



EUROPE IN ROME

Church of Sant'Isidoro
a Capo le Case
IRELAND





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EUROPE IN ROME

Jubilee journeys

Church of Sant'Isidoro a Capo le Case

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Section for Fundamental Questions
regarding Evangelization in the World

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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 Sant'Isidoro a Capo le Case

«Divo Isidoro Agricola dicatum»

This is how Rome's 'Irish church', which is located in the Capo le Case area, greets us as we visit it after climbing the two flights of stairs of the beautiful rococo façade. The name of the district (Capo le Case) is due to the fact that, right up until the 17th century, this area was "the

ture. His wife Maria de la Cabeza shared in the same work and together they reached perfect sanctity through the normal rhythms of daily life. In this way this couple, who lived in the Middle Ages, teaches us that holiness doesn't consist in performing extraordinary acts, but rather in consistently living the virtues of faith,

hope and charity in the little things of everyday life.

The dedication of the church dates back to 1621 when some Spanish Franciscan Friars, who had come for the canonization of Isidore by Pope Gregory XV, chose this place between the city and the countryside to set up their community. A few years later, another group of Franciscans who had come from Ireland due to religious persecution in their homeland, took over the construction

and management of the building. This is why we can see images of both saints on the façade: the Spaniard, Isidore, with the farmer's spade and Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, with the bishop's insignia in the act of chasing the serpent away from the Emerald Isle (**fig.1**). St Patrick, the evangelist of the island of Ireland, according to an ancient tradition,



fig.1

head of the houses", that is, the beginning of the city's housing area, while the countryside extended beyond. And it is by a providential coincidence that the church was named after a saint linked to farm work.

Isidore was born in Madrid, when the current capital of Spain was just a small village, and all his life he worked in agricul-

chased snakes out of Ireland: a clear allusion to his tireless fight against evil.

The architectural project for the church was entrusted to Antonio Felice Casoni from the Marche area of Italy, who designed it in the shape of a Latin cross surmounted by a dome. He was succeeded in the work by Domenico Castelli, of Italian-Swiss origins, who was responsible for the portico.

The façade, from 1705, is a light-filled work by Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri. It is divided over two orders, the lower of which is made up of three entrances and a portico, while the upper part culminates in the tympanum and two large cornucopias, symbols of abundance, on either side. The Franciscan emblem of the arm of Saint Francis crossing the arm of Christ is shown on the side entrances and on the gate, as well as on the vault of the atrium (**fig.2**). In this space, in addition to an image of Saint Patrick, we can see another saint, St Bridget of Ireland, an abbess also involved in the work of evangelization.

The interior (**fig.3**) has a single nave. The side chapels are not part of Casoni's project, but were added later by the great Franciscan historian Luke Wadding,



fig.2

who was the real mastermind of the whole complex: indeed, a cloister in the attached convent is named after him and his tombstone is in the sanctuary of the church.



fig.3



fig.4

The fresco (fig.4) by Charles-André van Loo, a French painter from Nice, though of Dutch origins, triumphantly fills the barrel vault. The painting, dated 1729, exalts the *Glory of Saint Isidore*. From the humble work of the fields, signified by the ox and the objects in the lower area, the saint rises towards the light of heaven supported by angels. The image above the altar (fig.5) brings our attention back to Isidore's earthly experience ... Andrea Sacchi, in this 1622 canvas painted for the saint's canonization, shows him contemplating the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus during the work he is carrying out. In the story of Isidore it is said that one day when the saint was dedicating himself to prayer, the angels took over his work in the fields. This is the scene that appears in

the background of the painting. Isidore opens his arms in an act of total and confident trust in divine providence. The Blessed Virgin Mary, in turn, holds a seed in her hand, a sign of a harvest that will be blessed by heaven. It is an extraordinary lesson in the search for holiness. As the Second Vatican Council puts it: "By offering his work to God, man associates himself with the very redemptive work of Christ, who gave work a very high dignity, working with his own hands in Nazareth" (GS 67). Saint Isidore the farmer and his wife Maria are luminous examples of a proper "spirituality of work". In 1856 Domenico Bartolini, an exponent of purism, frescoed the dome with the image of the Virgin Mary and the most



fig.5

significant figures of the Franciscan order, starting with St Francis, the Poorerello of Assisi, then Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Bernardine of Siena, Blessed John Duns Scotus, Saint Ludovic of Toulouse, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice and Saint Bonaventure. His is also the lunette in the apse showing the *Prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Olives*, which has great relevance to the relics of the martyrs kept under the altar.

