

THE SANCTUARY OF THE CONSOLATA: HEART OF TURIN'S SPIRITUALITY

The Madonna Consolata, a name commonly used to invoke the Virgin Mary in her role as comforter, is an abbreviated form of the formal title "Madonna of Consolation (Consolatrix)", Patroness of Turin and the diocese.

The Sanctuary of the Consolata, located in the heart of the historic center, has a history dating back to the early centuries of the Middle Ages. Originally, a small church dedicated to Saint Andrew stood on the site, later incorporated into a Benedictine monastery. In 1589, the church and monastery were entrusted to the Cistercian monks, who began a reconstruction project transforming the Church of Saint Andrew into a large oval-shaped nave.

The Architectural Transformation

The sanctuary, as it appears today, is largely the result of work carried out between 1678 and 1704 based on the design of architect Guarino Guarini. The interiors are a triumph of marbles, gilded stuccoes, frescoes, and paintings that create a solemn and majestic atmosphere. Between 1716 and 1729, architect Filippo Juvarra built the new presbytery and marble altar. Above the altar, displayed in a glory of angels, is the effigy of the Consolata, the focal point of Marian devotion in the Sanctuary.

The Millennial Devotion

Devotion to the Consolata dates back, according to tradition, to the 5th century, but received an extraordinary boost in 1104 when, on June 20, the blind Jean Ravais, who came from Briançon following a vision, rediscovered the lost effigy of the Consolata, simultaneously regaining his sight. Since then, devotion to the Consolata has known no interruption. This effigy, with its delicate painting inspired by the Byzantine style, has been associated with the Hodegetria (a Greek word meaning "Guide"), the Marian icon that signifies "She who guides towards the light".

The Underground Chapel of Graces

On the site of the 1104 discovery, the underground Chapel of Graces was rebuilt in 1608, to the right of the entrance, already erected by King Arduino in 1014. This chapel contains a baroque altar above which is visible the painting representing the rediscovery of the icon.

The "Gallery of Paintings"

Next to the Sanctuary's sacristy is the "gallery of paintings," where part of the thousands of votive paintings are preserved, testimonies of continuous gratitude. Particularly noteworthy in the Gallery are the ship that evokes a liberation from corsairs (1700), a votive painting from 1670 representing a priest offering the Eucharist to a kneeling woman, above whose head are reproduced, in the act of moving away, black figures of devils, and the painting that recalls the heroic act of Paolo Sacchi, who in 1852, on the occasion of the explosion of a large gunpowder factory, saved the city of Turin from a fire with potentially devastating consequences.

The Social Saints



The Sanctuary of the Consolata, elevated in 1906 to the dignity of a Pontifical Basilica by Pope Pius X, is loved not only for its monumental value but especially as a center of spiritual life. This characteristic, inherited from the rich past, is preserved to this day marked by the social saints, Turin priests who dedicated their lives to serving the poor, the marginalized, the young, and all those in difficulty, trying to respond to the concrete needs of the society of their time. In particular, just inside on the right is the chapel dedicated to St. Joseph Cafasso, whose relics are preserved in the urn. St. Joseph Cafasso, born in Castelnuovo in 1811 and died in Turin in 1860, was a master of the Turin clergy, had among his disciples St. John Bosco whom he guided and supported in his great work; he is also remembered in the Turin tradition as the "priest of the gallows" for his tireless apostolate among those condemned to death.

The Missionaries of the Consolata

Another important figure linked to the Sanctuary is Giuseppe Allamano, born in Castelnuovo d'Asti in 1851 and died in Turin in 1926, who founded in 1901 the Consolata Missions Institute, a religious congregation dedicated to evangelization and assistance to peoples in mission lands. Giuseppe Allamano, who was rector of the Sanctuary of the Consolata from 1880 until his death, transmitted to the missionaries he founded a deep devotion to the Madonna Consolata. Pope Francis, in May 2024, declared that Giuseppe Allamano will soon be proclaimed a saint.

The Sanctuary of the Consolata represents a perfect synthesis of history, art, and faith, continuing to be a beacon of spirituality for Turin and for all the devotees who come there on pilgrimage. Its rich history and deep devotion to the Madonna Consolata make it a unique and precious place.

