



# JUBILEE CHURCHES

Sanctuary  
of Divino Amore





DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION  
SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS  
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD



MINISTERO  
DEL TURISMO  
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

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## Jubilee journeys

# Sanctuary of Divino Amore

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## 4 themed routes to follow

The Jubilee is a great event for all people during which each and every pilgrim can immerse themselves in the endless mercy of God.

It's the Year of return to the essence of fraternity, mending the relationship between ourselves and the Father.

It's the Year that calls us to conversion, an opportunity to take stock of our lives and ask the Lord to direct them towards holiness. It's the Year of solidarity, of hope, of justice, and of commitment to the service of God, living in joy and peace with our brothers and sisters.

But, above all, the Jubilee year has at its center the encounter with Christ.

For this reason, the Jubilee asks us to get moving and to overcome the confines in our lives. When we move we don't just change place physically, but we transform ourselves too. For this reason, it's important to prepare well, to plan the route and



have a clear sight of our destination. In a sense the Holy Year pilgrimage begins before the journey itself: its starting point is the decision to do set out on the path.

To fully experience the 2025 Jubilee, through walking and prayer, four routes have been prepared for pilgrims within the city of Rome, each with its own theme.

### Europe in Rome

The Pilgrim Path of the Churches of the European Union, includes visits to 28 churches and basilicas, historically linked to EU member countries for cultural or artistic reasons or because they served as places of welcome for pilgrims from individual member states of the European community.

### Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches

Originally the idea of Saint Philip Neri in the 16th century, the pilgrimage of the Seven Churches is one of the most ancient Roman traditions. It's a 25 km route winding through the streets of Rome.

### Jubilee Churches

This is one of the churches designated as a meeting place for pilgrims. Catecheses will be held in these churches in different languages to rediscover the meaning of the Holy Year. They will also offer the sacrament of Reconciliation and host events aimed at nourishing the faith with experiences of prayer.

### Women Patrons of Europe and Doctors of the Church

This is a pilgrimage that involves stopping in prayer in those Roman Churches linked to Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Saint Brigid of Sweden, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, and Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

# Sanctuary of Divino Amore

## *Reasons for the pilgrimage*

The Sanctuary of Divine Love, (*the Divino Amore*) which lies on the via Ardeatina, 12 km from the church of *Domine quo vadis* has been a pilgrimage destination since its very foundation.

The story of the origins of devotion to the Madonna of Divine Love is a simple one.

It all began in 1740. The protagonist of our story is a pilgrim, whose name we do not know, who wanted to get to Rome, to see St. Peter's Basilica, but was not very familiar with the route. He got lost and asked some farmers for directions, but as he continued on his way, he was attacked by a pack of hungry dogs. Terrified, and looking around for help, he saw an image of the Madonna painted on the tower of *Castel di Leva* and invoked her protection. Mary immediately intervened and the furious dogs were put to flight. The pilgrim eventually arrived safe, well and grateful at the tomb of Saint Peter.

The story of this prodigious event encouraged more and more pilgrims to flock to the site. While some came from far away, mostly they came from Rome itself. They took to their heart the image placed on the tower of the first miracle. Soon a shrine was built, a simple affair consisting of a house for the priest custodians and some basic structures for the reception of the poor and orphans and a building of-

fering snacks to refresh the lively Roman crowds who came to picnic at the spot. Then, during the last months of the Second World War, the area was bombed. It was decided to transfer the fresco of the Virgin Mary to Rome where it could be better protected. The image was put on display, without fanfare, first in the church of *San Lorenzo in Lucina* and then in the church of *Sant'Ignazio*. But the population flocked to *Sant'Ignazio*, spontaneously, to ask for protection in the terrible final days of the Nazi occupation of the eternal city in 1944. In those early days their devotion was supported by Don Terenzi from the shrine of the *Divino Amore* and by Don Pirro Scavizzi, with links to the Sons of Divine Providence - the Orionini - a priest who had told the Pope about the abominations committed by the Nazis on the Russian front where they were exterminating the Jews, and transferring Polish clergy to the concentration camps so as to destroy the Slavs and the Catholic Church in those countries. At 6.00 pm on June 4th, without knowing that the Allies were already entering the city, the Roman people made a vow to the Madonna, before the image of Divine Love, to build a shrine for the Virgin and establish a charity if the city of Rome were spared from fighting between the Allies and the Nazis within its walls.

The intercession of the Virgin and the mediation of the Pontiff's delegates and vari-

ous Italian bishops meant that many cities in Italy were spared from the destruction that would have been generated by street by street fighting. An important historian, Federico Chabod, wrote that what happened could be compared to the time of the barbarian invasions, when it was the bishops who saved the population from the plundering invaders, since they were the only authority left in the cities.

In Milan, Genoa, Rome and many other places, the bishops and the Pope mediated between the Allies, the resistance fighters, and the Nazis, so that the cities and above all the population might be spared. In Rome this prayer for Our Lady's protection took place before the image of the Madonna of Divine Love.

On 11 June, a few days after the end of the Nazi occupation, Pope Pius XII himself celebrated the Eucharist in *Sant'Ignazio* to thank the Lord and the Virgin Mary. As he said in his homily:

*"We are here today not only to ask you for your heavenly favors, but above all to thank you for what happened, against all human expectation, in the supreme interest of the Eternal City and its inhabitants. Our Immaculate Mother has once again saved Rome from very serious imminent dangers. She has inspired, in those who held the city's fate in their hands, particular feelings of reverence and moderation; so, in the changing events, and even in the midst of the immense conflict, we have witnessed a protection which must fill our souls with tender gratitude towards God and his most pure Mother."*

The return of the image to the Sanctuary was accompanied by many of the faithful, who came to express their gratitude. From then on, the pilgrimage to the *Madonna del Divino Amore* increased even more in popularity.

