



## STAGE 2 - FROM THE CHURCH OF S. MARIA IN MARTÌNICO TO THE CHURCH OF S. STEFANO

### DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

Once you have admired the façade of Santa Maria in Martinico, turn left, with your back to the side of the church, and leave the churchyard (please mind the three 40 cm high concrete planters placed crosswise). Walk down a short cobbled path going downhill, keeping the historic Gentile Palace to your right. It once belonged to a noteworthy Dongo family with a deep interest in art and music.

Turn left and take via della Chiesa, which runs between old houses and their picturesque stone portals. After about twenty metres, at the crossroads, you can see an arched entrance embellished by a marble coat of arms with the letter H surmounted by a cross, probably the sign of a former hospital. The entrance, closed by a wrought iron gate, leads to a private courtyard.

Turn left into a cobbled street inside the hamlet of Martinico which runs slightly uphill (please mind the low threshold at the beginning of the street); at the crossroads with Via dell'Erbolo turn right and continue onwards, keeping to the left. After about 40 metres, a short stairway of six cobbled steps with a stone rise will lead you to a pebble dash clearing, enclosed by an approx. 70 cm high stone wall (accessible from the sixth step), hosting the old wash house. Recently restored, the wash house has four pools and is covered by a wooden roof supported by four pillars. We can imagine this as a truly "social place" where women would meet, chatter, exchange secrets and gossip.

Walk back to the end of the stairs and, by turning left, you will find yourself once again in the street inside the hamlet of Martinico: turn right, and, after about ten metres, take via Tolomeo Gallio, which is asphalted. Continue downhill up to the end of the street, then turn left into Via Iginio Gentile, which is asphalted, too: here, at number 38 (formerly 20), you can see a beautiful portal with stone impostes and a very elegant terracotta arch; the door is made of solid wood and still has its original old iron bolt. Moving along, you pass the Irene Falck Children's Home Nursery School at number 32. According to an old tradition (albeit not supported by any documentary evidence), this building stands on the area once occupied by the church of a priory dedicated to Saint Martha, from which the hamlet of Martinico would therefore take its name. Dongo's Nursery School was opened on October 1, 1883, thanks to the donation of a block of buildings and adjoining courtyard by Giovan Battista Scalini, and the generosity of many local benefactors; in 1911 the two-story building that we see today was erected. In 1955, thanks to funding from the "Società Acciaierie e Ferriere Lombarde Falck" ("*Falck Steelworks and Ironworks of Lombardy Company*"), the Nursery was transformed into a "Children's Home", and equipped to implement the method of education brought forward by the physician and educator Maria Montessori (1870-1952): thus renovated, it was named after Irene Rubini Falck.

Continuing along Via Iginio Gentile, at number 10 you come to the large three-storey complex hosting the Anna Vertua Gentile Comprehensive School, built in 1914 by the construction company of master-builder Innocente Mottarella according to a plan drawn up by surveyor Aldo Rumi, followed at number 6 by the Carabinieri Police Station, built in 1925. In front of the Police Station's entrance, cross at the pedestrian crossing and continue on the opposite side of the street for about 50 metres, up to where the sidewalk begins (after approx. 10 metres please mind the 30 cm high and two metre long stone bench against the house). After another 20 metres you come to via Irene Rubini Falck; at the beginning of the street cross at the pedestrian crossing and reach the right bank of the Albano river (protected by an approx. 1 metre high railing), which descends from the **valley**. The head of the valley has been safeguarded since 2005 by a "Parco Locale di Interesse Sovracomunale" (*Inter-Municipal Park*) covering a portion of territory falling under the Municipality of Gravedona ed Uniti (formerly Germasino). This part of the very wide river bed is occupied by large boulders and the banks have been artificially created by man; on the right hydrographic bank you can see a water pipe for the large plant of the historic **Dongo Ironworks** which later merged into the "Acciaierie e Ferriere Lombarde Falck" ("*Falck Steelworks and Ironworks of Lombardy*"), which stands a little further upstream, while the warehouses were located downstream, near the wharf.

Turn right, and, 10 metres after crossing, climb onto the asphalted pavement and continue along the creek. After another

80 metres you will reach the new bridge over the Albano river (protected by a railing about one metre high on both sides); turn left, cross the bridge keeping on the sidewalk, and enter Viale della Rimembranza, inaugurated in 1926. At the entrance of the petrol station cross the avenue on the pedestrian crossing. Turn left and continue along the striped stretch on the side of the road, and then on the large porphyry sidewalk that runs along the wall of the garden of the Franciscan friary adjacent to the Shrine of Our Lady of Tears, just beyond the entrance of Via Cimitero, marked on the corner by a small chapel with a painting of *Our Lady of Tears and Franciscan Saints*. It is advisable to keep to the left. After about 20 metres from the start of the sidewalk, on the right you will find a small parking area with six pebble dash concrete benches, a fountain placed in a niche in the wall with the date 1927 and a telephone booth. Immediately after, you come across a flowerbed with a boulder stone with the emblem of Arromanches-les-Bains, in Normandy, to commemorate ten years (1998-2008) of the twinning between Dongo and the French town. The twinning came about because of the historical affinity between the two villages: in Dongo, the arrest of Mussolini marked the end of fascism and of the war; the coast near Arromanches saw the historic landing of the Allied troops in Normandy on June 6, 1944. Again while bordering the flower bed, past two pebble dash concrete benches, you will be able to see a large coloured gravel reproduction of the City of Dongo's coat of arms (2 x 2 metres approximately) on the green. At the end of the flower bed, while still on the sidewalk, turn right, moving next to and bordering the friary wall (please mind the two benches at the beginning of the stretch after the flowerbed). Continue for about 100 metres, leaving the bus shelter to your left - the C10 (Como-Menaggio-Colico), C17 (Dongo-Garzeno), C18 (Dongo-Livo), and C19 (Pianello-Morbegno-Sondrio) lines stop here -, and come to the entrance of the Franciscan friary of Our Lady of Tears, built in the early part of the seventeenth century by the Reformed Friars Minor and renowned above all for its valuable library. The entrance to the friary, surmounted by a marble tondo with the IHS Christological monogram created by Saint Bernardine of Siena (he, too, a Franciscan), is preceded by a single arch portico.

