

## 1. CHURCH OF SAN CRISTO: GUIDE AND HISTORICAL NOTES

The church and the three cloisters were built starting from 1467 by the lay movement of the 'Gesuats', which arose in 1367 in Siena, Tuscany. They announced to everyone the savior name of **Jesus** (the term '**Gesuats**' comes from the Italian 'Gesù': Jesus). As laymen, they devoted themselves to prayer, to the care of the sick (especially the plague-stricken), to work. They also made sundials: one can be found in the adjacent cloister. The exact name of the Church is: **Church of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ**, now abbreviated to "**Church of Saint Christ**". Maybe it's the first church in the world exclusively dedicated to the Eucharist.



Self-portrait of the painter and Gesuat fra' Benedetto da Marone

The church dates back to 1490. From 1565, **Fra Benedetto da Marone**, a Gesuat painter, promoted the transformation of the church. Later, the church and convent passed to the reformed Friars Minor (1668), to the minor seminary of the Diocese of Brescia (1821) and to the Xaverian Missionaries (1957).

## 2. APSE AND PRESBYTERY

**The apse of the Church** was probably painted around 1565 by Benedetto Marone. **In the five veils of the apse** you can see God the Father (above the Crucifix) with little angels. **Below them**, scenes of the passion: Christ fallen under the cross, nailed to it, taken down from it and put into the tomb.



The apse of the Church. God (high above) and the scenes of the passion

**On the left wall**, Jesus washing the apostles's feet; **on the right**: the last supper. At the center there is a wooden crucifix in a classic style from 1970.



Jesus washing the apostles's feet (left) and the last supper (right).

**From the presbytery, looking up, on the sails**: the four Evangelists. They narrate the life of Jesus. The Gesuats spread the life, name and message of Jesus.



**On the left side wall**, from top to bottom, two scenes from the Old Testament: **the sacrifice of Isaac and that of Abraham** offering the sacrifice (a gift) to the priest Melchidesech. The sacrifice, presented in both frescoes, evokes the Eucharistic sacrifice, which was celebrated here, on the altar.



The sacrifice of Isaac (up) and (down) that of Abraham and the priest Melchizedek.



The **collection of the manna** also recalls the Eucharistic bread.

**Apse and presbytery** present a harmonious coherence of themes, linked to each other. The first theme is the life of Jesus (the Evangelists and the scenes of his Passion); the second is the bread (the manna); the third theme is the sacrifice of Abraham (Melchizedek and Isaac) and the one offered by Christ (the Last Supper, the washing of the feet, his death on the cross).

God the Father (above the Crucifix) spares Isaac's life, but that of his son's. His gift reaches all humanity through the Eucharist, celebrated on the altar,

deliberately placed at the centre of this place. Everything converges in the Eucharistic: the Old and New Testaments, the life, Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ, the words of the Gospels (the four evangelists).



### 3. TRIUMPHAL ARCH, VAULT AND SIDE WALLS

The Gesuat Fra Benedetto da Marone built a scene representing the Universal Judgment with the twelve apostles on the vault. On the first rhombus of the vault, near the triumphal arch, **Christ the Judge**, seated on the clouds, in the midst of Mary and John the Baptist.



Christ the Judge, seated on the clouds

To the right of Christ the Judge, on the side wall, **the blessed**, in Paradise; to his left, on the other wall, **the damned**, in Hell. This motif of the Last Judgment, which refers to Michelangelo's most famous masterpiece, in Rome, has contributed to the fact that this church is called the "**Sistine Chapel of Brescia**".



The Blessed (on the left) and the damned (on the right)



The final judgment of Jesus, the Blessed and the damned

**Left wall of the triumphal arch, above: Mary with the deposed Christ** between two saints. Mary's face is petrified in a mask of pain. On the left, **Saint Bartholomew the Apostle**, patron saint of leather workers due to his martyrdom for skinning. He was invoked for plague sick sores. On the right, with joined hands, the Blessed Sienese merchant-banker **Giovanni Colombini** (1305-1367), Founder of the Gesuats.



Mary with **the deposed Christ**

**Below: the Adoration of the Child Jesus.** Saint Peter, dressed as a pilgrim, in the left corner. At the center of the scene is Mary, in prayer. On the right, St. Joseph, kneeling with his arms crossed.



