

Santuario della Madonna del Divino Amore



Santuario della Madonna del Divino Amore is a pilgrimage shrine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, located on the Via Ardeatina to the south of the Circonvallazione Meridionale. The locality is now also called Divino Amore, and is part of the Castel di Leva district. Confusingly, the old *Castel di Leva* in which the shrine is located has given its name to both the district and a separate suburb some distance to the north-west.

There are two churches, a small old one and a large new one. The shrine is also the center of a parish, both being administered by the *Oblati Figli della Madonna del Divino Amore*, and the parish has the official name of *Santa Maria del Divino Amore a Castel di Leva*.

History

The area used to belong to the Benedictine monastery of San Paolo fuori le Mura, and at the end of the 13th century it built a fortified farmstead here called Lion's Castle (*Castello del Leone*). The name became corrupted to *Castel di Leva*. In 1570, the place was in the ownership of the Confraternity of Santa Caterina della Rota, and in that year they received the donation of the original icon from a priest named Cosimo Giustini. Who painted it and where it came from are both unknown, although it looks 14th century. For a reason also unknown they sent the icon down to the farmstead and hung it on the tower above the gateway, where it remained for 170 years.

The phenomenon of the shrine started when a miracle occurred at the gatehouse in 1740. A pilgrim on the Via Ardeatina was beset by angry sheep-dogs from the farmstead, and appealed to the icon for the Blessed Virgin's intercession. The dogs shut up and wandered off. After he told his story in the city, the site started drawing pilgrims who quickly reported further graces. This came to the attention of the Church authorities, so later the same year Pope Benedict XIV made enquiry and authorized the removal of the image to a church at Falcognani by the Canons of the Lateran. The Confraternity considered this to have infringed their property rights, so they sued and won their case. The law-court ordered the image to be returned, as soon as a chapel could be built for it. This was done, and the image was enshrined in 1745.

The Confraternity had serious trouble finding a priest willing to stay all year round at such a desolate place. So, for the next 185 years the shrine was only open from Easter Monday to July and was usually closed down for the rest of the year. This continued even when a parish was set up in 1912. In 1930 the

inevitable happened and thieves looted the chapel, with the result that the Diocese finally appointed a resident priest. This was Umberto Terenzi, who can be regarded as the real founder of the modern shrine. He restored the chapel as the first parish church in 1932, established a school, founded a religious sisterhood called the Daughters of the Madonna del Divino Amore to help him run the shrine and (perhaps most importantly) obtained a railway station and a bus route. The shrine was attracting thousands of pilgrims annually by 1935.

During World War II, the image was taken to Rome for safety and enshrined in the church of Sant'Ignazio. There, Pope Pius XII and many Romans came here to pray for Our Lady's intercession in order that the city be spared from war damage and to promise to embellish the shrine if this came about. It was believed that the peaceful occupation of Rome by Allied troops on June 4th, 1944 was as a result of her response, and the Pope publicly offered thanks to her. The image was carried back to the farmstead in a grand procession in September, and put back in the small church.

A new sanctuary church which could hold a large congregation was a long time in gestation, and was only finally inaugurated by Pope John Paul II on July 4th 1999. Part of the problem was that state heritage guardians objected to any structure that would compromise the setting of the old Castel di Leva. The new sanctuary church, designed by Luigi Leoni, was begun in 1987 and completed in 1999.

Old Church

Exterior

The small original church faces onto the central piazza of the old farmstead, and it has a simple rectangular plan with an enclosed narthex. The architectural elements are in white, on an orange-yellow background. The narthex is tall, with four Doric pilasters supporting an entablature with a projecting cornice. Over the doorway is a dedicatory inscription in fresco, and in between each pair of pilasters is a rectangular window, set low down. Over the cornice between the inner two pilasters is a segmental pediment, below the actual roofline which is horizontal. The roof itself is tiled, with a pitch. The actual nave frontage peeps over this rather oversized narthex, with four pilasters without capitals and a triangular pediment. There is a statue of Our Lady on the apex.

Attached to the left hand side of the narthex is the campanile, a substantial and stocky construction of three stories on a rectangular plan. The first two stories form the tower itself, with the storey frontages having four pilasters without capitals each and being separated by cornices. The first storey, which is taller than the second, has its own entrance and a dedicatory inscription on a tablet above. The third storey has two bells inserted into an arch, and crowning the composition is a little rectangular cupola which resembles the dome of the Roman Synagogue in miniature.

Behind the chapel is a staircase that leads down to the gate-tower where the miracle occurred in 1740. It now has a large copy of the icon in mosaic attached to its face.

Interior

The whitewashed walls of the small and simple interior are covered with part of the vast collection of ex-votos that the shrine has accumulated from thankful devotees. There is a small apse with conch, having a triumphal arch springing from a pair of rectangular Doric pilasters. The original (809) miraculous icon is enshrined above the altar, inserted into a Baroque glory decorated with silver-gilt angels and putti (this has recently been restored).

The mosaics in the apse are modern, and show Christ in the center, and the miracle on the left. It's dark, but there is a light switch in the apse.

In the crypt you will find the tomb of the married couple Bl. Luigi (Aloysius) Beltrame Quattrocchi and Bl. Maria Corsini Beltrame Quattrocchi. He died in 1951, and she in 1965. After their deaths, a beatification process was started. They were beatified on 21 October 2001 by Pope John Paul II, and this was the first time that a married couple had been beatified together. Their relics were moved here on 28 October 2001.

New Church

Exterior

The new sanctuary church was designed by Luigi Leoni, was begun in 1987 and completed in 1999. This is a fantastic post-modern building, rightly nicknamed the "Blue Grotto". On its north hand side, two vast walls of stained glass, the north-west one slightly shorter than the north-east, meeting at an angle of about eighty degrees. There is a short return wall at an acute angle on the west hand side, also in stained glass. The flat roof slopes downwards from these two glass walls until it reaches the ground, and is completely covered with grass except for a skylight near the angle and a large oculus at the far end.

Thus, the objections of the heritage guardians were met by providing a large structure which is barely visible from the old farmstead.

Interior

For the stained glass and the liturgical furniture, the famous Franciscan priest-artist Costantino Ruggeri was commissioned. The two main glass walls behind the altar are dominated by a billowing abstraction in bright azure blue, over a zone of indigo with green patches. On the right hand wall is a sun motif, an orange disc on an irregular yellow hexagon with a magenta triangle attached. The short wall to the left has an orange motif vaguely resembling an orange fish on green.

On the right of the entrance is the original wooden pulpit from Sant'Ignazio, from which Pope Pius XII gave thanks to Our Lady for saving Rome from damage in 1944.

The white marble altar is carved so that its front looks like a sheet of cloth with a large crease in it. It is below the cylindrical skylight, which is painted white. From the skylight runs an inverted triangle also in white, with the point reaching down to behind the altar, and on this is displayed a copy of the miraculous icon by Roberto Boesso.

The church has a large crypt, which is fitted out as an auditorium.

Special Notes:

Pope John Paul II decided to include the shrine in the pilgrim itinerary for the Holy Year 2000, replacing San Sebastiano fuori le Mura. This meant that the faithful who took part in certain pious act here obtained plenary indulgences.

In summer, pilgrim walks are arranged from Piazza di Porta Capena, where the Obelisk of Axum used to be outside the FAO building near the Circo Massimo Metro station. Each walk starts late on Saturday evening, around midnight, and reaches the shrine in time for early morning Mass. The walks have traditionally been for men only, but this has changed. However, decorum is still expected.

The feast of BB Luigi and Maria Corsini Beltrame Quattrocchi is now (since 2001) celebrated on 25 November, their wedding day.

To reach the sanctuary you can take bus number 218 from Porta San Giovanni as far as Via Ardeatina km 12, the *Santuario Divono Amore* stop. Alternatively, take either the 702 or the 044 from the Laurentina metro terminus (these two go via different suburbs, and there is not much to choose between them as regards length of journey).

Artists and Architects

- Constantino [Ruggeri](#) (1925-2007), Italian painter, sculptor, architect, stained glass designer, Franciscan friar and priest (also see [here](#))
- Luigi Leoni (20th cent), Italian architect
- Roberto Boesso (20th cent), Italian painter

Burials

BB Luigi and Maria Corsini Beltrame Quattrocchi

Location

Address: Via Ardeatina, km 12

Old Church Coord: [41° 46' 41.6"N 12° 32' 34.2"E](#)

New Church Coord: [41° 46' 43.8"N 12° 32' 37.6"E](#)

Info:

Contacts

Telephone: 0039 06 713518

Opening times

Winter 06:30am-08:00pm Summer 05:00am-09:00pm

Links:

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[060608.it web page](#)

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[Article on Padre Constantino Ruggeri](#)

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