


The Basilica of Saint Anthony

An artistic and symbolic guide to
 a spiritual experience

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Introduction



❶ The angel which proclaims the Resurrection is located on the top of the conical spire at the centre of the Basilica. This angel is a carbon fiber reconstruction of the previous angel removed during the restoration of the year 2000.

❷ A bird's-eye-view of the Basilica with its annexed four cloisters.



The Basilica of Saint Anthony is a unique masterpiece in the history of art. It is a workshop of extraordinary artistic creativity, a treasure-trove of undisputed masterpieces of Western art, a unique and multifaceted project aimed at offering a crystal clear service to the experience of faith.

The Basilica has been defined by Pope Paul VI as a “spiritual clinic” for contemporary humanity, a base-camp for the spirit which offers itself to pilgrims and to curious tourists as an articulate and generous repository of symbols pointing to higher truths. The Basilica summons one, through its intact beauty and its various symbolic thresholds, to establish a real and very tangible contact with one’s inner being and with the divine. It is an artistic and cultural repository of such great richness and world importance that simply must be experienced in the first person.

The purpose of this guide is to introduce readers to its principal artistic works so that they may better appreciate and understand the deep symbolic function of these works, which will help them to experience the contents of the Christian faith and of devotion to Saint An-

thony. This guide will also aid them in encountering the artists who created the masterpieces, whose task was that of promoting and increasing the faith of the faithful, as well as to involve the visitors in a spiritual and artistic adventure which is capable, by and of itself, to transform and renew the soul. The architectural, sculptural and pictorial language expresses the universal message of beauty. The artistic works in the Basilica describe the ways in which friar Anthony encounters and offers hospitality, throughout the centuries, to the needs and wounds of those who come to visit him so that they may be enriched with meaning of life and fraternal solidarity. In this way they will be able to meet the challenges of life filled with that self confidence which will enable them to set sail for the open seas of life up to their final destination in God the Father. ❁



❶

Who is saint Anthony?



Who is Saint Anthony? The Saint was born in Lisbon, Portugal, on 15 August 1195 into a noble and powerful family. He was baptized with the name of Fernando. After completing his studies at the prestigious Cathedral School, his parents urged him to become a knight. Fernando, however, at the young age of 15 chose to become an Augustinian priest.

Fernando first entered the Abbey of San Vincenzo in Lisbon, from where he asked to be transferred to the Abbey of Santa Croce in Coimbra, where he was to remain secluded from the worldly life of the king's court for eight years. In 1219 Fernando met five Franciscan friars who were going on a missionary journey to Morocco, and who were later martyred there by the Muslims. Their sacrifice for the faith deeply impressed the young Augustinian priest, who decided to become a Franciscan friar himself. Fer-

nando changed his name to Anthony, in honor of Saint Anthony of the Desert, the spiritual guide of monks. Cherishing the ideal of himself dying as a martyr, he asked his superiors to be sent to Morocco. In that country, however, a serious illness forced him to return home. During the trip back his ship was deviated to the city of Messina in Sicily by a violent storm. After recovering his health, Anthony made his way to Assisi to participate in the Chapter of Mats convoked by saint Francis.

In Assisi Anthony met friar Graziano da Bagnacavallo who, on learning that Anthony was a priest, brought him along to the hermitage of Monte Paolo near Forlì, where Anthony led a quiet and secluded life. After about a year and a half Anthony was asked to substitute a preacher during an ordination Mass. His preaching caught everyone by surprise, revealing his great

knowledge, his communicative skills and passionate faith. His fame reached the ears of Saint Francis, who entrusted him to preach to ordinary people and to teach the friars on how to preach the Word of God. Anthony began his preaching mission in the northern Italian region of Romagna, then he went to Bologna and from there to the south of France. Finally the Saint settled in Padua. At the end of the Lenten preaching season in Padua, the first in the history of the Church, characterized by daily preaching and confession, Anthony began to feel really tired. He therefore sought a period of convalescence at Camposampiero near his friend Count Tiso. There he spent the last days of his life praying and meditating in a little hut on a walnut tree. His last sermons were dedicated to the farmers who sought words of hope from him. When the Saint realized that his days were about to end, he

Briosco's Candelabra

- ❶ Andrea Briosco, called "il Riccio", *The Easter Candelabra* (1516);
- ❷ *Cupid with Mirror*, detail of the Candelabra;
- ❸ *Satyr*, detail of the Candelabra.



