



# JUBILEE CHURCHES

Church of Santa Maria  
in Vallicella  
(New Church)





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 Maria in Vallicella (New Church)

## Why visit the Chiesa Nuova?

Visiting the Chiesa Nuova means meeting Saint Philip Neri and learning his life story. He is, in fact, buried in the chapel to the left of the main altar. (fig.1)

Philip lived by faith and brought to faith the Rome of his time. He often said: "You shouldn't look for anything other than



fig.1

Christ. Whoever wants anything other than Christ does not know what he wants, and he who wants anything other than

Christ does not know what he is asking for." He also famously said: "*Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas, se non Christo...*" (Vanity, vanity, all is vanity that is not Christ) On other occasions he noted that detachment from earthly things was both useful and necessary to serve God, and said that if he had 10 people who were truly detached and who wanted nothing other than Christ, that would be enough for him to convert the whole world.

He had arrived in Rome, at the age of 19, to work as a tutor to two young people whose family lived in a residence immediately to the left of the church of *Sant'Eustachio*.

While still a layman, he founded the Archconfraternity of Pilgrims and Convalescents near the church of the Most Holy Trinity of the Pilgrims, with the aim of welcoming pilgrims and serving the sick. Many Romans joined Philip in this work.

In the meantime, he went alone on a pilgrimage to the catacombs of St Sebastian - in 1544 the Holy Spirit filled his heart while he prayed there - and to what later became known as the "seven Churches of Rome" to pray at each location and root his faith in the testimony of the saints and martyrs, asking God to reveal his mission to him.

To study theology he went to Rome's University of *La Sapienza* and to the church

near the Pantheon of *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*. He was finally ordained a deacon in the Basilica of St John Lateran and then priest in the church of St Thomas in Parione.

From 1551, for 32 years, Philip Neri, now a priest, lived as a guest at the church of St Jerome of Charity (*San Girolamo della Carità*). He found it congenial to live 'in common', living together with other priests in a community where his spiritual father, Don Rosa, who had accompanied him even as a layman, also lived.

Philip then became Rector of the church of St John the Baptist of the Florentines (*San Giovanni Battista dei Fiorentini*) where he continued his apostolate. In 1575 Pope Gregory XIII entrusted him with the old church of *Santa Maria in Vallicella*, which by then had fallen into ruin. Philip moved there in 1583 and lived the last years of his life there.

As a priest himself, he loved to repeat that the priest must die on three "woods": the wood of the altar, that of the confessional and that of the oratory chair, from which he gave his talks. His faith was a constant source of joy for him, since he believed that happiness manifests the certainty of God's presence: "He wanted people to be happy, saying that he didn't like to see them weighed down in thought or melancholy, because such attitudes did harm to the spirit. And for this reason - ever the good father that he was - even in his most serious illnesses, he wore a jovial and cheerful expression, saying that

it was easier to guide happy people along the paths of the spirit than melancholy ones."

His was a method of transmitting the faith that we might define as 'heart to heart'. We should never forget that the Oratory in the mind of St Philip was not designed for children, as the television versions portray, but rather for young people and adults. In the secrecy of confession and spiritual direction, and in the warmth of face-to-face dialogue, he met and welcomed the Romans of his time.

But at the same time, he really was the 'apostle of Rome', impacting the entire city with his ministry. When it occurred to him to leave everything and volunteer to serve as a missionary to the Far East, after being inspired by the witness of the first Jesuits, he accepted the word of his confessor at *Tre Fontane* who told him: "Philip, your Indies are in Rome" - words that express the urgency of spreading the Gospel of Christ in lands evangelized in the earliest times of Christianity. And Philip loved to repeat: "Whoever does good in Rome does good throughout the world." In reality, he was never to leave Rome again, dedicating himself entirely to the city, and he passed this on to his disciples, inviting them to the *stabilitas loci* which still characterizes the Oratorian Fathers today - an Oratorian remains for his whole life in the community which he entered. Philip never worried greatly about issues beyond the city - except when he worked for the pardon of the

French King Henry IV – just as he never particularly spoke about the reform of the Church, since he was more concerned with carrying it out.

In proclaiming the faith, he wanted to



fig.2

enhance every aspect of life. He owned many books and enjoyed reading them, just as he wanted faith to be expressed in music. Out of obedience he asked his disciple Cesare Baronio, (who probably also inspired Galileo – Baronio's phrase is often credited to Galileo that Holy Scripture teaches how to get to heaven, not how heaven works) to study the history of the Church and use it in teaching and preaching. It is likely that he was also nudged in this direction by a desire to reconstruct a positive version of the Church's history

over the centuries, since some currents of Protestantism seemed instead to want to destroy it. But, much more important for him was the awareness he had experienced over years of solitary pilgrimages, that faith is strengthened when it encounters the great tradition of the Church.

The pilgrimage to the 'seven churches of Rome' which Philip began way back in 1552 still sets off from the Chiesa Nuova today, allowing everyone to follow the itinerary he had already completed many times alone, and which he had, in turn, inherited from medieval tradition.

