



CHURCH OF ST. MARTHA

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

INFORMATION

Location: the church of St. Martha overlooks the right hand-side (when following our path) of via Calvi.

Paving: via Calvi is mainly paved with porphyry cubes; on the sides there are two street-level pavements made of porphyry tiles.

Architectural barriers: in order to access the church from via Calvi one must climb three stone steps.

Access: from the entrance on the façade, at an angle with via Calvi.

Services: parking available in the area, automated teller machine.

Leisure and food: hotels, cafes and restaurants nearby.

DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

It is unknown when the church of St. Martha was originally built; it is often mentioned in the Acts of Pastoral Visits as the oratory of the Confraternity devoted to the Saint, who was widely worshipped locally. The façade, rebuilt in neo-Gothic style in 1885, based on a drawing by Menaggio architect Alessandro Bravi, it is characterized by a pleasant chromatic effect between the white of the plaster and the orange of the pilaster strips' terracotta decoration, the strip under the gable roof and the arches above the portal; it is opened not just by the ogival arch portal (the lunette was painted by Antonio Sibella), but also by a large rose window with a surrounding cotto decoration. The single nave interior includes a chapel on the left, embellished by stuccos and frescoes, hosting on the altar the statue of the *Immaculate Conception*. On the pillars in front of the entrance, the figures of *Saint Felix of Valois* (on the left, with the deer) and of *St. John de Matha* (on the right), who in the 12th century founded the Order of the Holy Trinity to set Christian slaves free, deserve a mention.

The apsidal area is the result of the 1885 works, whilst keeping the beautiful 18th century wooden choir. The walls carry paintings of some interest: from the left, a *Pietà with Saint Stephen and Saint Martha* (1667), an 18th century copy of Correggio's *Adoration of the Magi*, presumably with the portrait of the donor on the right, below; on the right, a 17th century painting of *The Flogging* and another painting of *Saint Martha enthroned with Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Laurence* – probably from the same period – signed by Alovio Grosso. Next to the altar, four 17th century canvases with the *Doctors of the Western Church* have been placed. The 18th century polychrome marble high altar hosts a precious *Crucifix* with a greatly venerated silver cross, so much so that the church of St. Martha is also known as the church of the Crucifix. Even nowadays the cross is taken in solemn procession on Good Friday, when the blessing of the lake takes place. With reference to this Crucifix, the publication *Novecento anni da Mengaldo (1095-1995)*, edited by the Parish, writes that in 1798 a gang of local brigands, led by a certain Capelli and the much feared "Carciocco" became aware that a group of Jacobines from Bellano were planning to steal it one of the following nights. «Therefore, on the night set for the "robbery", the brigands waited in the vicinity of the church and ambushed the aspiring thieves, who in the meantime had managed to seize the Crucifix, by firing gunshots and dispersing them. The precious Crucifix, recovered by the brigands, was immediately returned to the Oratory among the jubilation of the people of Menaggio, and the brigands won the gratitude of the faithful and a reputation as... defenders of the church!». Of some interest, at the entrance of the church, the Late Middle Ages marble stoup, with a column formed by the intertwine of four dolphins and a basin resembling a shell.