On the left of the main altar the Easter Candelabra by Andrea Briosco (called "il Riccio") can be seen rising. This masterpiece of molten bronze measuring 9 meters and 92 centimeters in height is articulated according to four registers, and represents the attempt to reconcile Classical Antiquity with the Christian faith in Christ. It is a declaration of the power of religion to create order in the chaos of the world. ❁





The Cloisters

The cloisters are the places where the friars ordinarily spend their conventual life. The current cloisters, built in the gothic style, are attached to the southern side of the Basilica, and were built from the 15th century onwards. The first to be built was the Chapter Cloister (1434), also called the Magnolia Cloister on account of the magnificent magnolia tree which has been decorating it since 1810. It was erected by the master builder Cristoforo da Bolzano, who was also tasked with erecting the General Cloister (or of the Library). The great cross vaults uphold the friars' cells and the other places where the friars gather together. These two cloisters are very similar in style. On the ground floor there are columns of white stone and red Verona marble which order themselves in reference to the four columns on the corners, which are also of two colors. The pointed arches form the basis for the vaults, which are lying on arch-stones. The current Cloister of Blessed Luke Belludi was rebuilt in 1519 after heavy damage during the War of Cambrai. Since the end of the 18th century it has been used as an infirmary and it gradually be-

came connected to the Cloister of the Kitchen (or of the Bread), encompassing the schools and the homes of the friars in formation. In 1867, after the suppression of various religious orders by the House of Savoy, the architect Maestri presented a project to transform it into the seat of the new Civic Museum of Padua.

The Novitiate Cloister, begun in 1475, was also demolished in 1513 during the War of Cambrai. Reconstruction began a few years later, and lasted for two decades. Of the four cloisters, the Novitiate is the most monumental, mainly because of the close sequence of openings on the higher floor, which confer upon it a more elegant, 16th century style with respect to the other cloisters, which are characterized by more rudimentary higher floors perforated with rather small windows and oculi.



- ❶ The Novitiate Cloister (1475);
- ❷ The Cloister of Blessed Luke Belludi (1519);
- ❸ The General Cloister (1435);
- ❹ (Next page) The Magnolia Cloister (1434).

The Anthonian Library

The main hall of the Anthonian Library with illuminated manuscripts.

The Anthonian Library is also called the Pontifical Anthonian Library because it became property of the Holy See in 1932, together with the Basilica of Saint Anthony and the Friary, after the signing of the Lateran Treaty. The history of the Library can be traced back to

the first half of the 13th century, and is intertwined with the history of the community of the Conventual friars who have been the custodians of the Basilica since its beginning eight hundred years ago. Perhaps one of its unique features is that it is the only library in Italy that has remained more

or less unchanged through the ages. The Anthonian Library is currently storing 828 manuscripts, of which about 600 date from the Middle Ages; 260 incunabula, and 3200 copies of 16th century works, as well as a significant collection of works in Hebrew, the musical Archives. ❀



The Museum of Popular devotion

- ❶ Unknown author, *St Anthony with Jesus Child and Lily*,
wooden, 17th century statue with gilded,
silver ex-voto donated by devotees in the background.
- ❷ Ex-voto by Maria Luize, 16 August 1857.



The Museum of Popular Devotion contains a collection of ex-voto donated to the Basilica as tokens of gratitude for graces received from St Anthony. This substantial collection of testimonies of faith and love coming from all over the world is a very clear in-

dication of the greatness of devotion to St Anthony. It also offers an interesting cultural and anthropological account of the evolution of fashion and tastes throughout the centuries. ❀



The Anthonian Museum

The Anthonian Museum, detail showing one of the windows dedicated to the conservation of liturgical vestments (1995).



The Anthonian Museum is designed as a treasure trove of marvels containing the artistic masterpieces created throughout the centuries for the Basilica and the Venerable Ark of St Anthony: paintings, sculptures,

chalk works, sacred vestments, tapestries, gold products. The museum was established at the end of the 19th century to store historic and artistic devotional objects connected to St Anthony. ❁

