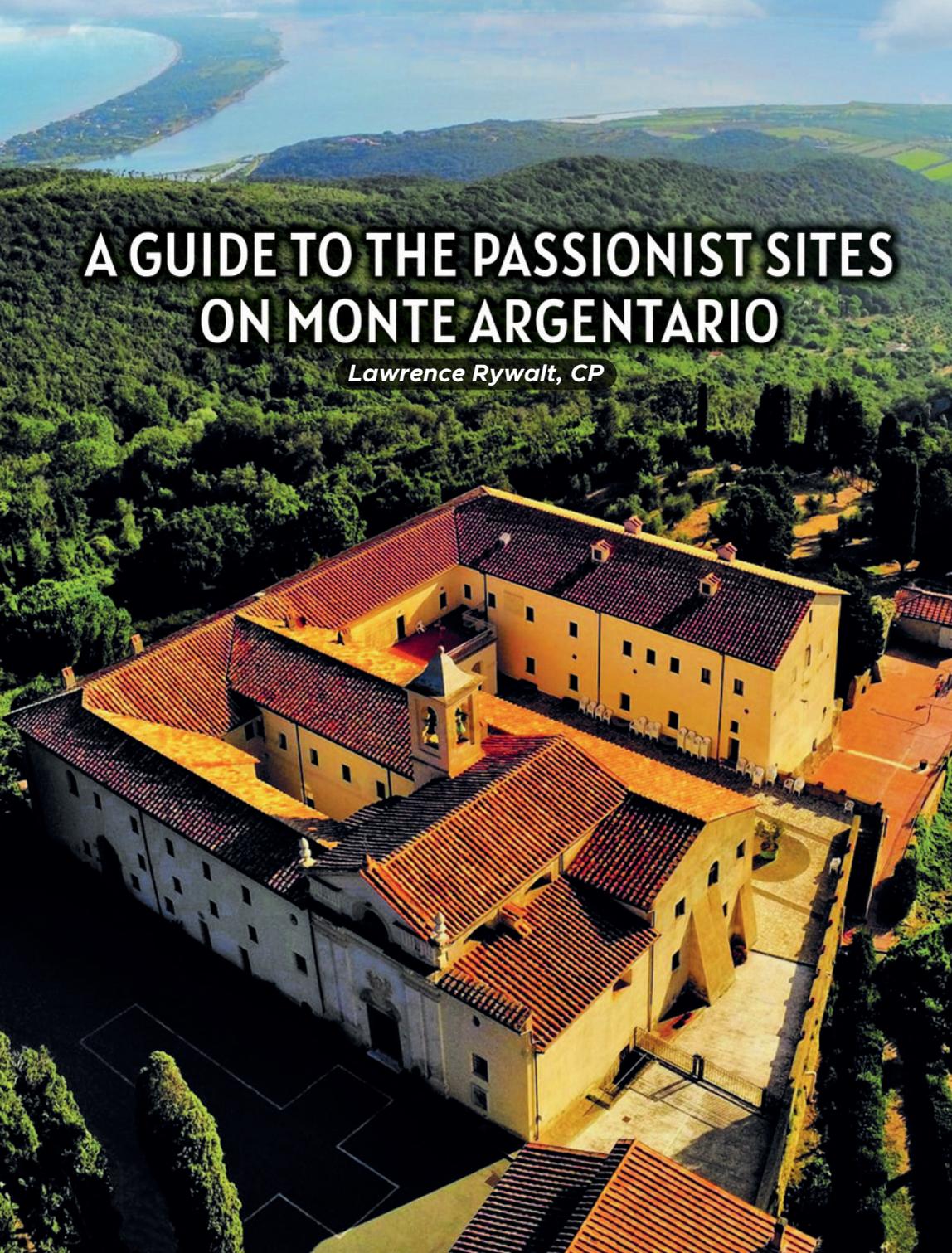


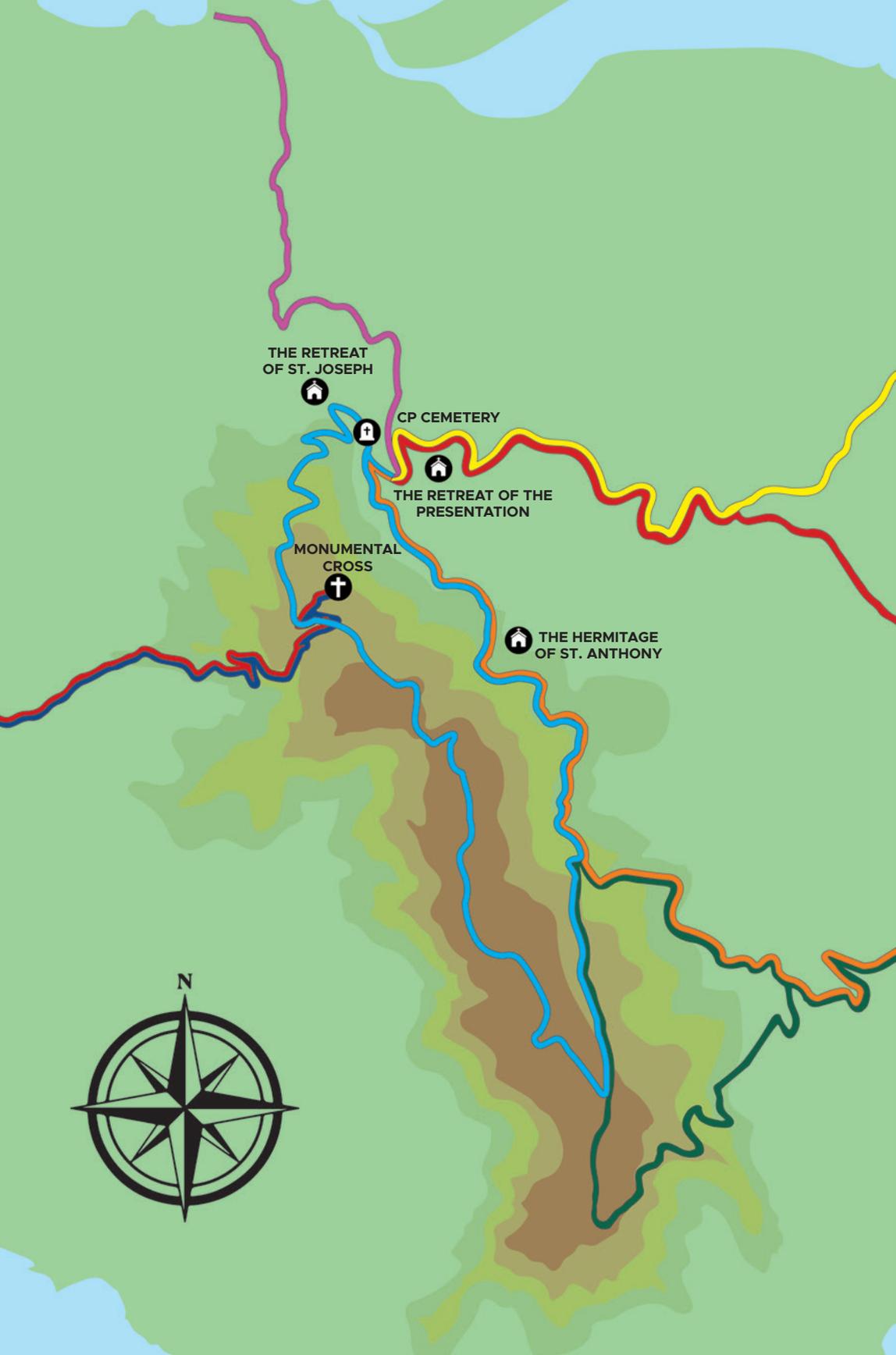


*“Come, let us go up to the  
mountain of the Lord”*

# A GUIDE TO THE PASSIONIST SITES ON MONTE ARGENTARIO

*Lawrence Rywalt, CP*





THE RETREAT  
OF ST. JOSEPH



CP CEMETERY



THE RETREAT OF THE  
PRESENTATION



MONUMENTAL  
CROSS



THE HERMITAGE  
OF ST. ANTHONY



# The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ



## **A Guide to the Passionist Sites on Monte Argentario**

*Lawrence Rywalt, CP*

Cum permissu:  
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## INTRODUCTION

*Many peoples will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”*

(Is. 2:3)

The year 2020 marked the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Passion by St. Paul of the Cross. The various initiatives planned for this Jubilee Year were designed to facilitate the maximum participation of the religious of the Congregation, as well as the friends and benefactors of the Passionist Family – nuns, religious Sisters, and laity. In particular, the aim of this special year was to welcome those who wished to come to Sts. John and Paul in Rome and the other historical Passionist places of Monte Argentario, Vetralla, and Ovada-Castellazzo as pilgrims, i.e. one who has come from afar and who is on a journey to a holy place. Despite this original intent, the Covid pandemic impeded most of the activities, including pilgrimages, that were scheduled for the Jubilee Year.

However, the preparations on behalf of the pilgrims were not in vain. In conjunction with the work of Fr. Ciro Benedettini and the Jubilee Commission, in June 2021 we published a *Passionist Guide to the Basilica and Retreat of Sts. John and Paul*. Its scope was to offer pilgrims, in particular, Passionists, a resource tool in the three principal languages of the Congregation (Italian, Spanish and English) for visiting and appreciating the over 250 years of Passionist history and spirituality in Rome. With this second publication, we are offering the Passionist pilgrim a Guide-

book for visiting the geographic area beyond Rome, where our Congregation first took root – Monte Argentario.

For many Passionists and members of the Passionist Family, especially those who do not speak Italian, a visit to Monte Argentario can be somewhat daunting. One is immediately impressed by the beauty of the site – a mountain on an island – its amazing panoramic views, the pure air, open skies, and startling silence. And one instinctively knows that this is holy ground, indeed a holy mountain divinely created, and then sanctified by St. Paul of the Cross and the generations of holy Passionists who lived and ministered here until today. However, while the pilgrim may indeed be aware of and long to understand the almost 300 years of Passionist presence on this mountain, without a competent guide who is able to communicate in the various