Adoration of the child Jesus

**Right side wall of the triumphal arch, above: the Madonna enthroned with the Child Jesus between Saints Rocco (left) and Christopher (right).**

**S. Rocco** was a doctor of the plague victims. He was invoked as their protector, and he himself was plagued (see the the sore on his thigh indicated by his hand). The Gesuats, like him, cured plagued people. At that time, due to wars,

diseases and unrest, **St. Christopher** (right) is carrying baby Jesus on his shoulders fording a river. He was the patron saint of pilgrims and now of motorists.



Madonna enthroned with the Child Jesus between S. Rocco (left) and S. Cristoforo (right).

**Below: two Saints in prayer.** On the left, **St. Jerome**, Patron of the Gesuats. On the right Giovanni Tavelli da Tossignano, archbishop of Ferrara (1386-1446), who wrote the Constitutions of the Gesuats.



St. Gerolamo and Giovanni Tavelli

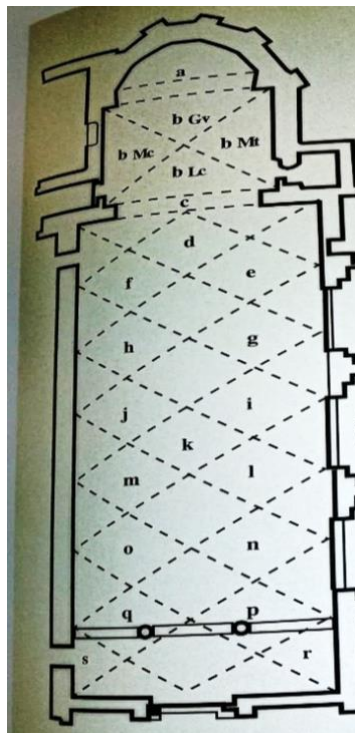
**The vault** is frescoed with the figures of the twelve Apostles. They participate in the Last Judgment of Christ, seated on the cloud. The Apostles are in the Glory of Heaven. In the centre, amidst the exultation of the angels, the

Eucharist, in the JHS trigram. JHS, in Latin: Jesus hominum Salvator, Jesus Savior of humanity.



The Eucharist: above the external portal (adoration of the two angels), above the main entrance of the Church (outside), in the center of the vault.

**The twelve Apostles** represent the Church and the time of the Church, and dominate, even physically, in the vault, the assembly (below) gathered for the celebration.



- a. Dio Padre e Angeli
- b. I quattro Evangelisti: Marco, Matteo, Luca e Giovanni
- c. Giudizio Universale (ai lati i santi ed i dannati)
- d. Cristo Giudice
- e. Apostolo Pietro
- f. Apostolo Andrea
- g. Apostolo Giacomo il Minore
- h. Apostolo Giovanni
- i. Apostolo Tommaso
- j. Apostolo Giacomo il Maggiore
- k. JHS (trigramma di Jesus Hominum Salvator)
- l. Apostolo Filippo
- m. Apostolo Bartolomeo
- n. Apostolo Matteo
- o. Apostolo Giuda Taddeo
- p. Apostolo Simone Zelota
- q. Apostolo Mattia
- r. Maria presentata al tempio
- s. Sposalizio della Vergine
- t. Profeti e Sibille
- u. Crocifissione

**On the arches of the side walls** the frescoes representing the martyrdom of the saints, many of whom are women: Vincenzo, Barbara, Francesco, Margherita, Caterina, Lucia, Agata... Further down, a **pictorial band composed of cherubs, fruit and vegetables** runs along the whole building. It acts as a detachment with the underlying stations of the **Via Crucis**.



West side wall

**On the left, starting from the organ,** the martyrdom of St. Vincent of Tarragona (died in 304 in Valencia), subjected to the torture of the comb and salt, finally thrown back on the beach by the waves of the sea and guarded by a waiting crow of burial.



Martyrdom of St. Vincent

**The martyrdom of Santa Barbara**, a prisoner, follows. An angel appears to cover her nakedness, she finally dies decapitated. Her pagan father would have locked her up in a tower to protect her from suitors. Knowing she was a Christian, he denounced her, so her breasts were torn out and she was scourged with rods, which turned into peacock feathers.



The martyrdom of St. Barbara

In the center of the wall, we note the void left by the funeral monument Martinengo, a noble benefactor who fell in battle in 1473. **Above: the Group of San Gerolamo** (patron of the Gesuats, on the left, by the lion) with Saints Francis of Assisi, Mary Magdalene, Saint Anthony the abbot and Saint Paul the hermit. They're represented in an ecstatic vision of Christ on the clouds.



