



SAN DONNINO

You can find this point of interest in Como 6 – Stage 1.

INFORMATION

Location: the church of S. Donnino is located in Via Diaz in Como

Paving: Via Diaz is made of porphyry tiles with side bands paved in stone; the steps leading to the churchyard and the churchyard itself are made of stone slabs

Architectural barriers: the small churchyard in front (not protected on the front side) is accessed by a wide central staircase of 11 steps, flanked on both sides by iron handrails. The staircase (from the third step), however, is normally closed by a low iron gate. Inside the church you enter by surmounting two other stone steps. Vestibule doors allow entry to the church.

Services: parking not available inside the walled city (except at the Arena in via Vincenzo Bellini 21); urban and suburban bus stops outside the walled city; pharmacy in via Cesare Cantù. Municipal Library of Como in Piazzetta Venosto Lucati

Leisure and Catering: in front of the church stands Palazzo Volpi, home of the Civic Art Gallery; bars, cafes and shops of various kinds in the area

Other information: pedestrian area with limited traffic. The church depends on the Parish Community of the Walled City (tel. 031.267295), which can be contacted for information. Currently (2025) the church has become the seat of the 'Chaplaincy' for the faithful who belong to the **Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church**.

DESCRIPTION

(by Silvia Fasana)

Artificially raised above street level for reasons not yet clarified by archaeological investigations, it is dedicated to the soldier martyr – condemned to beheading – whose remains are venerated in Fidenza. The cult of the Saint from Fidenza radiated to central-northern Italy, and reached Como, indirectly confirming the destiny of our city as a stage on the pilgrimage route to Rome. The neoclassical lines of the façade (1813) are the work of the main collaborator of the renowned Simone Cantoni, the architect Carlo Polti, who defined the advanced body of the narthex with Ionic semi-columns and an emerging tympanum. The lunette that gives light to the single nave bears a stained glass window depicting *San Donnino* by Eugenio Rossi, author of similar post-war works in the two oldest side chapels, near the main altar, dedicated to the Crucifix (frescoes by Gian Domenico Caresana, 1619-1620) and to the Virgin (frescoes by Fiammenghino, early '600, as well as the frescoes on the vault and the side painting of the *Assumption* – formerly an altarpiece, facing onto the *Nativity of Mary* by Ludovico Pogliaghi, 1888). The polychrome wooden statue of the *titular saint* (Ezekiel Trombetta, late 1800s) is placed in a niche in the rectilinear apse wall enlarged by an effective *trompe l'oeil* by Giuseppe Coduri Vignoli (early 1800s) developed around the eighteenth-century *Moses* and *Elijah* by Francesco Silva. The Baroque altarpiece has recently been recovered. Pilasters in glossy stucco of warm intonation solemnly mark the nave, surmounted by a bright barrel vault with stuccoes in the style of Angelo Menolli (1937), and opened by two

other chapels, immediately beyond the narthex: the most recent dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua, with a recent wooden statue and frescoes by Chiesa (1836-1837), the richest, on the left, under the patronage of the Volpi who lived in the building opposite, now the Pinacoteca: frescoes in the vault by Antonio Crespi known as Bustino (1675) within stuccoes by Giovanni Battista Barberini (1662), altar by Francesco Rusca da Campione (1630), refined marble incrustations on the walls (1647-1658), altarpiece by an unknown artist with *St. Dominic and St. Philip Neri adoring the Child Jesus entrusted by the Virgin to St. Anthony of Padua*.

Two significant sculptures are the small ancient group of the *Pietà* in the left passage between the narthex and the nave and the *Crucifix*, a gift from Zaragoza, kept in the sacristy, traditionally linked to the story of the rescue of a crucifix from the Turks narrated by a painting, also in the sacristy, where a painting by Gian Domenico Caresana is also preserved, *St. Francis in adoration of the Crucifix* (1610) adapted to the wardrobe.

In the church of S. Donnino, the future inventor of the battery was baptized on February 19, 1745, by the provost Moiana with the names of Alessandro Giuseppe Antonio Anastasio. A plaque, placed on the second centenary of Volta's birth (1945) at the baptismal font, shows the text of the baptismal certificate.

Volta often frequented S. Donnino, near his ancestral home, where he taught catechism. In this regard, Callisto Grandi wrote: «*Almost every Sunday [...] he, in a corner of the church of S. Donnino, is surrounded by a multitude of young men all intent on learning from his lips the catechism, which he masterfully teaches them. There is neither subservience nor severity in Volta, it is all goodness and sweet persuasion; rather than a very experienced teacher, he appears as a father in the midst of his children and with a thousand ways he captivates their love, docility, attention [...] Young people flocked to it in large numbers [...] The Volta doctrine class was the most crowded and often many did not find a place there!*». On a pillar on the right of the entrance a plaque commemorates: «Here baptized, / Alessandro Volta / felt the greatness of faith / and teaching the catechism to children / he prepared, with the miracle of the torch, / to transform the face of the world». Also, the funeral rite of the physicist was celebrated in the church of S. Donnino, on March 7, 1827.