 Reading time: 5 min.

(continuation from previous article)

Chapter XVII. Continuation and completion of the building.

It seems that the Holy Virgin did in fact fulfil the prayer made publicly in the blessing of the cornerstone. The work continued with the utmost speed, and during the course of 1865 the building was brought up to the roof, covered, and the vault completed, with the exception of the section included in the periphery of the dome. 1866 saw the completion of the large cupola, the smaller cupola, and everything was covered with tin-plated copper.

1867 saw the completion of the statue representing Mary Mother of Mercy in the act of blessing her devotees. At the foot of the statue is this inscription: *Angela and Benedetto Chirio, a couple, in homage to Mary Help of Christians FF*. These words recall the names of the well-deserving donors of this statue, which is made of wrought copper. It is about four metres high, surmounted by twelve golden stars that crown the head of the glorious Queen of Heaven. When the statue was placed in its place, it was simply bronzed, which revealed the work of art very well, but at some distance it became barely visible, so it was decided gild it. A pious person, already well-deserving of many titles, took charge of the expense for that.

Now it shines brightly, and to those who look at it from afar when it is beaten by the rays of the sun, it seems to speak and wants to say:

I am as beautiful as the moon, as chosen as the sun: *Pulcra ut luna, electa ut sol.* I am here to accept the supplications of my children, to enrich with graces and blessings those who love me. *Ego in altissimis habito ut ditem diligentes me, et thesauros eorum repleam.*

When the work of decorating and ornamenting the statue was finished, it was blessed with one of the most devout solemnities.

Archbishop Riccardi, our most venerable archbishop, assisted by three canons of the Metropolitan and many priests, was pleased to come himself to perform that sacred function. After a short address aimed at demonstrating the ancient use of images among the Jewish people and in the early Church, the blessing was shared with the Venerable.

In the year 1867, the work was almost completed. The remainder of the interior of the church was done in the first five months of the current year 1868.

There are therefore five altars, all of marble worked with different designs and friezes. For preciousness of marble, the one in the side chapel on the right

stands out, containing antique green, Spanish red, oriental alabaster and malachite. The balustrades are also of marble; the floors and chancels are mosaic. The interior walls of the church were simply coloured without paint for fear that the recent construction of the walls would counterfeit the colour type.

From the first base to the greatest height is 70 metres; the plinths, bindings, cornices are of granite. In the interior of the church and the cupola there are iron railings to keep safe those who might have to do some work there. On the outside of the dome there are three with a staircase, and while not very comfortable, are certainly safe for those wishing to climb up to the statue's pedestal. There are two bell towers surmounted by two statues, each two and a half metres high. One of these statues represents the Angel Gabriel in the act of offering a crown to the Blessed Virgin; the other St Michael holding a flag in his hand, on which is written in large letters: LEPANTO. This is to commemorate the great victory won by the Christians against the Turks at Lepanto through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Above one of the bell towers is a concert of five bells in E-flat, which some worthy devotees have promoted with their offerings. Above the bells are several images are engraved with similar inscriptions. One of these bells is dedicated to the Supreme Hierarch of the Church Pius IX, another to Archbishop Riccardi our Archbishop.

Chapter XVIII. Ancona. Painting of St Joseph – Pulpit.

In the left transept is the altar dedicated to St Joseph. The painting of the saint is the work of the artist Tomaso Lorenzone. The composition is symbolic. The Saviour is presented as a child in the act of handing a basket of flowers to the Blessed Virgin as if saying: *flores mei, flores honoris et honestatis.* His August Mother says to offer it to St Joseph her husband, so that by his hand they may be given to the faithful who are waiting for them with raised hands. The flowers represent the graces that Jesus offers to Mary, while she appoints St Joseph as its absolute dispenser, as Holy Church greets him: *constituit eum dominum domus suae.*

The height of the painting is 4 metres and it is 2 metres wide.

The pulpit is very majestic; the design is also by Cav. Antonio Spezia; the sculpture and all the other works are the work of the boys from the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The material is carved walnut and the boards are well connected. Its position is such that the preacher can be seen from any corner of the church.

But the most glorious monument of this church is the altarpiece, the large

painting above the high altar in the choir. It is also the work of Lorenzone. Its height is over seven metres by four. It presents itself to the eye as an appearance of Mary Help of Christians in the following manner:

The Virgin stands in a sea of light and majesty, seated on a throne of clouds. She is covered by a mantle that is supported by a host of angels, who, making a crown, pay homage to her as their Queen. With her right hand she holds the sceptre that is a symbol of her power, almost alluding to the words she spoke in the holy Gospel: *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est.* He, God, who is mighty, has done great things for me. With her left hand she holds the Child whose arms are open, thus offering graces and mercy to those who have recourse to his August Mother. On her head she has the diadem or crown with which she is proclaimed Queen of heaven and earth. From above descends a ray of heavenly light, which from the eye of God comes to rest on Mary's head. In it are written the words: *virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi:* the virtue of the Most High God will overshadow you, that is, will cover you and strengthen you.

From the opposite side other rays descend from the dove, Holy Spirit, which also come to rest on Mary's head with the words in the middle: *Ave, gratia plena: God save you O Mary, you are full of grace.*. This was the greeting given to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel when he announced to her in the name of God that she was to become the Mother of the Saviour.

Further down are the Holy Apostles and Evangelists St Luke and St Mark in somewhat larger-than-life figures. They are enraptured, as if exclaiming: *Regina Apostolorum, ora pro nobis. T*hey gaze astonished at the Blessed Virgin who appears to them majestically above the clouds. Finally, at the bottom of the painting is the city of Turin with other devotees thanking the Blessed Virgin for the favours received and beseeching her to continue to show herself mother of mercy in the grave dangers of the present life.

In general, the work is well expressed, well-proportioned, natural; but the value that will never be lost is the religious idea that gives rise to a devout impression in the heart of anyone who admires it.

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