



## ORATORY OF THE BEATA VERGINE (BLESSED VIRGIN) OR MADONNINA OF S. PAOLO (ST. PAUL)

You can find this point of interest in Cantù - Path 1 - Stage 2

Cantù – Path 2 – Stage 1 passes by this point of interest

### INFORMATION

**Location:** The Oratory is placed outside the churchyard of the church of S. Paolo (St. Paul), close to the entrance of Scotti house, formerly Archinto palace, leaning to the old walls close to porta Ferraia

**Access:** from the front door

**Paving:** the space in front of the Oratory is cobbled; the band around the facade is paved in small slabs of stone, as is the first step of the entrance, while the other two steps and the last one are in stone. The vestibule is paved in stone, the interior in fired bricks.

**Architectural barriers:** three steps plus another one lead to the interior of the Oratory, passing a small vestibule delimited by an iron grid with glass. The apse is one step higher. At the centre of the oratory is the baptismal font, on a lower plan (take care).

**Services:** urban and extra-urban bus stops in Piazza Parini; cash dispenser in Piazza Garibaldi and in via Corbetta; chemist's in via Ariberto da Intimiano and via Matteotti

**Leisure and Food:** bars and shops in the neighbourhood; public gardens in via Dante (Parco Argenti) and via Roma (Parco Martiri delle Foibe).

**Other information:** open on request. For opening times, call 031.701393 (Parish of S. Paolo – Secretary).

### DESCRIPTION

The Oratory is a small building with a square plan, with an unusual apse with seven sides of irregular length, probably adapted to the trace of the city walls. The stratigraphy shows that the oratory was erected between the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, enclosing a more ancient image of the *Breastfeeding Madonna* painted on a stretch of the walls, to protect the city. The oratory, in fact, is not mentioned among the churches listed by Goffredo da Bussero in his *Liber Notitiae Sanctorum Mediolani*, written in 1289.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the facade was open and delimited by an iron grid, as witnessed by the apostolic visitor father Leonetto Clivone in 1566; in later times, the facade was closed, as prescribed by San Carlo Borromeo after his visit of July 9, 1570. At the same time, cardinal Borromeo also ordered to renovate the baptistery, placed at the time in the church of S. Paolo; meanwhile baptisms should have been held «*nella chiesa più propinqua*» [in the church most close]. Thus the baptistery was temporarily moved inside the oratory; in 1717 cardinal Giuseppe Archinto ordered that the oratory should be used instead as the seat of the Confraternities of the Very Holy Sacrament and of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmelo.

Here started a period of decay: the care of don Carlo Annoni, Calvi, and Garovaglio, avoided the oratory to be destroyed during the urban renovation of the city that took place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even when it was used for other purposes, such a deposit or laboratory. Only in 1956, thanks to the parish mons. Giuseppe Bratti, the first restoration works were started, in order to use the oratory again as baptistery, during a short period between the sixties and seventies of the last century. Between 1998 and 2004 a new series of renovation works were performed, aimed at maintaining and consolidating the structure, as well as at restoring the frescoes.

In contrast with the unassuming simplicity of the exterior, the interior is endowed with a rich fresco decoration, covering the apse, the side walls and the vault.

The apse has seven sides: on the wall, a loggia has been painted, opening on a landscape behind: a picture of ***Our Lady of the Milk*** is placed at the centre, painted in a simple style, dated at the 14<sup>th</sup> century, due to her Gothic tracts. This is the only breast-feeding Madonna in Cantù who has a crown on her head; the Child has a small bird on his left hand. According to Natale Perego: «*it is an interesting fact that this church [for a certain period] was used as a baptistery: one more time, as in Galliano [...], we find painted together in the territory of Cantù water and milk, that is the two primordial elements of spiritual and material life*».

At both sides of the Madonna are two *Angels*, behind whom images of the ancient Cantù have been recognised; the *Buon Ladrone (Good Thief)* is painted on the left end of the loggia and *San Nicola da Tolentino (Saint Nicholas of Tolentino)* on the right. Over each arch of the loggia you can find alternated a shell and a Cherub's head; at the centre, over the breast-feeding Madonna, *Dio Padre (God Father)* is represented in the gesture of benediction.

On the walls there are two cycles of paintings: the *Life of the Blessed Virgin* and *The Infancy of Jesus*: on the left wall, starting from the left, are the *Massacre of the Innocents*, *the Shepherds' Adoration*, *Nativity and Presentation to the Temple*; on the right wall, starting from the left, are *The Wedding of the Virgin*, *Circumcision* and the *Adoration of the Magi*. These scenes are separated by false pillars surmounted by a trabeation; over the trabeation are half moons with *Sybils* and *Prophets* in medallions. An inscription on the left side of the arch delimiting the apse reports the probable authors and the date when the paintings were executed: Giovanni Ambrogio da Vigevano and Cristoforo Motti (1514), mentioned only for this cycle of frescoes, who, according to Mauro Natale, were inspired by Bergognone and Bernardo Zenale, and often by the engravings by Raffaello and Durer. At the center of the blue, star-studded vault, shines a round painting spreading sunrays and including a *Madonna with Child* over a half moon.

A baptismal font in poly-chrome marbles has been placed at the center of the Oratory.