



CHURCH OF S. EUFEMIA (ST. EUPHEMIA)

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

INFORMATION

Location: the church of S. Eufemia overlooks the square of the same name, in the hamlet of Incino.

Paving: Piazza S. Eufemia is mainly paved with stone slabs. In the portion of the square in front of the church of S. Eufemia, a variation of the paving (stone cubes surrounded by a cobbled strip) highlights the area once occupied by the Early Medieval baptistery dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The wide low step which precedes the bell tower and the façade is paved in stone.

Architectural barriers: to access Piazza S. Eufemia from the large sidewalk which borders onto the western side of the square, separating it from via Licinio, one must pass through the openings between the chains supported by pillars which enclose it. A wide low step, which precedes the bell tower and the façade of the church, at the height of the main entrance, becomes a slightly inclined ramp.

Access: access to the church of S. Eufemia is by the main portal in Piazza S. Eufemia, which leads into an enclosed area (the so-called *bussola*) with a front door.

Services: parking available in nearby Piazza Vittorio Veneto and adjacent areas; automated teller machine in via Volta – corner of via Mazzini; Chemist in Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

Leisure and Food: bars, cafes and restaurants in the area.

Other information: the church is generally open for visits.

DESCRIPTION

(*Silvia Fasana*)

The church of S. Eufemia is one of the oldest parish churches of the entire diocese of Milan. It is thought to have been founded as far back as the 5th century. In the following centuries it underwent several expansions and renovations; in particular, at the end of the 11th century the church was refurbished in Romanesque style, and, between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the next, its front section was extended to adjoin the bell tower.

A parchment from the year 891, preserved in the Capitular Archive of Monza, confirms that - already back then - S. Eufemia was a prestigious centre of monastic life. Over the centuries, however, the church fell more and more into ruin, so much so that Saint Charles Borromeo ordered that the title of parish church be transferred to the church of S. Maria di Villincino (*St. Mary of Villincino*), thus decreeing the end of its religious importance.

The small simple façade of the church is partially occupied by the imposing 32.7 metres high bell tower, which originally stood detached from it. Erected around the 11th century, probably in order to act, too, as a watchtower to help defend the entire Parish, it has now become the symbol of the city of Erba. This square shaped tower was built with small square polished stones, together with a large amount of salvaged building materials from Roman times: one may recognize, especially at the bottom, parts of Roman altars and Latin inscriptions and epigraphs. It is marked by cornices of hanging arches; the three upper orders are opened with single, double and triple lancet windows.

The most important element of the façade, probably rebuilt in the 17th century, is the portal, on the same plane as the bell tower. The niche of the tympanum hosts a copy (the original is inside the church) of a precious fragment of a white marble Romanesque sculpture, arguably dating back to the 13th century, found during the works for the refurbishment of the presbytery in 1970. It represents a male figure, possibly *The Redeemer*, holding a book; it is flanked by two trees on the foliage of which two trees are perched.

To the right of the entrance portal, through low window you can take a glimpse of a small chapel set up in memory of the 77 victims (mostly women and children) of the bombing of the city by the Allied troops on September 30th and October 1st, 1944.

The single nave interior is on a rectangular plan, with a chapel along the right side, and is covered by a trussed timber roof, redone in 1928. Walled inside the right wall, next to the entrance, there is an exquisite rectangular Musso marble Romanesque font with small human heads in relief, engraved with the date MCCXII (1212) and the letters

R.A.ME.F.I., which were interpreted as: «*Reverendus Abbas me fecit fieri*».

The side chapel on the right is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and was commissioned by the Parravicini family; it is enclosed by a wrought iron gate. The altar is embellished by an altar frontal made in scagliola stone, the centre of which is dominated by Saint Bernardine of Siena's trigram indicating Christ (IHS), where the shape of the H recalls, too, the M of Mary. Above the altar stone you can find a Late Middle Ages fresco depicting the *Madonna and Child with Saints Bartholomew* (patron of the Parravicinis), *John the Baptist* (a link with the old Baptistry?) and two donors.

However, the most notable work to be found in the church is a large 16th century wooden Crucifix carrying a painting of the figure of Christ, resembling the style of Giotto. At the end of the arms of the cross there are three pictures came to light during the restoration of 1983: on the left, *Our Lady of Sorrows*; on the right, *St. John*; at the top, the *Holy Trinity*. Under the chancel area, originally raised above the nave, there was a crypt with three naves and three bays, with vaulted ceilings, illuminated by an oculus which can still be seen today, although it has been walled in. The crypt hosted an altar dedicated to St. Maternus.

Inside the presbytery, the original precious fragment of a white marble Romanesque sculpture of *The Redeemer*, under the altar stone, is worthy of mention, as is the gilded wood altarpiece above the altar, dating back to the late 16th century. It consists of a small temple-shaped structure enriched with wooden statuettes (the stolen originals have been replaced by copies) representing, in the lower end, from left to right, *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, *Saint Peter*, *Saint Paul* and *Saint Euphemia*, surmounted by *Christ at the column* at the centre, flanked by *St. John the Baptist* and a *Bishop Saint*; the *Virgin Mary* is represented at the top.