languages of the Congregation (in particular, those who do not understand Italian), the Passionist pilgrim has no key to unlock the spiritual treasures that lie herein. Therefore, although the Jubilee Year has officially concluded, it is our hope that the spirit of the Jubilee will continue – i.e. rediscovering the treasure of the Passionist charism, spirituality, and history as embodied in the life and ministry of St. Paul of the Cross, our Father and Founder, and the first courageous Passionists who laid the founda-

tions for the first Retreat and the first Novitiate of the Congregation of the Passion on Monte Argentario.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to several people who were especially helpful to me in this project. First, Fr. Joachim Rego, Superior General and Fr. Ciro Benedettini, First General Consultor for encouraging me and giving me the opportunity to research, translate, prepare the texts, and to publish this Guidebook. I thank Dr. Eunice Dos Santos, General Archivist, for her guidance, assistance, and patience in locating and providing materials for me from our General Archives. I am most grateful to several of our religious who patiently answered my numerous questions concerning these historical sites and our Passionist history: Fr. Tito Paolo Zecca (MAPRAES), Fr. Adriano Spina (MAPRAES), Fr. Antonio Munduate (SCOR), and most especially Fr. Paolo Zega (MAPRAES) for patiently taking me by the hand and walking with me through these various sites and sharing with me his great knowledge of these historical places. In a special way I would like to thank Bro. Mario Cempanari (MAPRAES) for his extraordinary work, *“Storia dei Passionisti della Provincia religiosa della Presentazione di Maria Santissima al Tempio”* (The History of the Passionists of the religious Province of the Presentation of Mary most holy in the Temple, 2011). I would never have been able to access much of the material for this manuscript without this text.

Finally, I would like to thank my confrere Fr. Paul Francis Spencer (PATR) for proofreading the text and offering me his comments. A final word of gratitude to those who generously offered their language skills to translate this work from English, into Italian (Fr. Alessandro Foppoli and Fr. Paolo Zega) and into Spanish (Fr. Antonio Munduate and Fr. Rafael Blasco).

In 1988, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, in merit of her extraordinary life and ministry, was declared an honorary citizen of Monte Argentario on the waterfront in Porto Santo Stefano. On that occasion she met with the then pastor of the parish of Santo Stefano, currently Cardinal Angelo Comastri. He recalled that, “she stared like a child at the breathtaking [ocean] scenery and said, *‘In such a beautiful place such as this, you too must be concerned about having a beautiful soul’*”. I think St. Paul of the Cross would agree.

