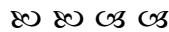


Pilgrims

The Place where Saint Angela lived in "Le Grezze"



According to tradition, the Merici family left their house at Via Castello in Desenzano, where St. Angela was probably born, and moved to "Le Grezze", at that time on the outskirts of the town. Only a small section of the original house still stands today, made up of three rooms and a porch, on the left of the custodian's house.



The building's restoration project by the architect Massimo Pagliari focuses on the following religious path suggested to the pilgrim:

- 1) A walk from the kitchen to the well and back, along the ideal path used by St. Angela many times a day – it is now paved with Botticino marble. Following her footsteps, the pilgrim may find inspiration for his spiritual life in the light of Angela's own path of faith.
- 2) In St. Angela's house, a visit to the rooms; they are bare, with no decoration, according to her spirit and lifestyle. The atmosphere here encourages the visitor to focus on what is fundamental in life, on the true values for which it is worthwhile to spend our lives. It is also a reminder of self-renunciation so as to be worthy of being authentically present before "His divine Majesty" It favours a spirit of meditation. Interior silence helps us to perceive Angela's mysterious presence, and re-echoes her words of wisdom true for all times, allowing us to find an answer to the complex issues of our lives.
- 3) Entrance into the small chapel inside the Casa Merici, with its luminous ceiling suggesting two welcoming arms pointing towards the altar. It suggests us to stop at the feet of Jesus Christ and there "recite most fervent prayers" as St. Angela did, and there find shelter only at His feet – as shown in the icon on the wall.

The inner court is left in its original shape with a pavement made of pebbles from the river that are placed according to the irregularities of the ground. The path from the well to the kitchen porch is paved with marble slabs from Botticino, in perfect continuity with the pebbles. The sun rays in red marble from Verona symbolise St. Angela's spiritual fulfilment and represent the Companies and Religious Institutes of the Ursuline Sisters around the world today. The large sun dial on the western side of the courtyard bears the carved inscription "A family around its mother".

The visitor enters the kitchen from the porch. The floor is covered with “cotto” tiles and Botticino burnt marble slabs; the walls consist of bare stone, partly covered with natural lime; the ceiling is of plain wooden planks. The fireplace and the sink display the domestic purpose of this room as a space for rest and intimate family life. Angela’s spirit is alive here today. Angela’s room“ is on the first floor; with its simple mat for resting, it invites the visitor when he returns to the Madre’s home, to meditate and rediscover the true and significant values in our lives.

The little church on the ground floor is an essential place in which each aspect conveys its own meaning. An iron bar in the floor goes from the entrance door to the stone altar; two iron arms, also in the floor, open up perpendicularly to this bar towards the east and the west. The tabernacle is inserted in the eastern wall.

The ambon – the platform from which the Gospel is read – is in the chancel, which is slightly higher than the rest of the floor. The ceiling bends down, closing the perspective towards the apse. Here is a very beautiful painting by Paolo Orlando showing St. Angela at the foot of the Cross with Mary, St. John and St. Longinus. Daylight floods in through the large abstract stained-glass windows at the entrance and in the apse, a modern interpretation of St. Angela’s spirituality by Father Costantino Ruggeri. The small church with its walls in tones of earth and lime, offers the visitor an opportunity to rest and pray.

St. Angela’s path in Faith started at “Le Grezze”, her spirituality and daily life were most tightly intertwined in this place. Her apostolate originates from this rural landscape and its plain yet direct language, and follows a path of faith dotted with the numerous requests from people striving for a profound spirituality.

St. Angela’s footsteps may also be steps in our own faith, and “Le Grezze” invites us to walk along them “together” with her.