

## THE CHURCH OF SS. ISIDORE AND EUROSIA

The Church of SS. Isidore & Eurosia was built in 1818 by Msgr. Nicola Nicolai<sup>1</sup> for the farmers on a country estate on 'the Road to Paradise'<sup>2</sup> that is traveled when making the Seven Churches pilgrimage. The portico is attributed to Valadier; three plaster reliefs, thought to be the work of Antonio Canova, may be admired in this portico.

The Oratorian Fr. Generoso Calenzio acquired the church, together with the attached house, in 1889. Through the generosity of Pope Pius XI, the Fathers of the Roman Oratory regained possession and returned there. The Pope invited them to join with the nearby parish of St. Paul's-outside-the-Walls in ministering to the parishioners.

A new neighborhood was developing in the parish. Families that had been evicted from their old, rickety dwellings in Rome's historic center were moving to Garbatella, and ministering to this mixed population, far from the city's churches, was becoming a problem that urgently required a solution.

In 1924, the newspaper *Il Messaggero* reported, "*This year, the Baby Jesus has been born in a stall in Garbatella.*"

Young Fr. Luigi Botton had been transferred from S. Maria in Vallicella; indeed, he had transformed the Santambrogio family's cowshed into a chapel. He celebrated Midnight Mass there, and the little chapel was unable to hold all the people who attended.

The Roman Congregation heard about the important ministry that was beginning in Garbatella. At great personal sacrifice, various priests from Chiesa Nuova went to help their young brother priest on Sundays and holydays.

The Roman Congregation, guided by Fr. Paolo Caresana, a friend and confessor of Msgr. Montini, had preserved precious mementos of St. Philip Neri's apostolic activity in the heart of old Rome. Significantly, a valuable bas-relief of St. Philip in ecstasy that had once adorned the altar of 'The Garden' was donated to the humble quarters of the new and growing Garbatella parish. This 'garden' was the courtyard of a building in Borgo Vittorio that had been acquired long before by the Oratorian Father (later Cardinal) Colloredo for the Secular Oratory brothers' recreation; it was expropriated in 1928<sup>3</sup>. Some orange plants from that 'garden' were transplanted to Garbatella; one of the original orange trees is still thriving, and the bas-relief remains in the front of the portico of SS. Isidore & Eurosia on Via delle Sette Chiese.

Thanks to the Fathers' hard work in the pastoral ministry, the time came to start a new parish; this one was dedicated to St. Francis Xavier. In 1933, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Marchetti Selvaggiani, assigned a special task to the Oratorians who were working in the apostolate there: the organization of a special Oratory for young people; it continues its work to this day.

An American couple, Thomas and Irene Bradley, had given a generous donation to Pope Pius XII, to be used at his personal discretion. Thanks to the interest shown by then-Monsignor Giambattista Montini (the future Pope Paul VI), this money was given to the Congregation. It paid for the construction of a large building for the Baronio Institute, as well as the parish church of St. Philip Neri *in Eurosia*<sup>4</sup>. Thus the full name of the parish continues to recall the story of the little church, as well as the memory of those first generations of the Christians of Rome whose catacombs can be found under the surrounding fields.

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*translated & annotated by Fr. Timothy E Deeter*

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<sup>1</sup> He directed the Ministry of Agriculture for the Papal States.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the Via delle Sette Chiese (Road of the Seven Churches).

<sup>3</sup> Various properties in Rome were taken over by the Italian state and then demolished to facilitate the widening of streets or the construction of new ones.

<sup>4</sup> The little Church of SS. Isidore & Eurosia is now an adjunct chapel of the larger complex of St. Philip Neri parish. But the formal title of the parish, St. Philip Neri *in Eurosia*, preserves the name of the original foundation.