### *Visiting the church*

In the middle of the Holy Year of 1575, Pope Gregory XIII assigned the parish church of Santa Maria in Vallicella to Philip Neri and, at the same time, set up a Congregation of priests there, calling the new foundation the Oratory. St Philip decided to immediately begin the reconstruction of the building, demolishing the pre-existing church which was in a serious state of decay. The *Chiesa Nuova* ("new" when compared to the previous building!) appears to us today as Philip imagined it and desired it, since there have been few subsequent interventions since his time. (fig.2)

Philip moved there only in 1583, out of obedience to the Pope, staging a self-deprecating 'change of address' procession, but he already loved the new

building, for it was as he had wanted it – great and solemn, at the service of the people of Rome.

The fresco on the vault, painted by Pietro da Cortona in the mid-17th century, depicts the saint during the construction of the Chiesa Nuova: the Madonna miraculously supports the beams which are about to collapse on the altar of the previous church, which was housing a Marian image which was waiting to be transferred to the new building. (fig.3)

In a chapel in the transept, to the left of the main altar, is the most venerated place in the Chiesa Nuova: the tomb of Saint Philip Neri. The altarpiece is a mosaic copy of the painting by Guido Reni which portrays Saint Philip in priestly robes venerating the *Madonna della Vallicella* holding the Child Jesus. The Fathers of the Oratory offer pilgrims guided tours of the saint's rooms, where many objects linked to his life help us to understand him better. (fig.4)

Saint Philip Neri, while he was still alive, stated that he wanted the altarpieces of the side chapels of the Church of *Santa Maria in Vallicella* to each represent one of the “mysteries of Christ” in which Mary had been present. The expression “mysteries of Christ” refers to the most important episodes of his life which serve as a kind of alphabet which help us to get to know Jesus. We find such episodes today in the “mysteries” of the Rosary, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (nos. 512-570) explains that it is through such



fig.3



fig.4

“mysteries” that beginners can be introduced to a basic knowledge of Christ. Philip decreed that anyone who decided to finance the creation of one of the side chapels would not be able to choose the



fig.5

subject of the altarpiece but would have to stick to the series already established by the Fathers of the Oratory. The saint lived long enough to see some of the works already in place in the side chapels – it is known, for example, that his favorite was the Visitation by Federico Barocci

which was created in 1586. Caravaggio, one of the many painters who collaborated, created the Deposition of Christ (Jesus being taken down from the Cross) for the Vittrici Chapel.

Following the iconographic order, starting from the chapel of the left transept, this is the list of the artworks:

- Presentation of the child Mary at the Temple by Barocci (1603);
- Annunciation by Passignano (1591);
- Visitation by Barocci (1586);
- Nativity by Durante Alberti (prior to 1590);
- Epiphany by Nebbia (1578);
- Presentation of the Child Jesus at the Temple (also called Purification of the Virgin) by Cesari – also called the Cavalier d'Arpino – (1627);
- Crucifixion by Pulzone (1586);
- Deposition of Christ by Caravaggio (1602, the original was replaced with a copy in 1797, after the theft by Napoleon's troops, and is today in the Vatican Museums);
- Ascension by Muziano (prior to 1587);
- Pentecost by an Unnamed Flemish painter (original from 1607, replaced in 1689);
- Assumption of Mary by Ghezzi (replaced in the mid-17th century);
- Coronation of the Virgin Mary by Cesari, the Cavalier d'Arpino (1615).

Here we can clearly see (**fig.5**) how Caravaggio's famous canvas is part of an entire cycle conceived by the Fathers of the Oratory in full counter-reformation spir-

it. Even although each painter worked alone on a work, or several works, entrusted to him, the overall plan must nevertheless have been clear to the artists. The Chiesa Nuova series thus allows us to see how a dialogue was established between the sponsor of the chapels, the priests who served in the Chiesa Nuova and the artists.

We start from the chapel in the left transept, with the image of Mary as a baby, and we end up at the Coronation of the Virgin Mary in the right transept. The circular progression, however, does not stop at that point, but continues vertically, high up into the apse and the dome. Behind the altar, the very ancient image found in the previous church of Vallicella carries our gaze up towards the crucifix above it and this, in turn, raises our eyes to the apse basin where the Assumption of the Virgin is located, a work by Pietro da Cortona. From the apse our gaze rises

again towards the dome, again frescoed by the great Maestro from Cortona, and from the Assumption of the Virgin one's eyes ascend towards the Trinity.

Borromini's baroque oratory, next to the church, is beautiful. It was conceived by the Oratorians in line with the thought of Saint Philip, so that from the celebration of the liturgy one could move seamlessly to life in the Oratory.

Unfortunately, it was seized at the time of the Unification of Italy and now, artificially separated from the Chiesa Nuova, it belongs to the Italian State.

Meetings of the priests took place in the Oratory, focusing on education in the Christian faith, through knowledge and meditation on the lives of the saints. Thus, study was alternated with prayers and songs. Indeed, the well-known composer Giovanni Animuccia, a friend of Philip Neri, performed his famous *Laudi* there.