



BASILICA OF S. PAOLO (ST. PAUL)

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

INFORMATION

Location: the Basilica stands at the top of the hill of San Paolo, next to the Pietrasanta Palace, giving onto a panoramic parvis overlooking Piazza Garibaldi, the square below.

Access: access is usually through the side entrance on the left.

Paving: the parvis (*"pasquè"* in local dialect) is cobbled; next to the side entrance a mosaic – again, cobbled - depicts a lamp with a burning flame. A stone tile strip borders the perimeter of the church, the parvis and the green flowerbed on the left side of the Basilica. The steps giving access to the main portal are in stone; the landing on the top of the staircase is made of stone slabs.

Architectural barriers: an 11-step staircase leads to the façade's pronaos.

The side entrance is preceded by an inner door opening outwards at the centre.

When inside, one has to climb 5 steps in order to access the apse of the nave, and 3+2 steps to access the apses of the aisles.

Services: bus stops for urban and suburban routes in Piazza Parini; automated teller machines in Piazza Garibaldi and via Corbetta; Chemists in via Ariberto da Intimiano and via Matteotti;

Leisure and food: bars, cafes and shops in the area; municipal gardens in via Dante (Parco Argenti) and via Roma (Parco Martiri delle Foibe).

Other information: the Basilica is usually open. For opening times, call 031.701393 (Parish of S. Paolo - Secretary).

To the left of the Basilica stands the former Canons' House.

The small square was once overlooked by the Oratory of the Dead, which was later demolished when the Cemetery was moved next to the Sanctuary of the Beata Vergine dei Miracoli (*Blessed Virgin of the Miracles*) in the Napoleonic era.

DESCRIPTION

The Basilica of S. Paolo (St. Paul), with one nave and two aisles, was built on the hill which dominates the village of Cantù, most probably in the 11th century. On the outside of the church, some parts of the central apse of the original building remain, with decorations and hanging arches divided into five groups of pilaster strips; other arches are visible, too, on the façade above the porch portal, and a decoration runs along the profile of the roof. The bell tower, the town's symbol, dates back to the end of the 11th century, and is inserted into the left aisle directly onto the façade. The bell tower - the lower part of which is made of squared stones and pebbles, while the upper part is made of bricks - is surmounted by a sixteenth century conical brick spire; the openings are slit windows and three rows of mullioned windows.

The current appearance of the church is largely due to the alterations that took place in the second half of the sixteenth century, when Saint Charles Borromeo fostered its restoration in order to transfer the Collegiate Church from S. Vincenzo in Galliano (1582).

The façade is preceded by a seventeenth-century pronaos, the access to which is by an imposing staircase. On the northern side of the church (the left side, when looking at the façade), only a few spans remain of the 16th century portico with coupled columns which originally surrounded the building,

The interior is divided into a nave and two aisles, separated by gneiss columns. A brick vault replaced the original coffered ceiling in 1579 with regard to the aisles, and in 1674 with regard to the nave.

The stained glass windows of the nave represent four saints of Cantù: *Adeodatus, Ecclesius, Savinus and Manfred* (Luigi Migliavacca, 1930); in the left aisle of the counter-façade a stained glass window is dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo.

At the beginning of the left aisle (when entering), a niche houses a statue of Saint Apollonia, the town's patron saint (her feast is celebrated on February 9th); one of her relics, transferred from the church of S. Maria (St. Mary) is preserved here. The next chapel, built in 1795 according to a design by Carlo Felice Soave, is neoclassical in style. It is called the Crucifix chapel because it contains a valuable sixteenth-century wooden crucifix which was originally in the Basilica of Galliano.

At the bottom of the left aisle is the chapel of the Holy Thorn; it was once dedicated to St. Joseph, as shown by the seventeenth century paintings on the walls depicting *The Flight into Egypt* and *The Death of St. Joseph*. The relic of the Holy Thorn, transferred from the church of S. Maria (St. Mary) which was attached to the Benedictine Monastery, is placed in the tabernacle of the altar, which is embellished by a themed twentieth century triptych created by the painter Luigi Migliavacca. Above it a valuable fifteenth century stained glass window depicts the *Saints Peter and Paul*.

The chancel is dominated by the polychrome marble temple-shaped altar (1783) flanked by the bronze sculptures of *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*; *Saint Paul in Glory* (Francesco Verda, 1852) towers from the vault. The stained glass windows in the apse represent *The Conversion of Saint Paul* and *The Martyrdom of the Saint* (Luigi Migliavacca 1930). The *Four Cardinal Virtues* (1930) are depicted in the apse conch.

The chapel of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel opens at the end of the right aisle. As the tombstones on the walls record, it was restored in the first half of the seventeenth century thanks to the Argenti family. A number of works attributed to Giovanni Battista della Rovere (brother of the better known Giovanni Mauro, and both called the *Fiammenghino*) are preserved here. They depict, starting from the left, *Saint Ursula* (?), *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (venerated in this chapel since 1610, as attested by the inscription below it), *Saint Ambrose*, *Saint Agatha*, and *Saint Teresa of Ávila*. *Our Lady of Mount Carmel with Angels* is painted on the vault, while two *Prophets* are represented on the lunette. This chapel hosts two more paintings the work of a different hand: *Our lady of Mount Carmel delivering the scapular to Saint Simon Stock* (on the left wall), and *Saint Charles* (on the right wall). The two windows of this chapel are dedicated, respectively, to *St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus* and to *Saint Aloysius Gonzaga*.

It is worth mentioning that in the middle of the right aisle there is an altar surmounted by the reproduction of the *Grotto of Lourdes*, completed in 1897-98; two paintings follow, the first being *The Conversion of St. Paul*, attributed to Camillo Procaccini, and the second the seventeenth century painting of the *Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia*.

The church of S. Paolo (St. Paul) was raised to the status of Minor Roman Basilica by Pius XII in 1950, due to the intervention of Cardinal Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster.