

## PIEVE DI SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA

The Pieve di Santa Maria Assunta is set in a quiet square behind the City Hall.

According to historical sources, the erection of a religious building in Soncino dates back to the V century. The current church is the result of numerous transformations, starting from the XII century.

The added parts of the XIV and XV centuries did not modify the Romanesque structure, while the renovation of 1580 deeply changed the ancient structure, to adapt to the liturgical rules established by the Concilio Tridentino. In the late Renaissance, the Church was entirely frescoed by Giulio Calvi, il Coronaro, ( 1585 ) and Uriele Gatti, both from Cremona. Uriele Gatti painted the counter-façade in 1589. During the Baroque Age there was the extension of the choir ( 1601-1615 ) and the construction of the side chapels, while in the XIX century, the architect Carlo Visioli built the chapel of the Holy Trinity.

The earthquake of 1802 seriously damaged the church, which was rearranged and enlarged, from 1883 to 1888, by the architect Carlo Maciachini.

The nave, the aisles, the southern chapels and the church bell were kept, while the northern wall was renovated and the original medieval aspect was given back to the façade which, nowadays, presents three pilasters with, at the top of them, pinnacles. The central portal is preceded by a prothyrum with column-bearing lions and surmounted by a rose window.

The apsidal part was demolished to create an octagonal dome.

Around 1930, a new restoration took place.

The bell tower, with a square shape, is decorated with windows with one or two lights and, on the top of it, there is the statue of the Virgin of the Assumption, executed by Antonio Ferrarotti, in place of the statue, planned by Maciachini in 1888 and created by Carlo Riva, damaged by a lightning in 1952.

The inside, in Neo-Gothic style, presents a solemn aspect with a lively decoration executed in 1897. The dome is decorated with a great Theophany, preceded by the saint protectors of Soncino, Martino and Paolo, with the Madonna with angels, the Risen Christ, saint Peter, pope Leone XIII and other saints.

Entering, on the right, we find a Madonna with the Holy Child and the blessed Stefana Quinzani, a work of the late XVII century, due to the Veronese painter Ruggero Milani.

The first chapel, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, was erected in 1631 as a vow for the cessation of the plague. Today, it is covered by a dome and it has got a remarkable polychrome marble altar of Baroque taste with the wooden statue of the Virgin, executed by the Intelvese artist Antonio Ferretti in 1759, and the wooden statues of the kings David and Solomon, created by Giovanni Sanz, from Bergamo, in 1785.

The second chapel, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, was built in 1845 by the Cremonese architect Carlo Visioli with a neoclassical aspect. It contains the altar-piece with a painting by the artist Uriele Gatti from Cremona which represents the Holy Trinity with angels and saints.

In the following area that leads to a service entrance there are some gravestones in the wall and a big painting by the Cremonese painter Angelo Massarotti: The Good Death.

The next chapel, dedicated to the nativity scene, was built in 1610 (but today it is in neoclassical style) to honour the relic of the manger of the holy cave, coming from the Roman Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, a gift of the pope Paolo V to Carlo Cropello from Soncino. A fire destroyed the previous painting now replaced by a creation of the painter and historian Francesco Galantino. A manual mechanism allows to slide the altar-piece revealing the reliquary with all the relics. Among them, the crucifix of the blessed Stefana Quinzani.

On the wall, on the left, there is a canvas with the Madonna del Rosario e i quindici misteri, in a golden frame, a work executed by the Bergamasco painter Enea Selmaggia, called the Talpino, in 1622.

Above the sacristy door, there is the most important mobile painting of the church by the Dutch painter Mathias Stom representing the emperor Vespasiano who is freeing Giuseppe Flavio from the chains. The work was painted in Palermo in 1640 and came to Soncino with one of the Sicilian captains to garrison the fortress during the Spanish domination. The sacristy contains a fresco, executed by Francesco Carminati in 1530, portraying the Madonna with the Holy Child, san Bernardino da Siena and the blessed Pacifico Ramati da Cerano, coming from the damaged oratory of San Bernardino.

At the back of the church, on the right, there is the altar of Sant'Antonio da Padova.

Remarkable is the altar in carved polychrome marble, created by Bartolomeo Manari da Gazzaniga in 1667 and completed in 1747 by Paolo Bombastoni and Pietro Sanguinelli.

In the choir, characterized by nineteen Neo-Gothic stalls, we find the stained-glass windows by Giuseppe Bertini (1854) with the Madonna Assunta among the angels and there are also three paintings coming from damaged altars.

On the right there is the Martyrdom of santa Vittoria by Matteo Ingoli, a painter from Ravenna, executed in the first half of the XVII century. The painting was produced as an altar-piece for the chapel built in 1610 by Orazio Guarguanti, "doctor, philosopher, astrologer and musician" that stayed for a long time in Venice.

In the centre of the apse there is a Coronation of the Virgin by the Cremonese Uriele Gatti and, on the left, Santa Rosalia by the Soresinese painter Gian Giacomo Pasini that painted it in 1630 as a vow to ask for the cessation of the plague.

At the back of the church, on the left, we can admire the chapel dedicated to the saint Luigi Gonzaga with a beautiful polychrome marble altar. The saint is portrayed by the Soncinese don Angelo Monti, at the beginning of the XX century, a copy of the work by Gallo Gallina, kept in the Seminario Vescovile in Cremona. In the same chapel there is a painting of the Cremonese mannerist painter Cesare Ceruti with the Madonna, the Holy Child and saints, Giovanni Battista, Girolamo, Caterina d'Alessandria and Francesco d'Assisi who presents the client Olimpia Foresti Vacani (1604). The painting was originally in the chapel of San Francesco, then removed and here placed.

Along the walls of the left aisle there are two Neo-Gothic altars of Jesus Christ and the Madonna of the Sorrow and the neoclassical altar of san Giuseppe. Above the ancient baptismal font we can find a fresco of the beginning of the XVI century with the Holy Trinity. This iconography with the three equal entities obliged the ecclesiastical authorities, during the Counter-Reformation, to cover the image, which appeared in 1843 during the restoration of the Trinity chapel.

Although there is no sure evidence, the painter of this fresco could be an artist from Soncino, probably Alberto Scanzi or his son Francesco.

The other baptismal font, of Renaissance taste, has got a neoclassical wooden covering.

Valuable are the wooden confessionals executed in 1771.