In a certain sense, all Passionists are citizens of Monte Argentario by merit of being sons and daughters of our Father, St. Paul of the Cross. It therefore behooves us and all the Passionist Family who come as pilgrims to this **holy mountain** to strive to know and love our Passionist charism and history and especially our Founder, St. Paul of the Cross, and the many holy religious who lived with him on this holy mountain and who gave birth to the Congregation of the Passion. Although, like Moses, we instinctively know to “*take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.*” (Ex.3:5); yet, with this Guidebook in hand, may we also know that we are invited to come closer, to climb this holy mountain, to spend some time here in silence, solitude, and prayer, and together with our brothers in community, to strive to become “beautiful souls” for the honor and glory of God and the sanctification of his people, the Church.

***May the Passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts!***

Lawrence Rywalt, CP (PAUL)

21 November 2022

Memorial of the Presentation of the

B.V.M. in the Temple

Sts. John and Paul, Rome

# 1. MONTE ARGENTARIO – AN OVERVIEW

## GEOGRAPHY

Located half-way between the coastal cities of Civitavecchia and Talamone, Monte Argentario is a promontory that juts out into the Tyrrhenian Sea at the two southernmost islands of the Tuscan archipelago-- Giglio Island and Giannutri Island.



Monte Argentario and the city of Orbetello.

Argentario originally was an island, but over the centuries the combined action of the sea currents and the River Albegna created a double “tombolo” (i.e. a sandy isthmus by which an island becomes attached to the mainland via a narrow piece of land such as a spit or a bar. Once attached, the island is then known as a tied island.) These tomboli form the Lagoon of Orbetello. The two main villages on Monte Argentario are Porto Santo Stefano, the principal town, facing north, and Porto Ercole facing south. The panoramic road, the “Strada panoramica” starts in Porto Santo Stefano offering splendid views of the coast and the Tuscan Archipelago. Monte Argentario borders the town of Orbetello, which is located on the middle

dam between the two lagoons of Laguna di Ponente on the west side and the Laguna di Levante on the east side of the middle dam.

Monte Argentario is located in an area known as the “*Maremma toscana*”. The general term *Maremma* is today used to indicate a vast geographical area that covers both parts of Tuscany and Lazio near the Tyrrhenian coast. At the time of St. Paul of the Cross and the first Passionists, it was mostly marshland, often malarial because of the presence of mosquitos. It was also inhabited by bandits who frequently assaulted travelers going through the region. Hence it was a region that Paul’s original version of the Rule would characterize as “poor and incommodious” as well as dangerous—an ideal area to preach Jesus Crucified.

Monte Argentario reaches its highest point at Punta Telegrafo (635 meters/ 2,083 feet) and is characterized by completely hilly and at times impervious terrain. Over time, terraces were created where mainly grapevines and olive trees were cultivated. The jagged coast includes coves and beaches, mainly stony, of remarkable beauty from a naturalistic point of view. In 1991 it was declared a natural maritime protected area.

Its climate is typical of the Mediterranean-- very mild throughout the year, with a noticeable increase in humidity during the summer period. Precipitation is quite scarce (on average just over 400 mm per year) and rarely of long duration and occurs mainly during the autumn months.

## EARLY HISTORY OF MONTE ARGENTARIO



The Ponente lagoon and the Spanish windmill.

The promontory, probably initially inhabited by the Etruscans, was the personal property of the Roman Domitii-Ahenobarbi family, who obtained it in return for the money they lent to the Roman Republic during the Punic Wars. The current name probably finds its origin here, since *Argentarii* was the name of money lenders in ancient Rome.

Later an imperial possession, it was ceded to the Church by Constantine the

Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. In the Middle Ages, due to the reduced traffic on the nearby Via Aurelia, the area was sparsely settled. In the heart of the Middle Ages, the promontory became a possession of the Monastery of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. Subsequently, the promontory was a possession of the Aldobrandeschi and the Orsini families, as well as King Ladislaus of Naples and Siena, until Spain acquired it in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### THE POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL REALITY OF MONTE ARGENTARIO AT THE TIME OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

In order to appreciate the difficulties and importance of the foundation of the Passionist Retreat of the Presentation on Monte Argentario, one needs to review the social situation into which Paul and his brother, John Baptist would be immersed.

Following is the summary that Fr. Fabiano Giorgini provides in his work, *The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus, A brief history* (Rome,1988) [the Italian version was revised and reprinted in 2006].



The Spanish fortress, Porto Santo Stefano.

The peace of Westphalia (1648) put an end to the Thirty Years War and sanctioned the principle of the “just balance of power,” by which one State must avoid becoming more powerful than another and thus disturbing the peace. This principle together with the dynastic interests of the Bourbons and Hapsburgs on the Continent and of the English dynasty and that of the Russian Czars were the cause of many wars at the end of the 1600s and before the middle of the 1700s.

During the second half of the seventeenth century the region of Castellazzo and Ovada in the Piemonte region of Italy was tormented by the war which the princes of Savoy fought in order to conquer the territory of the Republic of Genova. To these wars were added the rivalries among the various towns and feudatories, making family life difficult, including that of the Daneo family. The wars which had

the greatest impact on the family and personal life of Paul were:

- The War of Spanish Succession (1700-1714) which lasted a long time also in the areas of Castellazzo and Alessandria, which passed under the Savoy Dynasty, whereas at Paul's birth they were under the Duchy of Milan, ruled by Spain. The State of the Tuscany Garrisons (Mt. Argentario) also passed from Spanish to Austrian control as Paul experienced in 1721.
- The War of the Fourfold Alliance (1717-1720): France- England-Holland-Austrian Empire fought against Spain.
- The War of Polish Succession (1733-1738): in Italy, the Spanish reconquered the Kingdom of Naples, the State of the Tuscany Garrisons where Paul comforted the wounded and interceded

ed to spare the city of Orbetello from being bombarded.

- The War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) in Italy resulted in new divisions of its territory in favor of the Royal Houses of the Bourbons and Lorraine [...]
- Other wars in Austria and the Venetian Republic against the Turks were waged in Eastern Europe. Paul thought of enlisting as a volunteer crusader in the latter war between 1714-1718.

The list of these wars enables us to understand the complex social and economic crises which Europe experienced and the immense suffering of the people who were either overwhelmed by battles or oppressed by war taxes. Commerce under these conditions declined due to the increasing difficulty of obtaining supplies and thereby making famine more painful.

From a cultural perspective, Enlightenment dominated the European scene [...] Illuminism sanctioned royal despotism even though, theoretically, it wanted the king to use his absolute power for the good of the people. Royal despotism also brought about the subjection of the Church whose organized rights would be suppressed and made to depend solely on the good pleasure of the king.

For this reason the various States, even within a nation such as in Italy, did not admit preachers who were not citizens without the explicit consent of the government. A religious institute could not make a foundation even though they had the Church's permission unless the government recognized the institute-- something it did not permit because it considered it

useless or harmful. This kind of situation prevented Paul from being able to found the Congregation in the Piemonte region, in the Republic of Genoa, in Sicily, in Naples or in Tuscany. [...]

Thus, the Congregation was born in a Garrison State which embraced the whole headland of Argentario with the city of Orbetello as capital and the villages of Port'Ercole, Porto Santo Stefano and the small port of Talamone. In all, this encompassed about 315 square km. to which were added 9 km. on the Island of Elba with the village of Portolungone, today Porto Azzurro. Philip II of Spain formed this State in 1557 to have a military base from which to guard northern and southern Italy. The civilian population of the State was about 3,000 while the soldiers stationed at the various fortresses were more than 1,000 in case of war.

This maritime zone from Pisa to Gaeta was infested by malaria which caused sickness and frequently, death. This danger explains Paul's concern not to travel through those areas during the summer months and the fear he had for the health of the Religious in the retreats of Toscanella, Corneto, and Terracina.

The ecclesiastical communities of the cities Port'Ercole and Talamone, although they were two important military centers of the Garrison State (the Presidi), depended on the Diocese of Sovana-Pitigliano. Paul referred to the bishop of that diocese when he first arrived in Port'Ercole and took refuge in the ancient hermitages of the Annunciation and Sant'Antonio on the mountain, both within the parish territory.

## 2. PAUL DANEI CLIMBS THE “HOLY MOUNTAIN”

### SOME BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

In order to understand Paul's arrival at Monte Argentario, it would be helpful to briefly recall some biographical data. However, the numerous biographies that are available in the major languages of the Congregation offer greater detail concerning Paul's life and vocation, especially at the moment of his discernment of the charism and the life of the Congregation.

Paul Danei, as a religious calling himself “of the Cross”, was born on 3 January 1694, in the city of Ovada in the Piemonte region of Italy. This city was under the Republic of Genoa and his father Luca (+1727) had taken refuge there while the French troops were devastating the area of Alessandria and Castellazzo, his native town. His mother, Anna Maria Massari (+1746) was from Rivarolo Ligure (Genova). Paul was the first of six children who survived infant mortality.

Paul was an average, practicing Catholic. However, in 1713 he experienced an interior crisis occasioned by a parish priest's sermon. We do not know where it



St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775).

took place or in what month. He called this experience a “conversion.” In other words, he had a new and profound understanding of God whom he felt to be “his” God, “his Supreme Good.” This produced in him a deep sorrow and horror for every sin, even the smallest. He continued to help his family; however he devoted more time to prayer. He added some very hard penances to the austere regimen of his family life which he afterwards tempered because of the danger of compromising his health.

A gradual interior illumination between 1717 and 1720 (a desire for solitude while he contemplated the shrine



of Our Lady of Gazzo near Genoa) and a sojourn in Castellazzo (where he moved in 1717 at the invitation of his paternal uncle) enabled him to understand God's will that he found a Congregation to remember and promote the "grateful memory" of God's saving love manifested in the Passion of Jesus.

After a careful discernment with his spiritual director-confessor in the summer of 1720, Paul opened his soul to the Barnabite Bishop Francesco Arborio di Gattinara (+1743). The bishop considered the inspirations Paul received to be substantially authentic and therefore he welcomed Paul's request to be vested in a black habit similar to the one that Paul was shown in the interior vision during the summer of 1720.

After giving him this black habit on 22 November 1720 (the date that we would later mark as the founding of the Passionist Congregation) the bishop asked

Paul to make a 40-day retreat in order to better discern God's will. He directed him to write down what would transpire within him during those days and to write a Rule of life for the Congregation he felt inspired to found.

After reading the Diary that Paul wrote during the retreat (23 November 1720–1 January 1721) and the Rule of the future community, Bishop Gattinara consulted various persons. Consequently he confirmed his opinion that Paul was being inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, although the bishop permitted him to teach catechism and to give public meditations, he did not grant him permission to gather companions. This meant that the bishop did not intend to initiate the foundation of the Congregation. For this reason, Paul asked permission on 11 March 1721 to go to Rome, hoping to obtain the Pope's permission to gather companions in order to found the Congregation.

## PAUL SETS SAIL FOR ROME AND DISCOVERS MONTE ARGENTARIO

Paul decided to postpone his trip to Rome until after the summer. Therefore towards the end of August he went to the port of Genoa where he boarded a ship to Rome. The voyage was uneventful until, on 8 September, the wind dropped, and the boat was becalmed off the south coast of the Argentario peninsula. Monte Argentario had for centuries been a place favored by hermits and those seeking to be alone with God. Paul gave this account of his first encounter with the mountain which was to be his home for many years:



The “*Salus Populi Romani*” icon,  
Basilica of St. Mary Major.

“On the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady the boat stopped near Monte Argentario; I did not disembark, but I ate some wild figs which the sailors had gathered on the land. However, standing on the boat, I fixed my eyes on the rocks and

craggs on the southern side of the mountain, and thought of withdrawing to one of those caves, and surely ending my days there.” (*Processi*, IV, 315 ff.)

The next day the ship dropped anchor at the port of Civitavecchia. Because of quarantine regulations, no one was allowed to leave the port for at least ten days. While waiting, Paul did not waste his time, taking the opportunity to offer religious instruction to his fellow passengers and preparing a clean copy of the Rule of the Poor of Jesus to present to the pope.

When his quarantine was over he traveled by foot to Rome. He arrived there around 20 September 1721 but was not granted an audience with the Pope, Innocent XIII, because Paul did not have with him any documents of presentation from his bishop. Very downcast, Paul withdrew from the Quirinal Palace, where the Pope resided, and went to the nearby Basilica of St. Mary Major. There, before the icon of Our Lady, the *Salus Populi Romani* (the Health of the Roman People), he professed a personal Passionist Vow to promote in the hearts of the faithful the grateful memory of the Passion of Jesus and to commit himself to found the Congregation.

Morally sustained by this vow, he decided to return to Genoa. However he did not want to go home without having a closer look at the mountain. Arriving at Monte Argentario, Paul obtained permission from the Bishop of Pitigliano to live in an old hermitage on the mountainside, two miles from Port’Ercole. It was dedicated to Our Lady of the Annunciation. However he did not receive permission to start a religious community because he was allowed to have only one person with him, i.e. his brother John Baptist.



Ven. John Baptist Danei (1695-1765).

Therefore, Paul returned to Castellazzo and asked Bishop Gattinara to vest his brother John Baptist in the same penitential Habit as his own on 28 November 1721. The two then left for Argentario on 22 February 1722 and arrived at Port'Ercole on the Wednesday evening of Holy Week, 4 April 1722.

At the end of that year or at the beginning of 1723 they went to the city of Gaeta at the invitation of Bishop Pignatelli. Paul taught catechism, visited the sick and dying and, at the request of the bishop, preached a course of spiritual exercises for seminarians preparing for ordination. He attempted to organize a community with some hermits who were in the Shrine of the Madonna della Catena (Our Lady of the Chain) in Gaeta, but it did not succeed.

In the summer of 1723 Paul was invited by the bishop of the city of Troia (Foggia), Emilio Cavalieri (+1726), to go there together with his brother. Cavalieri offered them a cordial welcome and during the next six months he reviewed the draft of Rule Paul

had composed and gave him useful advice to improve its organization. However, Paul did not accept the bishop's offer to found the Congregation in his diocese.

Paul tried to start a community again at Gaeta but was not successful. Subsequently he withdrew for three months to the Shrine of Santa Maria della Civita in the city of Itri. In September of 1726 he and John Baptist transferred to Rome to put themselves at the service of the Hospital of San Gallicano. The hospital was located in the Trastevere section of the city. It had recently been inaugurated for the Jubilee Year of 1725 and was dedicated to the care of those suffering from dermatological illnesses.

Paul's stay in Rome, however, brought him to the decision to be ordained a priest. On 7 June 1727 he and John Baptist were ordained priests at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, so that they might better fulfill the mission God wanted for the future Congregation. Additionally, they learned how to care for the sick, how to organize a community, and they met various persons who would be of great help to them in the future. However, a persistent health problem and a growing interior uneasiness convinced Paul that God did not want him there.

On March 1, 1728, Paul, with due permission, returned to Monte Argentario together with his brother and was determined to try in every way to give life to his Congregation. He found that the Hermitage of the Annunciation was now occupied by hermits. Therefore Paul withdrew to another hermitage, that of Sant'Antonio. This was located higher up the mountain than the hermitage of the Annunciation and had only one main room and a small chapel on the ground floor and another room on the floor above. After eight years of wanderings, uncertainties and disappointing efforts, Paul returned to Monte Argentario where he had his original, unique inspiration in September 1721.

### 3. SINKING ROOTS: THE PASSIONIST RETREATS

In October of 1728, Paul wrote to his friend Fr. Erasmo Tuccinardi, to tell him about his new home in the hermitage of Sant'Antonio which, he said, was "most suitable for seeking the highest perfection" being far away from the town. Paul and John Baptist were very hopeful for other companions; however, except for their own brother, Antonio, who arrived in May 1730, the few who did come were not strong enough to remain. Addition-

ally, since there were only two rooms, if people were to join the community, more space would be needed. Therefore, Paul began to think about building a new house/ "retreat" in which there would be room not only for a larger community but also for people who might want to come there and spend some time in prayer with the community or to make a retreat. The house itself would not be a monastery or priory or convent, but a "Retreat".



The Retreat of the Presentation.

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## WHAT IS A “RETREAT”?

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In order to better understand and appreciate this very important historical aspect of the Passionist charism, below are some excerpts taken from the analysis of the topic by Fr. Fabiano Giorgini in his entry in the Italian-language work, *“Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione”* (VII, Edizione Paolini, Roma, 1983, pp. 1828, ff.)

When someone initially hears the word “retreat” the first image that may come to mind is the practice of spending a period of time in prayer and meditation, also called “spiritual exercises”, in the tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits. This experience traditionally occurs in a place called a retreat house or retreat center. However, for St. Paul of the Cross the concept of a “retreat” was much more expansive than a certain period of time in a particular place.

Paul’s concept of “retreat” as a special place has its origin the tradition of the Franciscan Friars Minor, in particular the Capuchins. Paul was familiar with their traditions from his contact with them in Castellazzo. Contemporaneous with the foundation of the Passionist Congregation, the Franciscans were also undergoing a period of reform that included designating some of their “friaries” as “retreats”, i.e. “houses intended for living religious life



The inner courtyard and cistern, Novitiate of St. Joseph.

*more austere, including a certain eremitic tinge, at least as far as the Order of Friars Minor is concerned, and with much time devoted to prayer.”* However, for Paul of the Cross all the religious houses of the Passionist Congregation were to be considered “retreats”. This was so from its origins up until the first decades of the 20th century. Giorgini continues, “It is perhaps the only case in which all the houses of a religious family are referred to as “retreat”, indicating precisely the type of penitential life and solitude that was supposed to be lived there, the hallmark of the entire institute.”

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## WHAT IS A PASSIONIST RETREAT?

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As stated above, “Paul was familiar with the Capuchins, but it does not appear that he drew from their Rule for the creation of his concept of ‘retreat.’ In fact, in 1746 he was displeased because a cardinal on the commission to revise his Rule inserted into the text that the cells should be as large “as those of the Capuchin Order” (Regulae et Constit. 6/III/36-8; Letters II, 683).” Giorgini continues to explain the unique element that Paul envisioned for his Congregation. “His idea of a retreat which he had in 1717, came from the inspiration to ‘retire in solitude’ and which, in the definitive enlightenment of his vocation as Founder in 1720, he understood that meditating upon and promoting the memory of Jesus’ Passion was part of the “apostolic life” (cf. Letters IV, 217-8). For this reason Paul felt that solitude and the retreat were essential for the full implementation of the Congregation’s purpose.

In the first text of the Rule Paul calls the dwelling of his religious, “a house of retreat of penance” or simply a “retreat of penance.” The first text approved in 1741 speaks only of a “house of retreat,” which in the 1746 Latin translation becomes *domus religiosi recessus*.

For Paul of the Cross, retreat had a deeply biblical derivation and meaning. The example of Jesus who “withdrew” in solitude to pray, far from the crowds, and who called the disciples there to prepare them for the mission (cf. Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:10, 18; Mk 6:31-3), becomes for Paul the fundamental norm of the “apostolic life” that the “evangelical Passionist worker” must realize-- to promote in the faithful the memory of the infinite love of Jesus manifested in his Passion.”

The 1775 version of the *Rule and Constitutions*, Chapter III gives the following

explanation of why the houses are to be founded in solitude: “*The houses shall be constructed in retired places, that the devout brethren after their apostolic labors, undergone for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, may withdraw far from the society of men and the noise of the world to devote themselves in solitude to their own spiritual advancement, to prayers, fasting, and other pious exercises, by which they may be more and more inflamed with divine love. Thus, having grown stronger in Christian virtues, they may become better qualified and more ready for gathering abundant fruits of the word of God, which they have to scatter, exciting in every place, to the utmost of their power, a love of piety and a grateful remembrance of and veneration for the passion and death of Christ our Lord.*”

Giorgini continues: “In the Rule and other documents, the Founder completes the description of the retreat by stating that it becomes a place for experiencing the living God when silence reigns there, “which is the soul of a well-ordered community.” Strict seclusion is practiced there not only by the exclusion of women, but also men. The latter, in fact, without a well-founded reason and special permission from the superior, cannot enter the retreat, so that the religious are not distracted from concerning themselves solely with God and to “drive out of their mind, or memory everything that is not God, or of God” (*Guida per l’animazione*, no. 49, 54, 138-40). [...] However since it is [also] a “retreat of penance,” in which one may contemplate the crucified Christ and participate in the reparation that Jesus offers for the sins of humanity, it is necessary that rigorous corporal penance should also be practiced in the retreat. [...] Besides these penitential practices, the religious spent about three

hours daily in meditation-contemplation and another two hours or more in the liturgical prayer of the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.”

Finally, Giorgini explains that, while remaining closed to those who wish to visit them as “tourists”, the retreat “was open to those Christians who want to immerse themselves in solitude and ascetic exercises, and there was a special section [of the retreat reserved] for them. [Whereas] the [public] church was open daily for those who want to come for prayer, to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist or for spiritual direction (*Regulae et Const. 4/I-III/1-10; 134/I-III/17-20*).”

Giorgini concludes his entry in this *Dictionary*, by offering some historical information concerning the evolution of the concept of Passionist retreats after the death of Paul of the Cross, in particular during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. “The understanding of the retreat as an essential feature of the spirituality and apostolate of the Passionist Congregation remained certain until the mid-19th century [...] From the middle of the 1800s, however, the Congregation’s expansion outside Italy put the religious in contact with different pastoral situations, especially in England, the USA, and South America, while in France and Italy they experienced new suppressions. At the same time, the socio-cultural change was also accompanied by a change in the understanding of the word “apostolate” and “apostolic life”-- from imitation of the life of the apostles (hence, “apostolic life”) in which prayer and proclamation of the Word are balanced (cf. Acts 6:4). The word “apostolate” began to mean a predominant commitment to activity, to the exercise of works of mercy to which so many new congregations that arose in the nineteenth century were dedicated. [Consequently many Passionists] began to see the retreat, as understood by the

Founder, as an obstacle to “apostolic life” understood according to this new meaning. [...] [Subsequently] the 1959 revision of the Rule also eliminated the word *retreat* in the sense and with the importance attributed to it by the Founder.”

Returning to these original “Retreats” founded by St. Paul of the Cross, it is worth noting that the foundation of these retreats usually was made at the request of bishops and of the people who had attended a mission or spiritual retreat and wanted to be assured of having the Passionist community nearby so that they could continue the good which had begun and that it might be extended to other towns. Apart from the retreat of St. Joseph (San Giuseppe), which Paul wanted as the novitiate and that of Sts. John and Paul donated by Pope Clement XIV, the other ten retreats began as a result of missions and in relation to these.



View from the cell of the Founder,  
Novitiate of St. Joseph

## 4. THE RETREAT OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE B.V.M. IN THE TEMPLE

### LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE RETREAT OF THE PRESENTATION



The retreat and church of the Presentation of the BVM.

One day at the beginning of 1731, as Paul was walking on the mountain, he stopped to pray. As he had done on other occasions, he gazed across the lagoon towards the town of Orbetello. He set his sight on the main church, the Duomo, and he knelt for a moment to pray, adoring the Blessed Sacrament. As he prayed there, in the shade of an olive tree, the inspiration came to him that this was the spot on which he should build the new Retreat.

To build on this site, known as the Property of Sant'Antonino, he would need the help of the people of Orbetello. He already knew some influential people in

the town, including the family of Agnese Grazi, his spiritual directee, whose father was captain of the city's garrison. When he spoke to the Grazi family about his project, they agreed to give him their support. Paul then made a formal request to the city council for the property.

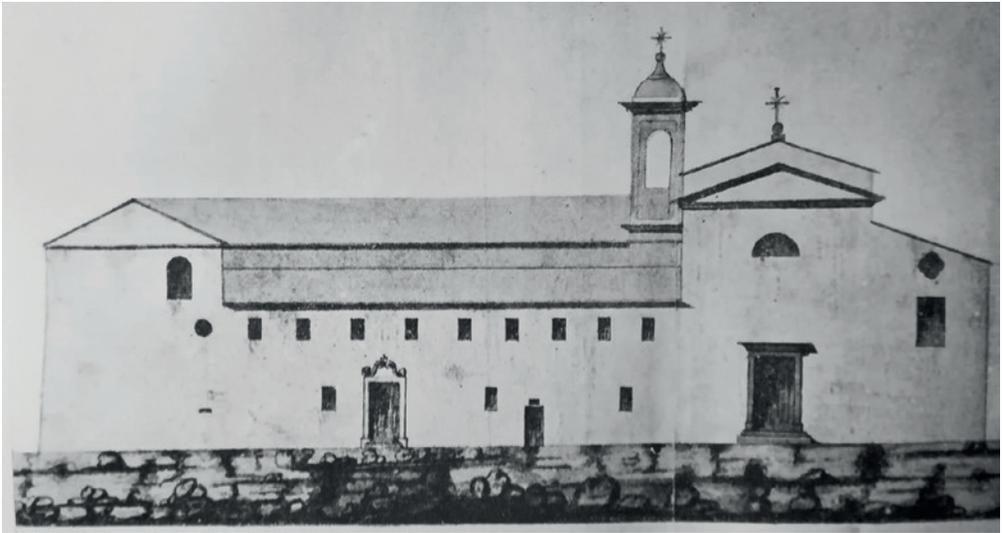
During the winter of 1731-32, some of Paul's supporters decided to measure out the piece of land intended for the new Retreat. In a letter dated 31 March 1732, written from the hermitage of Sant'Antonio to the bishop of Alessandria, Bishop Carlo Maria Ferreri, Paul spoke about the building of the Retreat: "God's mercy

is arranging for a Retreat of Penance to be built for us and our companions upon a property held by the city of Orbetello. It consists of a church dedicated to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (a day of special blessing for us since it was the day we began to live our present way of life) with about eighteen small, poor rooms, etc. Besides this a retreat house will be built not only for priests of the neighboring dioceses (for in the bad climate of this marshy locality hardly any have a seminary) but also for laymen who at convenient times would like to come here for spiritual exercises. A large quantity of material is already on the spot and the foundation-stone will be laid very shortly. I am telling you all this as if to our own pastor, to recommend this holy work to your prayers and also to those of your beloved flock. This Retreat is being built here on Monte Argentario, close to where we are ... When the Retreat is built I hope that God's mercy will give us the grace to depend upon poverty, especially when others come. Already there are some who wish to do so but we cannot receive them because we have no room."

