone of my vocation. I understood that the Church has a body composed of various members, but that this body cannot lack the necessary and noblest member. I understood that the Church has a heart, a heart burning with love. I understood that only love spurs on the members of the Church to action and that, if that love were to be extinguished, the apostles would no longer be able to proclaim the Gospel, and the martyrs would no longer be able to shed their blood. I understood that love embraces all vocations, that love is everything, that it*

*extends to all times and places. In a word, that love is eternal.*

*"Then with great joy and ecstasy of soul I cried out: 'O Jesus, my love, I have finally found my vocation. My vocation is love. Yes, I have found my place in the Church, and you have given me this place, oh my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love and in this way I will be everything and my desire will be translated into reality."*

### **Visiting Trinità dei Monti**

The chapel of the *Mater Admirabilis* (fig.2) is located not in the church, but in the convent. It is an image of the Virgin Mary who is weaving the cloth of the veil of the Temple, the veil of the Holy of Holies, a gesture which is a prefiguration of the moment in which she will complete her most important work, "weaving" the flesh of the Son of God. It was painted in 1844 by a young postulant of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Pauline Perdreau, and the image was immediately considered miraculous, since healings and conversions attributed to it occurred.

The Convent had been built by the Minim Fathers of Saint Francis of Paola, because the King of France Louis XI had invited the saint to come and see him and St Francis later told his successor, Charles VIII that a convent of Minims would be built on Rome's *Pincio* hill.

The kings of France thus purchased the land and over time, Louis XII, Francis I, Henry II, Henry III and their successors



paid close attention to the works of the convent during Renaissance and Counter Reformation times, until, in 1594, the church was finally consecrated. But the Minim priests were expelled by the revolutionary French army, which arrived in Rome in 1798. Everything was looted, the church was transformed into a warehouse, all the works were removed, and the *Deposition of Christ from the Cross* by Daniele da Volterra was even pulled down from the wall so it could be moved to France.

When the French Academy was moved to Villa Medici in 1803, thought turned to its expansion with the possible annexation of the buildings of *Trinità dei Monti*. Various artists came to stay in the rooms of the convent, while the deconsecrated church was turned into studios for many of them. The most famous of the painters who worked here - as if it were any old studio - was Ingres who painted among other things, *Romulus' Victory over Acron* here.

It was only after the Congress of Vienna that the church was consecrated again, and this time the entire complex was entrusted to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart to build a school. Thus, they set out, as a source of the time put it, "to form Christian women". The nuns "realized a desire [of those who] felt that Italy did not do enough to produce refined women ed-

ucated in the light of the Catholic faith. The hope was that the French nuns might offer Italy this incomparable gift." It was Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, in 1828, who gave life to the new institution, the Institute of the Sacred Heart with a vocation as educators

Among the postulants of the new order was the painter of the *Mater Admirabilis*. To reach the corridor, later transformed into a chapel, in which the image was painted, you must first cross the beautiful cloister with paintings of all the kings



fig.2

of France in succession. Indeed the complex was patronized by the royals themselves, and it also recounts stories of the Minims to whose care the complex was originally entrusted.

The Chapel of the *Mater Admirabilis* has not only played host to Thérèse of Lisieux. Many Romans and pilgrims have prayed here, among them Don Bosco and Pope Pius IX.

The area had already been a monastic

settlement in the patristic period ... the noble widow Proba had transformed her house into a “monastery” for young people without families and for widows: Saint Augustine wrote her a memorable letter on prayer and happiness, when she fled to Africa at the time of the barbarian invasions. The Minim Convent, over time, became a center of great culture, with a library of 9000 volumes, but the revolutionary forces dispersed all that heritage. Andrea

Maignan’s stay in Rome (1636-1650) his father created a painting six meters long which, seen from the side, depicts Saint Francis of Paola praying under a tree; seen from the front, however, it looks like a landscape, in which the same saint and one of his brothers are seen praying before the miraculous sea crossing from Calabria to Sicily. The second image, which occupies about 20 meters of wall space, represents (from one angle) Saint



fig.3

Pozzo painted the refectory using the *trompe-l'oeil* method, one of the priests became the king’s botanist, and the convent’s pharmacy was among the best-frequented in Rome. But the most evident sign of the cultural and scientific attributes of the Minims is the two *anamorphoses* - literally “new forms”, or “re-formations”- paintings originating from the optical studies of Father Emmanuel Maignan and his disciple Nicéron. During

John in the act of writing the Apocalypse, but from a different perspective it shows the landscape of the island of Patmos where the biblical text was written. This work was painted by Nicéron.

The complex is accessed via the famous *Trinità dei Monti* Staircase - better known as the Spanish Steps (fig.3).