Turn left and after another 5 metres you will reach the 18<sup>th</sup> century porch in front of the entrance to the **Shrine of Our Lady of Tears** (or S. Maria del Fiume, as indicated in historical documents), built between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries around a small country chapel which contained a picture of the Virgin Mary, known in the past as Madonna del Fiume (*Our Lady of the River*), which is believed to have shed some tears on 6 September 1553. Access the portico by the side arch and keep to the centre, where the base of the columns which support the arch has an opening; descend the step, turn right and reach the Shrine's central bronze portal, from which you can access the interior by crossing a stone threshold.

When leaving the Shrine from the main portal after the visit (the wooden sculptures representing the *Last Supper* and the *Crucifixion*, made by fra Diego da Careri between 1648 and 1653, located in the two chapels next to the presbytery deserve a mention), turn left and walk back, climbing the step of the portico and exit by the opening of the side arch base. Continue for 5 metres and cross Viale della Rimembranza at the pedestrian crossing; climb onto the porphyry sidewalk on the opposite side of the avenue at a clearing where a stone base carries a bronze bust of Mons. Eusebio Semprini (1823-1895), a Franciscan born in Dongo who became a missionary bishop in China. The decision to have the bust made - the work of Ampellio Ragazzoni - was taken at the death of Mons. Semprini by his friend Saint Luigi Guanella, by the Franciscan brothers and by the priests of the Parish.

Turn right and continue on the sidewalk for about 30 metres, take via Giampietro Matteri, then cross at the pedestrian crossing. Climb onto the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street; after a metre you come to the asphalted exit of the car park in Piazza Virgilio Matteri. Continue for 15 metres (please beware any motor vehicles passing by) and once again climb onto the sidewalk; after a further 15 metres you will find yourself back on the Regina Road (a continuation of Viale della Rimembranza), bordering the eastern side of Piazza Matteri. Soon after, at number 1, you come to the building hosting the Oratory - or rather, as the sign says, the Ricreatorio (*Youth Club*) - built in 1943 thanks to the donation by Luigia Redaelli Rubini, who wanted it to be named after her son, Lino Redaelli, who died on August 15, 1936. A plaque has been placed on the façade in his memory. The original structure was a single floor building adjacent to the vicar's house. In 1962 Maria Del Bono Redaelli donated it to the parish in memory of her father; the upper floor hosting classrooms for catechism was built in the sixties and seventies of the last century, while a hall used as a cinema, theatre and conference room was added later on.

In the garden opposite the Oratory you can see the statue of *St. Giovanni Bosco*, patron of youth. After 80 metres, before reaching via Campiedi, cross the Regina Road and curve slightly to the right taking the asphalted via Cossoni, leaving to your left the austere three-storey building called the "Casa del Vescovo (*Bishop's House*)". The reason for the name of this mansion, which was formerly called Casa Cossoni, lies in the fact that in 1854 it was bought by the then Bishop of Como Carlo Romanò as a holiday home, where he died on November 13 of the following year. Purchased by the Municipality in 1983, the palace is now the home of the "Alto Lario" Municipal School of Music, the Lake Como International Piano Academy and the Lario Soccorso (*Lake Como First Aid*) of Dongo.

Continue along Via dei Cossoni, keeping to the left: then border the low wall which encloses the large courtyard of the "Bishop's House", which after about 10 metres has an opening to allow access to the building appurtenances and the passage of ambulances (please be careful!). Once you have passed this first entrance, climb onto the porphyry sidewalk which runs alongside the enclosure wall. Carry on past the second entrance to the courtyard for a further 50 metres, right to the end of Via dei Cossoni, reaching the large square in front of the archpriestal church of S. Stefano. From here, looking southwards, you can admire the imposing rocky spur called **Sasso di Musso** which seems to be diving straight into lake Como, with the small church of S. Eufemia, linked to the memories of the feats of Gian Giacomo de' Medici, also known as the Medeghino.

The portion of the square farthest from the sacred building is asphalted; the part surrounding the church is paved with

porphyry cubes, with a cobbled central strip which continues on the façade, describing a Tau of sorts. Two large green areas with lawns and trees, one on each side, are located near the porphyry strip; head towards the one on the right (when facing the front of the church) by making a short detour along a porphyry walkway which forks from the right of the square, and pass a low step to access it.

This area is almost like a precious casket enfolding the memory of the Fallen (**Area Memoriale dei Caduti**); at the centre, the tall tower of the Memorial of the Fallen “Alpini”; on the left the Memorial of the Fallen “Carabinieri”; at the centre the Memorial of the Fallen “Guardia di Finanza”. After the detour it is advisable to stay on the porphyry section surrounding the sacred building, and then cross it once you reach the cobbled strip - embellished by a square insert of 3.5 m x 3.5 m, paved in stone, with a flower decoration at its centre - leading to the entrance of the church. The current appearance of St. Stephen’s, a parish since the twelfth century, is the result of the eighteenth century rebuilding of the church, which had been damaged by repeated flooding from the lake; it hosts frescoes by Carlo Scotti and Giulio Quaglio, both from Laino, and stucco statues by Laglio artist Stefano Salterio.