Paul was invited to preach a mission in Orbetello itself, beginning on 4 February 1733. This was a providential opportunity to remind the people of the resolutions they had made and of all the work they had done in obtaining the land, securing the necessary permissions from both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and having building materials transported to the site. However he reminded them that they had more or less forgotten the commitment they had made and had abandoned the work they had begun. The people repented and told Paul that they would take care of everything; he was to leave the matter completely in their hands. Paul went back to Monte Argentario and traced the outline of the house on the ground with his

own staff. It was very rudimentary, nothing more than a simple rectangle. Work began immediately and the foundation stone was laid on 4 March 1733. The stone, which was rediscovered during excavations in 1778, bears a roughly-written inscription— "DIO TI SALVI 1733" (May God save you).

The following years were filled with many setbacks due to practical matters that included funding and building supplies, permissions from ecclesiastical authorities and the ongoing war in the state of the Presidi (Orbetello and Porto Ercole). However, by 1737 the building had been completed and the necessary permissions to inhabit the retreat and dedicate the church had been granted. On 14 September 1737, in the presence of the civil and military authorities and a large number of people from Orbetello, including the Grazi family, Monsignor Giovanni Maria Moretti (the Vicar General of Orbetello) blessed the Retreat and church of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and celebrated the first Mass in what Paul had described in one of his letters to Cardinal Lorenzo Altieri (1671-1741) as "the most beautiful and seemly church in these parts". In a letter to Sister Maria Cherubina Bresciani, Paul described what occurred: "*On 14 September, the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, principal feast of our small and new-born Congregation, the solemn entry and blessing of the church and Retreat took place. I had the duty of leading the way with the cross aloft, and with a rope around my neck. Eight companions followed me, that is five priests including myself, and four lay brothers. A sermon was given suitable to the occasion and the function then concluded. All the above companions are wearing the same habit as myself; we are nine in all, besides another who wishes to take the habit. All serve God fervently except the unworthy one who is writing.*"



An antique print of the façade of the retreat and the church.

## THE MODIFICATIONS TO THE RETREAT OVER THE YEARS

In addition to the history of those who inhabited the Retreat of the Presentation, there is also the history of the building itself that evolved like a living organism, that over the years, advanced and took shape.

It is not easy to rediscover the primitive outline or structure that would enable a present day pilgrim to understand the

original image of this historic building. Everything was built without any architectural plan or building project. For this reason there are no archival documents concerning the evolution of the Retreat. However, this space is full of memories. Here, in fact, was where our religious professed vows in the Congregation for the first time.

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## THE CHURCH

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In his book, *“La vita quotidiana dei Passionisti”* (The daily life of the Passionists, 2019, Effata’, p. 70) Fr. Tito Paolo Zecca explains that *“the churches [of many Passionist retreats] such as this one were never of great proportions for two reasons. The first because the retreats were in the open countryside [or on a mountain], so the influx of people was never great. The second reason came from the fact that the Passionists, being*

*a Congregation dedicated to preaching, exercised their apostolic ministry mainly in parish churches or in the churches of other religious institutes.”*

Traditionally the church contained three altars: the main altar, above which there was a painting of the patron saint or titular of the church. In this case, there is a large painting of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. The two side altars are ded-

icated to St. Michael the Archangel and St. Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross.

The altar dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel in the original church was consecrated in 1739. In 1741 permission was obtained to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the church, and in 1746 the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene was constructed. Thus, piece by piece, the church began to develop into its present appearance.

In 1779 the vault was restored and in 1780 the bell tower was added that included a new bell that was cast in Genoa. The Provincial, Fr. Tommaso Struzzieri (subsequently, Bishop) wrote to Pope Pius VI, asking that he deputize someone suitable for the blessing of the bell. Pius VI responded, granting the faculty to the commendatory abbot who, on 18 October, designated the canon of Orbetello, Don Alberto De Sanctis for the task. On 5 November 1780 he climbed the Mountain, and he gathered the communities of the two Retreats (the Presentation and St. Joseph). The bell was placed in the middle of the Chapter Hall and there, during the ritual it was consecrated to the Most Holy Virgin, St. Barbara, and St. Blaise.

In 1781 the additional construction of the small church was begun under the direction of Michele Rusconi. The work included the preparation of two marble columns and the burial crypts. The work turned out to be more expensive than expected and in fact it became so expensive that the rector, Fr. Antonio Pucci (of St. Augustine), with the permission of the Provincial, Fr. Vincent Strambi, allocated additional funds. Pope Pius VI also helped in procuring materials through Cardinal

Guglielmo Pallotta (1727-1795). On 29 October 1781, he also supplied additional funds for the construction project.

In lowering the floor they had to demolish the vaults of some of the burial crypts and it was on this occasion that the Platea includes an inventory of the bodies of those valiant first religious who helped the Founder in establishing this initial Retreat. Among the remains in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene where those of Agnese Grazi (1703-1744). Paul was her spiritual director and assisted her until the end of her life. (see below for further biographical information.)

In the chapel of St. Michael the Archangel they discovered the remains of Confratel Turrenio Romagnoli (of the most Holy Trinity) the first religious to die at the Retreat and Fr. Fulgenzio Pastorelli (1710-1755). (see below for additional biographical information.)

The completed church was blessed on 15 December 1782 by the Superior General, Fr. Giovanni Battista Gorresio. On the eve of the solemnity of the Epiphany Fr. Vincent Mary Strambi, the Provincial, blessed the burial crypts.

Unlike the church, this Retreat itself underwent various and radical transformations and restructurings. To the primitive construction that dated back to 1733, a series of rooms was added towards Porto Santo Stefano and then another wing was constructed facing toward the west, that would serve for the convenience of the professed religious, thus keeping the rooms of the original Retreat available for those who wanted to make retreat here.