The Group of San Gerolamo

**Lastly, the martyrdom of St. Margaret of Antioch of Pisidia**, with a devout patron (below, in a sumptuous dress). Of the group of girls consecrated to Christ, she presents the typical scene of captivity with the dragon-crocodile, the demon who would have swallowed her and rejected her after three days. For this reason, S. Margheret was invoked as the protector of pregnant women.



The martyrdom of St. Margaret

### The Via Crucis, on the left

Under the lunettes, **the Via Crucis**, with the scenes of the Descent into Hell (contained in the Creed) and the Resurrection.



### The right side wall

On the right side wall we find **three scenes of martyrdom**, together with two frescoes. The first arch is dedicated to **St. Catherine of Alexandria**, scourged at her column, martyred (the four cogwheels all broken) and finally killed by the sword. Due to the presence of the wheels, S. Caterina is the patroness of the mills and millers who work there.



The martyrdom of St. Catherine

This is followed by the **popular episode from the life of St. Anthony**: a Jew converts when he sees his mule, which has been fasting for three days, ignore the fodder and run to bend down in adoration before the Eucharist displayed by the Saint. The church of the Body and Blood of Christ, in fact, is dedicated to the Eucharist.



St. Antony with his mule

The **third** arch, above the central chapel, depicts the **martyrdom of St. Lucia**. Four pairs of oxen cannot shake her fidelity to Christ the bridegroom. She remains in a luminous halo. Above, the saint, with her sick mother, asks for the grace of healing on the tomb of St. Agatha. Her martyrdom shows her on the grill among her flames, where she is stabbed in the back of her neck and at the same time a presbyter communicates her, assisted by an altar boy. St. Lucia is venerated in Syracuse. Below, with a beard, the Jesuit Fra Benedetto da Marone, who, in 1565, completed the frescoes of S. Cristo.



The martyrdom of St. Lucia and, below, with a beard, the Gesuat Benedetto da Marone

**The fourth arch** is dedicated to the **martyrdom of St. Agata**. She is depicted during the flagellation, the imprisonment, the tearing of the breasts, finally on the grill. Another example of a young girl faithful to Christ, venerated in Catania, Sicily.



Martyrdom of St. Agata

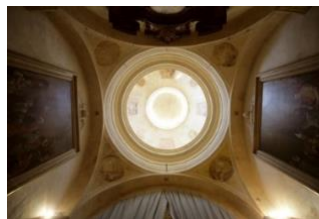
In the last arc **Pietro d'Alcantara**, who gives bread to the poor, symbol of the Eucharist, so dear to the Gesuats.



St. Peter from Alcantara

#### 4. THE THREE SIDE CHAPELS AND THE ENDONARTHEX

On the right side wall there are **three chapels**, whose construction dates back to 1640. The central chapel has a small dome with a lantern. Together with the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (to the north), it has a finely inlaid wooden altar. It houses three canvases by **Bagnadore**: the Nativity in the centre, the Adoration of the 'Magi' and the Circumcision on the sides.



Chapels of the Immaculate Conception (north) and in the centre (Bagnadore)

In the first chapel (to the south) there is, in all its massive power, the **wooden statue of St. Francis Xavier**, patron saint of the Xaverians and of all missionaries.



St. Francis Xavier, Patron of the Xaverians and Missionaries

**The endonarthex** that supports the choir contains four frescoed scenes from Jesus' childhood. They are believed to belong to the school of **Lattanzio Gambara** (collaborator and son-in-law of Romanino), skilled in creating perspectives, plays of light and colour.



The endonarthex

In the scene of the **adoration of the shepherds**, the light emanating from the Child which illuminates the faces of those present is striking. In the foreground, on the right, **the majestic shepherd** takes off his hat. The mother, at the center of her, with her arms outstretched in adoration in the light of her cradle.



The adoration of the shepherds

The second panel is the **Presentation of Jesus in the temple**, with the elderly Simeon and Anna **embracing** the child.



Jesus presented at the temple

The third box depicts **Jesus among the doctors of the law**. On the left **Mary and Joseph**, enveloped in a divine light, question the twelve-year-old Jesus (also in a play of lights).



Jesus among the doctors of the law

On the right, **the Baptism of Jesus**. The opening of the door has now deprived us of the protagonist. On the right, the Baptist can be seen in the Jordan next to the door.