It was built between 1723 and 1726 to a design by the Roman architect Francesco De Sanctis. Until then, the Pincio hill had

been climbed by walking up a steep path of earth, with obvious inconveniences - especially when it rained! Although a project to create a connection between *Piazza di Spagna* and the *Trinità dei Monti* had existed since the mid-16th century, it had been delayed several times due to a shortage of funds and because France wanted the structure to be equipped with "French" statues. Indeed it was originally suggested that it be designed around an equestrian statue of Louis XIV that would be placed so as to dominate the area. The project also had to overcome an urban planning issue: the *Barcaccia* Fountain (now seen at the bottom of the Spanish steps) was not aligned with the façade of the Church - the fountain had been sculpted by Pietro Bernini, with the help of his son Gian Lorenzo and shows a boat on the verge of sinking, even though, in reality, it never actually sinks. It is an extraordinary evangelical image and almost a symbol of the *modus vivendi* of the city itself.

The land was purchased by the Apostolic Chamber in the last decades of the 16th century, but only the donations of a Frenchman, Stefano Gueffier, in 1660, allowed the planning to begin. The drawings attributed to the workshop of Gian Lorenzo Bernini were decisive, because they showed that a concave and convex layout of the walls and the use of pincer ramps would render the staircase truly spectacular. Construction was finally completed under Pope Innocent XIII and the heral-

dic eagles of his coat of arms - that of the Conti family - which appear, together with the lilies of France, on the memorial stones at the base of the monument, suggest a felicitous result was achieved.

The ternary rhythm that De Sanctis gave to the construction is a reference to the Trinity, with the three evident 'pauses' given by the two balustrades at the top of the first unitary flight of stairs and a third which marks the transition from the single staircase to the pincer ramps. The first part of the ramp is, in fact, unitary, but is marked by a division also into three parts. Everything refers to the descent of the Trinity downwards and, at the same time, to the ascent towards God, in the opposite direction.

The church has two towers on the façade, (**fig.4**) which is unusual in Rome but



fig.4



fig.5



fig.6

is more common in churches beyond the Alps. They were built between 1570 and 1585, according to a design once attributed to Giacomo Della Porta.

Before the double-flight access staircase, designed by Domenico Fontana, stands the so-called "Sallustian" obelisk, a Roman copy of an Egyptian original. It was Pius VI who wanted it there in the years immediately preceding the revolution. The plaque between the two staircase ramps is from the time of his successor, Pius VII and commemorates the restoration of the complex after the revolutionary devastation mentioned above.

(fig.5) Inside, the church is designed with a single nave with chapels along the sides. Among the chapels we can see on the right it is worth noting the following:

- the first is dedicated to Saint John the Baptist (the Altoviti Chapel) with paintings from around 1580 relating to the story of the Baptist and, in particular, the altarpiece showing the *Baptism of Jesus* by Gian Battista Naldini .

(fig.6) the second is dedicated to Saint Francis of Paola, in memory of the founding friars of the church, the Minims. Ingres painted his famous *Jesus giving the keys to Peter*, for this chapel which he revived in 1841. A copy exists outside the sacristy of the church. It is said that a Sacred Heart nun painted the image of Saint Francis of Paola in the 18th century, on a panel that the saint used as a bed.

The third chapel is dedicated to the Assumption (the *Cappella della Rovere*) and



fig.7

contains paintings by Daniele da Volterra (1548-1560). The painter painted *the Assumption*, while the cycle is completed

by the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, the *Meeting at the Golden Door*, the *Massacre of the Innocents*, the *Flight into Egypt* and the *Coronation of the Virgin*. On the left of the church the following chapels are worthy of note:

(fig.7) the second chapel, (the Bonfilii Chapel), contains the famous *Deposition from the Cross* by Daniele da Volterra, based on drawings with which Michelangelo collaborated. During the French occupation it was removed from the chapel next door and relocated in its current position.

(fig.8) the third chapel is the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (Orsini family). It was the chapel where the *Deposition* of Daniele da Volterra was originally frescoed, before being detached by the revolutionaries. It was repainted with works by "Nazarene" painters, with an altarpiece of the *Immaculate Conception* by the German artist, Filippo Veit. On the left is the *Annunciation* by his pupil, Giuseppe Thunner, and on the right the *Visitation* by the same or another pupil.

Above the main altar, the vault is late Gothic in style, built in the early 16th century, while the Renaissance was already flourishing in the rest of Rome. The main altar bears a representation of the Trinity, while the statues of Saint Louis and Saint Francis of Paola which originally adorned the sanctuary were lost in 1807.



fig.8