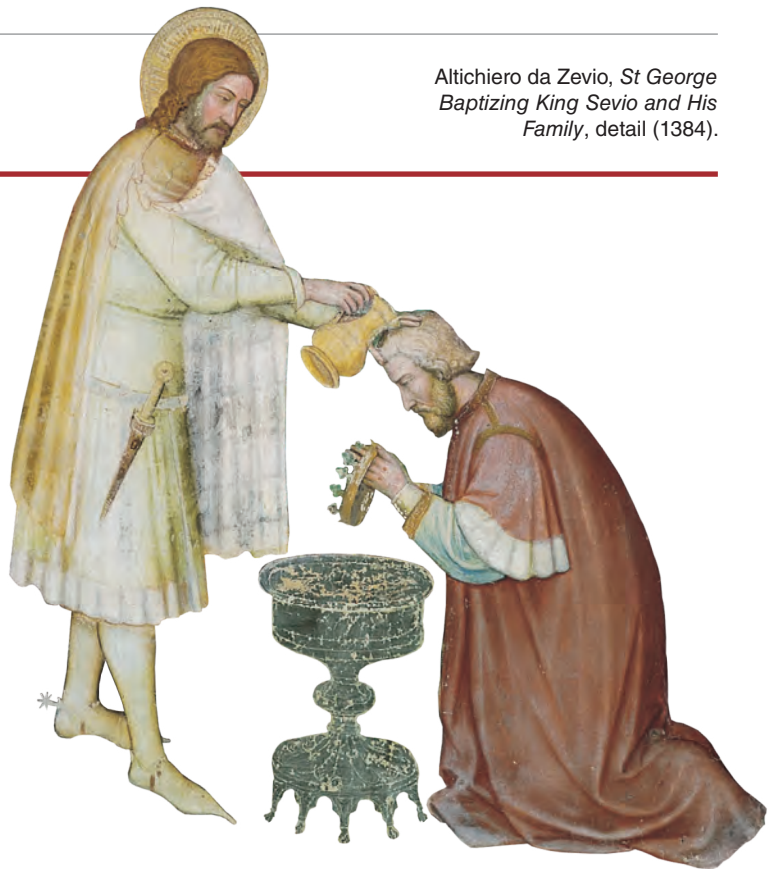


The Oratory of St George

Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Baptizing King Sevio and His Family*, detail (1384).

The Oratory of St George also bears the signature of Altichiero da Zevio, who has here left behind one of his most articulate and mature artistic works, thus consolidating Padua's fame as one of the most sophisticated artistic centers in 14th century Europe. Thanks to the great scenes painted by Altichiero, a whole epoch comes back to life, that of the 14th century courts, whose habits and ways of thinking can be reconstructed by observing these works carefully.

The decision by Raimondino Lupi, marquis of Soragna, to build his family's chapel inside the Basilica was in accordance with the mentality then in vogue in the Padua ruled by the Carraresi, who saw in art and culture an instrument of political propaganda, and thus paid huge sums to commission the best artists. The presence in Padua of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), one of the highest and most sought after representatives of humanistic culture, bears witness to the growing awareness of the importance of recovering the treasures of antiquity in order to celebrate the image of one's own family. To be buried under St Anthony's protective wing was not merely an act of religious devotion, it was also a powerful



affirmation of social prestige for those with power, ambition, culture, wealth and competence. A tangible result of this effort are the masterpieces in the two family chapels built by the Lupi family in series: the Chapel of St James in 1379 and the Chapel of St George in 1384. The works in these two Chapels were performed in open competition to the works in the Scrovegni Chapel, which contains Giotto's undisputed, avant-garde masterpieces. Whereas the Chapel of St James celebrates the glorious and mythical origins of the Lupi family in the form of the legendary Queen Lupa, who was converted

by James the Apostle, the Chapel of St George mainly celebrates the neo-feudal ideals of inherited nobility and warlike valor represented in their powerful, saintly protector, but intertwined with the newly conceived humanistic style, which aimed to recover ancient culture, the natural world and the value of the individual. These warlike virtues are extended to the two female saints as well, Catherine and Lucy, true heroines of the faith capable of confronting with manly courage the most terrible ordeals, as portrayed in the frescos on the western wall of the Chapel. The self-celebrating project culminated in the monumental arch,

The Oratory of St George

Altichiero da Zevio,
Oratory of St George,
general view of the south wall (1384).



whose height almost reached the ceiling and rose from the centre of the Chapel. Unfortunately this arch was dismantled in 1592, and is now located toward the eastern wall; it is accompanied

by some residues of the statues of knights belonging to the Lupi family. The frescoes were meant to highlight, with their stories, the value of the real protagonist of this Chapel, which is the

funerary monument of the Lupi family, with which the frescoes were in 'dialogue' through a complex network of relationships and symbolic connections. All of this was designed according to

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