



SANTUARIO E CONVENTO DELLA MADONNA DELLE LACRIME (Shrine and Friary of Our Lady of Tears)

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

INFORMATION

Location: the Shrine stands alongside Viale della Rimembranza; the friary is adjacent to the church, to the right of the portico.

Paving: the portico is paved with stone slabs; the interior of the church is floored with tiles.

Architectural barriers: our itinerary suggests to access the 18th century portico located in front of the Shrine by the arch on the right; it is advisable to keep to the centre of this opening, where the base of the columns which support the arch has an opening. The portico floor is at a slightly lower level, therefore one has to overcome this difference in height by descending one step. On the front of the portico, i.e. the side overlooking Viale della Rimembranza, the base hosting the columns presents three gaps, corresponding to the three arches; here, too, you need to descend one step in order to reach the portico floor. To enter the church one has to cross a threshold made of stone.

Access: entrance is through the central bronze portal with bas-reliefs by Fra' Guglielmo Schiavina, made on the occasion of the Jubilee of the year 2000. The portal, usually open, does not give immediate access to the interior of the church but is separated from it by a rather long enclosed area (the so-called *bussola*) with two entrance doors, one on the right and one on the left.

Services: parking available in the area; automated teller machine in Piazza Virgilio Matteri.

Leisure and Food: bars and a restaurant (*trattoria*) in the area.

Other information: the church is generally open for visits.

DESCRIPTION

(*Silvia Fasana*)

The Shrine of Our Lady of Tears (or church of S. Maria del Fiume, as indicated in historical documents) contains a picture of the Virgin Mary known in the past as Madonna del Fiume (*Our Lady of the River*), painted in a small country chapel, which is believed to have shed some tears on 6 September 1553. The first people to witness this event were a woman, Maria de' Matti, and a priest, don Bernardo Bonizio. After the miracle the people of Dongo started to erect a sacred building around the chapel, which over the years became progressively larger thanks to the many donations by the faithful. In the second decade of the 17th century, the Reformed Friars Minor settled here, building a friary and gradually widening and embellishing the church.

Following the Napoleonic suppression in 1810, the friars were forced to abandon the friary; the Polti Petazzi family purchased it from the State on the same year and in 1838 granted the friars the right to use it. They were again sent away from the convent further to the provisions of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy in 1868, but once more the intervention of the Manzi family, the heirs of the Polti Petazzis, enabled the Franciscan community to return.

In 1936 the last heiress of the family, Giuseppina Manzi, donated the property to the Lombardy Province of the Friars Minor by a notarial deed. Mons. Teresio Ferraroni, Bishop of Como, included this Shrine among those to visit during the Jubilee years 1975 and 1983; his successor, Alessandro Maggolini, renewed the same privilege for the Jubilee of the year 2000. Moreover, on 1 November 2004 a decree by the same Bishop declared Our Lady of Tears "Patrona delle Tre Pievi" (Patron of the Three Parishes).

The church has a single nave and four side chapels. The first chapel on the right, dedicated to Saint Francis, was opened in 1619 and funded by Tommaso Scanagatta, and is decorated by paintings which tradition attributes to Fra' Emanuele from Como (1625-1701) and by an altar-piece with *The Impression of the Stigmata*, deemed to be the work of Fra' Gerolamo Cotica from Premana. Opposite is the chapel of Saint Anthony, quite probably built with funds from the *Schola Panormi* (i.e. with remittances from people who emigrated to Palermo), with a statue of the *Saint* to whom the church is dedicated flanked by statues of the protectors of the Franciscan Third Order, *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* and

Saint Louis IX. The chapel of Saint Francis is followed, again on the right hand-side of the church, by the chapel of the Crucifixion, which, together with the chapel facing it, dedicated to the Last Supper, were probably opened in 1602. Both are dominated by groups of wooden statues which represent the relevant scenes from the Gospels, made by Fra' Diego from Careri between 1648 and 1653 on a mandate by the Minister General, Father Daniele Cossoni, who was born in Dongo. The presbytery is frescoed with *Old Testament Biblical figures with prophecies related to Our Lady* (in the intrados of the entrance), *Episodes from the life of Saint Joachim and Saint Anne* (in the ovals of the vault), *Stories from the life of the Virgin Mary* (on the side walls), the work of Gian Domenico Caresana from Cureglia (Ticino). The marble altar is dominated by a fresco of the miracle, in a gilded cornice above which the dove representing the Holy Spirit stands out among the rays of the sun.

The friary adjacent to the Shrine hosts a library with approximately 18,000 volumes, among which about thirty incunabula and over 600 16th century editions.

As a witness to the growing and marked importance of this library there is a papal bull, dated 13th february 1682, bearing the signature of Benedetto Odescalchi, Pope Innocent XI, who was born in Como. This decreed excommunication for anyone who stole as much as one volume from the library. Indeed, by means of the *Quaderni della biblioteca del Convento francescano di Dongo (Notes from the Franciscan Friary of Dongo library)* - a publication which is highly appraised and respected in scientific circles -, all sorts of information about the art, culture, tradition and history of the area is published and discussed.