

4. THE CHURCH OF SAN NICOLA DI BARI – PRETOLA (PG)

This ancient, historically significant little church in Pretola is dedicated to San Nicola di Bari (also known as Saint Nicholas), and was consecrated in 1383. Parochial activities began in 1555, until 1824 when Monsignor Cittadini united this parish with the suburban parish of S. Petronilla. It wasn't until 1910 that the parish of Pretola regained its independence, and was assigned to Don Ascenso Ricceri, who initiated major restoration works on the church, beginning with the bell tower (1912), then the cypress-wood door (1920), and finally the façade (1922).

Crucifixion. Perugian painter of the late 14th century. Fresco located in the current sacristy. The Church of San Nicola is home to fourteenth-century frescoes rediscovered below the plaster on the walls of the nave when, after the dreadful flood of the Tiber in November 1896, the good people of Pretola came together to repair the walls, roof and floor of their church. In 1979, the church's frescoes underwent a painstaking restoration.

The Church, with its Roman-style cruciform floor plan, is the result of expansions to an early church which held five altars: the main one, dedicated to Saint Nicholas, and four side altars dedicated respectively to Saint Joseph, the Madonna of Loreto, Saints Macarius and Anthony of Padua, and the Madonna of the Rosary. The interior has just one nave, divided into three bays, with side chapels later added. In 1743, the parish priest of the Pretola church, Don Francesco Bruganti, ordered that the sacred stones of the two side altars be properly plastered, an iron cross be put on the roof, and that the entire church be whitewashed and plastered where necessary.

PRETOLA AND ITS CHURCH IN THE HISTORIC WRITINGS (1913 - 1938) OF DON ASCENSO RICCIERI.

"The parish church of Pretola, dedicated to S. Nicolò di Bari, was dependent on the S. Paolo di Val diponte Abbey from the fifteenth century, as revealed by an ancient land register kept in the archives of the S. Pietro monastery". Of the churches mentioned in these historic writings, only the church of Pretola had been consecrated. A record of its consecration was kept in the form of an inscription discovered by Monsignor Ferniani, Bishop of Perugia, below the consecrated stone of the main altar on the pastoral visit he made to Pretola on 18 October 1734. One Serafino Offidani was parish priest at the time, and kept a record of this in a little book, whose tattered remains along with four parchments form the entirety of the parochial archives I have uncovered. The good priest writes that the bishop had the stone raised, and beneath it found a record of the consecration written in Gothic characters, and as nobody there could read it, he had it brought with him to Perugia where it was read by the Chancellor.

DON ASCENSO RICCIERI, a young Perugian priest, scholar, writer and tireless preacher, was a good and active parish priest for Pretola for many years, from 1912 to 1938. He had previously been the parish priest of Morcelli and chaplain at the Military Hospital. Pretola enjoyed its best years under his pastoral care, and it is no wonder that he is remembered with respect and esteem. Don Ricceri is remembered for the construction of the beautiful new bell tower and for the reconstruction of the parish church in 1912. The first stone was laid by the archbishop on 6 October that year. He is also remembered for having returned the Baptismal Font to Pretola, which had been taken or stolen by the parish of Ponte Valleceppi after the suppression of the parish of Pretola. The way for its return was paved on 30 March 1912 by decree of the archbishop. As a writer and

researcher, Don Riccieri has left us "*Appunti storici intorno alle parrocchie della Fraternità di Ponte Valleceppi*", a volume of historic writings on the parishes of Ponte Valleceppi along the Tiber river.