The baptism of Jesus

**Above the columns in the centre, the Fathers of the Western and Eastern Churches. From left to right: Athanasius, Basil the Great, Ambrose, Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory Nisseno and Giovanni Damasceno. The Carthaginian martyr Saint Giulia on the cross (in white) stands out three times. Her body was kept, for a time, here in San Cristo. Later her relics will be received at the nearby Benedictine monastery.**



## 5. THE CLOISTERS AND THE ROMANINO

In the adjacent cloister other lime-washed paintings are visible: a Last Supper, attributed to Fra' Benedetto da Marone, and the Prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane.



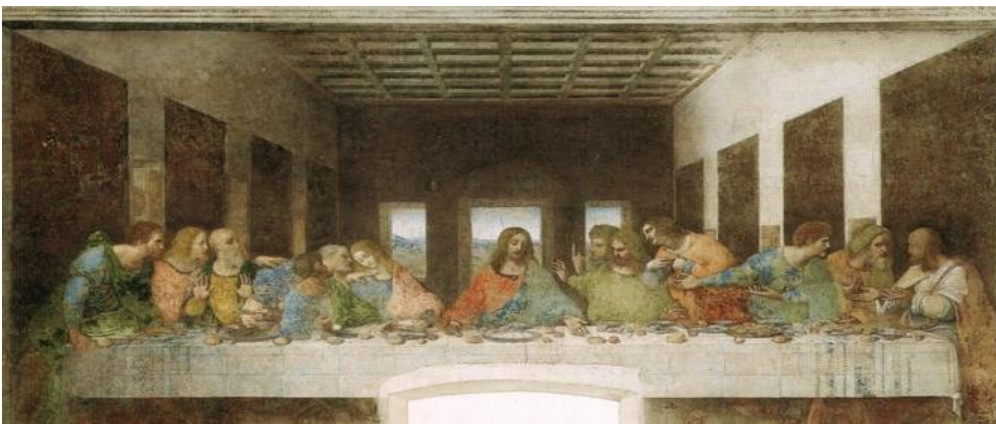
The cloister adjacent to the Church and the sundial

In the refectory, near the other cloister, you can admire **the Last Supper by Romanino** (Brescia, 1484-1566). After the 2001 restoration, it regained its color and shape.



The Last Supper by Romanino

This fresco dates back to 1530, and resumes the moment of the **institution of the Eucharist**. The Church of St. Cristo is already dedicated to it. Romanino had dealt with Leonardo's Last Supper (Vinci, 1452-1519), kept in Milan.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*, Milan

**Romanino**, unlike **Leonardo**, had to deal with a wall at the back of the refectory, divided into three arches. Jesus is placed in the central one. Both painters do not put halos on the apostles, not even on Jesus, and present men who are all the same. Even if Romanino recovers the sanctity of the Master in a big way, through a golden apse background, which frames his head.

Leonardo and Romanino portray the moment in which Christ says: "**One of you will betray me**". St. John comments: "The disciples looked at each other unable to understand of whom he spoke". It is the moment of uncertainty, amazement and disturbance from which the twelve are taken.

At the terrible words of Jesus emotions are unleashed among the apostles. Romanino represents **Judas** in a grim, dark aspect, separated from the others, on this side of the table, about to leave, after having drawn on the morsel (in the hand).

**John**, the beloved disciple of Jesus, with blond hair, bows his head on the Master's chest in a gesture of abandonment. The figure of **Judas**, on this side of the table, acts as a counterpoint to that of John. Judas' face manifests restlessness and torment as he draws from the chalice and prepares to leave.



**Jesus** emerges between the heads of **John** and **Judas** placed on the same level. Perhaps in this way it was intended to bring together two opposing models, fidelity and betrayal, John's gesture of abandonment and that of Judas who he leaves for another road.

**The Lord**, well preserved in the features of his face, stands in the center in sad solitude, almost ignoring the intimate presence of the beloved apostle John, who will follow him to the foot of the cross.

**In the left side wall**, a few steps lead to an internal niche at the top. There, in the past, one person read while the others below listened in silence as they fed.

**The Xaverian Missionaries** have carried out important restoration works to re-establish the Church and the Complex in its former glory. Also near the other cloister you can admire the lunettes of the Anti-refectory.



The scene of the crucifixion



Gathering manna in the desert



Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac



The Gospel parable of the wedding guests: the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame (Lk 14:16-24).



The internal church used everyday by the Xaverian Missionaries



Christ at the column, in the same church

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To consult and learn more about the Xaverian's mission:  
<https://www.saveriani.it>