The worship space is divided into six chapels, three on each side, plus the transept.

The first on the right is the Chapel of Saint Joseph, decorated with paintings by Carlo Maratti, a disciple of Andrea Sacchi. They were painted in the mid-17th century. Over the altar we admire the *Marriage of the Virgin*, on the left is the *Flight into Egypt* (fig.6) and, on the right, the *Transit of Saint Joseph*. The frescoes on the vault are also by Maratti. Worth noting is the tomb of the Irish noblewoman Isabella Ball-Sherlock, from 1847.

Next on the wall is the tomb of Margherita Meigham-Haris, in neoclassical style, with the allegorical figures of *Fortitude* and *Meekness*. In the lower section, a plaque commemorates the burial of the

painter Amelia Curran, who was a friend of the famous poet Percy Shelley.

The Chapel of Saint Anne is next. Pier Paolo Baldini's canvas presents us with the three generations of Jesus' family, using a highly effective *chiaroscuro* technique: Mary entrusts the child Jesus to her mother Anne, and the Christ child willingly abandons himself into the arms of his grandmother, echoing the gesture of a little angel shown high above, thus



fig.6

underlining the perfect harmony between heaven and earth. The other paintings are a visual narration of the story of Saints Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Virgin Mary: on the left is the *Birth of Mary*, on the right the *Presentation of Mary as a child in the temple*, while the frescoes in the lunettes are dedicated to the events preceding her immaculate conception.

After the transept, the Sylva Chapel is a jewel to be admired (**fig.7**). Despite its somewhat small dimensions, it is the most



fig.7

beautiful space in the church, with its admirable fusion of architecture, painting, and sculpture in different materials. The design of the chapel is a prime example of the work of that supreme genius of the Baroque, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who designed it for the Portuguese nobleman Rodrigo Lopez de Sylva, as a funeral chapel for his family. A certain stylistic continuity with Bernini's ideas is found also in the funerary monuments (**fig.8**) which were sculpted by his son Pao-

lo; indeed it may well be that Gian Lorenzo himself contributed with his chisel, as well as his advice, to the creation of the whole. Other collaborators include Giulio Cartari and Paolo Naldini - the former was responsible for the allegorical figures of *Charity* and *Truth*, while the latter produced *Justice* and *Peace*. Carlo Maratti painted the *Immaculate Conception* which we can see above the altar. In a frame of gilded stucco with foliage, the Virgin Mary appears with baby Jesus in a blaze of clouds and angels, in the act of crushing Satan, the ancient serpent who dominates the world.

This chapel was created in the 1760s and, at that time, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception had not yet been defined (this would only happen two centuries later, in 1854); but already this doctrine, which considers Mary exempt from any stain of original sin, was spreading, mainly thanks to the preaching of the Franciscan Order.

On the opposite side, is the Chapel of Saint Francis, in front of which we can admire the tomb of Caterina Bryan Tal-



fig.8

bot, a work by Vincenzo Gajassi from 1847, which shows the young woman who died having just turned 19, lying serenely on



fig.9

the sarcophagus with her hands crossed and a thin drapery that seems to bring her body to life. The funerary monument to the Protonotary Apostolic, Pietro Pavoni dates from 1626 and that of Antonio Barano, from Milan, sculpted by Francesco De Rossi (known as *il Vecchietta*) is from 1667. In a medallion on the wall Saint Pa-

trick is seen, again chasing away snakes from the island of Ireland.

The following chapel houses the altarpiece showing *Saint Anthony in ecstasy* (fig.10) by Gian Domenico Cerrini, known as *Cavalier Perugino*. It was painted in 1661. The other paintings and frescoes refer to episodes from the life of the great Franciscan miracle worker.

On the next wall is the tomb of the Capelletti family, followed by the Chapel of the Crucifix, also painted by Maratti, whose canvases were later removed.

Many parts of the church contain funerary monuments and memorials to families or individuals who, in various capacities, were linked to the presence of the sons and daughters of Ireland in Rome and, to the various events linked to this place of worship.

It is a space which, as we have seen, offers a pleasing mix of Hispanic and Hibernian memories and cultures. Thus, in a single journey the paths of different communities intertwine, but they are both pointing, as though on a Jubilee pilgrimage, in the same direction, namely coherence of life through the example and intercession of the saints.