### *Visiting the sanctuary*

The title of *Madonna del Divino Amore* proclaims in a special way the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit, who is Divine Love. From recent studies it seems that the title may date back to the *Compagnie del Divino Amore*, which flourished in Rome at the beginning of the 16th century. This 'Company of Divine Love' existed to come to the aid of the poor who lived outside the city walls. It would have been the members of such a Company who gathered the workers, servants of their masters, to pray before the image of Mary and to teach them to call her Our Lady of Divine Love. (fig.1)



fig.1

(fig.2) The image, as it now appears to us after recent restorations, is a Byzantine-style medieval icon typical of the Lazio region, originally a fresco on a wall,



fig.2

subsequently detached and transferred to wooden board. Even from a distance it is evident that the dove of the Holy Spirit descending on Mary is a later addition,

perhaps from the mid-18th century, when the first shrine was dedicated. However, another iconographic symbol reminds us that, from the beginning, there was the presence of the Holy Spirit. One of the three stars, with which Eastern tradition represents Mary, is visible on the Virgin Mary's shoulders. The three stars represent Mary's virginity before, during and after giving birth. In the Church's understanding of the mystery of Mary, her virginity does not have primarily a moral importance, but rather a theological one. It expresses the truth of the conception of Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Mary is "full of grace" because she was conceived without sin by God's free will, even before her assent, in anticipation of the grace of Christ; because she lived without sinning, in continuous listening and obedience to the Holy Spirit; because God brought his work to completion in



fig.3

her with the Assumption; but above all because in Her, by the work of the Holy Spirit, the fullness of divinity, the fullness of grace, the Son of God assumed human flesh. (fig.3)

When popular devotion to the Madonna of Divine Love began to grow - after the first miracle of 1740 - probably through the work of Cardinal Guadagni, then Cardinal Vicar of Rome, the depiction of the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descending on Mary and the Child Jesus was added. And it was he who linked the feast day of the sanctuary to the great feast of Pentecost, the solemnity that celebrates the completion of Easter. Coming on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Divine Love means asking for graces for which Mary intercedes, but above all it means asking, through her intercession, for "grace", the presence of Divine Love in joy and in pain, in sickness and in health. It is Divine Love which, penetrating our hearts, unites us with the Son of God.

The image of the Madonna of the Miracle was painted by an unknown person in the 14th century on a tower of the *Castel di Leva* (a name which probably derives from the ancient name *Castrum Leonis*), a fortress of the Orsini and later the Savelli

family, built in the 12th century. After the castle was destroyed in the 15th century, only the tower where the Madonna was painted remained standing. The pilgrims



fig.4

addressed their prayer to that image of Mary. (fig.4) In a short time, in 1744, the sanctuary that we can still admire today, was built on the ruins of the castle to preserve the image of the Madonna. The modest architecture of the church is due, it seems, to the work of Raguzzini.

The fresco of the Madonna was removed from the tower, a tower which still stands today outside the church, and solemnly

enthroned above the main altar, where it is currently venerated.

After periods of great popular devotion, the sanctuary experienced a decline in the first decades of the 20th century until it was almost abandoned. But in 1931 a young priest, Umberto Terenzi, after having survived a terrible road accident in that very place, and following the advice of Blessed Luigi Orione, became its rector and helped it flourish again, even before the events of the Second World War. Don Terenzi was a priest of the Diocese of Rome and was the promoter of devotion to the Madonna of Divine Love until 1974, the year of his death. Pius XII thought of building a larger sanctuary to take the place of the ancient one, during the rectorship of Don Terenzi, to fulfill the vow made on the occasion of the prayer to the Virgin that Rome would be spared from bombings as previously men-

tioned. Pope Pacelli even commissioned one of the major architects of those years to carry out the project and even blessed the foundation stone. But the project never came to fruition. The architects wisely decided that the new church, designed to be larger than the previous one so as to accommodate the many pilgrims, should not obscure the little hill and the walls that still house the 18th-century sanctuary.

**(fig.5)** And so, it has survived, as it was, marking the landscape with its distinctive shape, preserving the image of the Virgin and Child. Outside the walls, near the tower of the first miracle, the meadow suddenly ends and becomes a long steep slope. The architects decided to continue it, to create a large mound. Above you can now see the green meadow, covered in spring with wild flowers, while the new sanctuary is built like a cave below.



fig.5



Mary is blessed because she believed and she is a kind of stopping off place on the road that leads to Christ. For this reason, at the *Divino Amore*, it was decided to create a place that would act as an oasis for the soul, accessible to all the people who

spot, a sacred space, one that it is God's, which should be experienced and lived in a context of celebration. Coming here to pray, chat and share food with friends, the pilgrim will experience what Don Terenzi described: "The *Divino Amore* is a space



fig.6

come there, to adore Christ and venerate Mary, his mother, in joy and friendship. And the people still come to the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Divine Love, as they always have, not only to pray to the Madonna, but also to be with their friends, to relax and enjoy a picnic together. Isn't this also why, for centuries, the *Divino Amore* has become the sanctuary *par excellence* of the Romans? The combination of the attractive and friendly setting that surrounds the shrine and the formal religious and liturgical space at its heart conspire together to make this a special

of beauty and also an ideal space for every celebration in life". **(fig.6)**

The Sanctuary's popular and festive atmosphere became famous all over the world thanks to Federico Fellini's film *The Nights of Cabiria*. Produced in the years 1956-57, it depicts how this place had become a destination for faith, but also for the joyful, noisy and at times irreverent joy of the Roman people, in a truly popular way, uniting the sacred and the profane. Don Umberto Terenzi also appears in the film.