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## LATER HISTORY

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In 1798, after the proclamation of the Roman Republic, the retreat hosted numerous religious who fled from the Papal States, including some cardinals; however in 1799 the retreat, although isolated, was invaded by a group of soldiers of the French army who were engaged in the siege of Orbetello. They looted it and damaged its sacred objects. In 1810, following the suppression of religious Institutes promulgated by Napoleon, the retreat was abandoned, and the building and its land were rented by the local authorities to private individuals, who proceeded to plunder the most valuable of its furnishings, and to desecrate the church and the burial crypts. Only in 1814, after the fall of Napoleon, were the religious able to return.

In 1836 there was a major renovation of the building after which it began to take on its current appearance. In 1866, with the law that sanctioned the abolition of religious orders in Italy, the retreat was again abandoned. The government thought of different uses for the building, including a hospital or a prison. However, in the end they decided to put the property up for sale and divide it into lots. All the lots were purchased by a friend of the Passionists, who then donated them to Father Emanuele Comparato (of St. John the Baptist), a General Consultor of the Congregation, who was then able to welcome the religious again.

In 1915, during World War I, the retreat was requisitioned by the local military that stationed 200 soldiers here, that included transforming part of the structure in an infirmary. During World War II, in 1943, it became an asylum for many refugees, also briefly hosting the municipality of Porto Santo Stefano and the civil hospital.



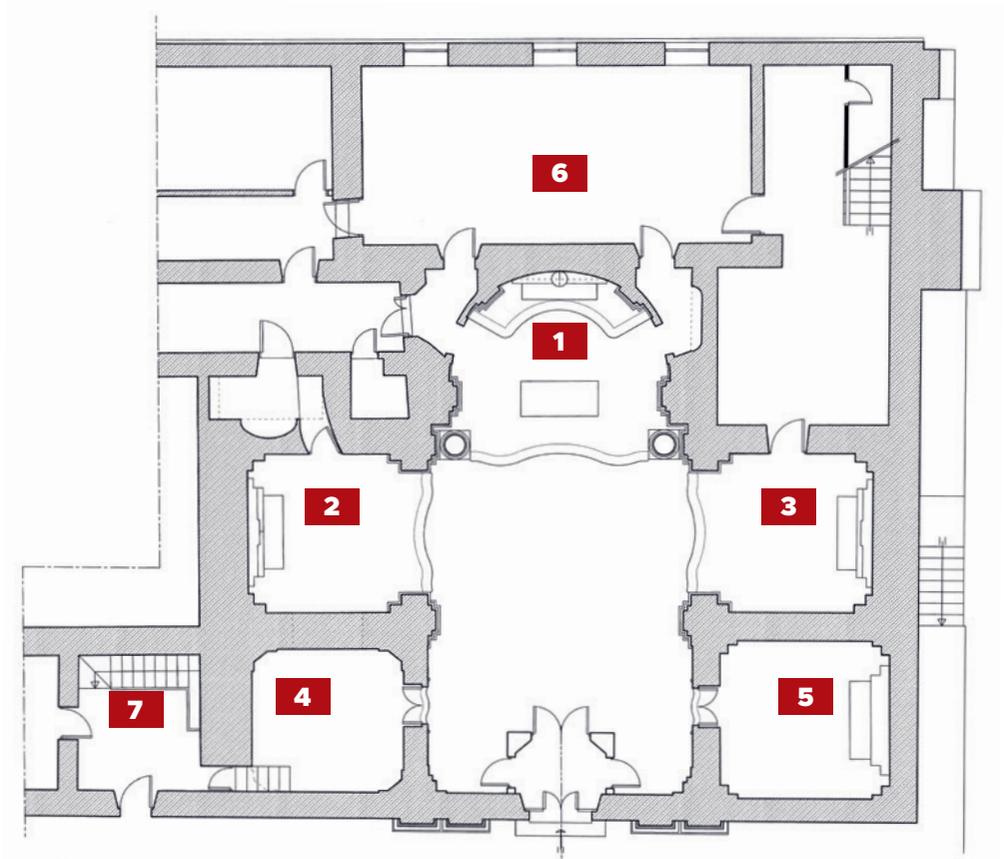
The Passionist Sign above the entrance to the church.

Finally, the only Pope to ever visit the Presentation Retreat was St. John Paul II in the Holy Year, 2000. He was accustomed to make recreational outings in the mountainous areas on the outskirts of the Vatican and he made an unannounced visit to this retreat during the afternoon of 12 December 2000. To the delight of the novices and the local community he paused here to pray in the public church of the monastery and to briefly greet the community. The Platea of the community describes the event in this way: "On 12 December at about 5:20 PM, unknown to anyone, Pope John Paul II visited the church of "Our Lady Presented in the Temple", escorted by his guard. At first the news was not accepted as true. Then the ocular observation of several people, especially of the pious volunteer women confirmed that it was true. When they heard the news, the religious of the community gathered in the church. Photographs were taken with the Pope and then the Pontiff personally signed the Register of pilgrims and guests: '*cum benedictione Joannes Paulus II - 12. XII. 2000*'"

## VISITING THE CHURCH AND THE RETREAT OF THE PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE

Since this is the first church in the first retreat of the Congregation, it is important for the visitor to the present-day church to understand the original description of a church in a Passionist retreat. This is found in Chapter XIV entitled “On the poverty to

be observed in the churches and houses of the Congregation” in the 1775 version of the Rule. “*In the Churches, which should be built at a moderate expense, let religious decorum and perfect cleanliness be kept up; let there be within them nothing*



**Floor plan of the church of the Presentation Retreat**

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| (1) Main altar                         | (5) Chapel of St. Paul of the Cross |
| (2) Altar of St. Michael the Archangel | (6) The choir                       |
| (3) Chapel of the Crucifix             | (7) Entrance to the Crypt           |
| (4) Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene       |                                     |

*sumptuous, nothing vain, or strange, to distract the minds of the devout. Let the sacred furniture be clean, becoming, well arranged, that, as far as is possible among us, it may be suitable to Divine Service and Sacrifice. Gold, however, or silver, or other precious ornaments, which may give majesty and greater propriety to the Divine worship, are not forbidden in them.”*

Its austere façade, erected in 1856, is framed by pilasters and culminates in the tympanum above the door that contains the “Sign” of the Congregation. It is neo-classical in style, but in its simplicity it is harmonious with the vast prospectus of the whole complex of the retreat.

The church is designed in the form of a Greek cross, with a main altar and two side altars and two side chapels flanking the main entrance. As different from the description above of a Passionist church in the 1775 Passionist Rule, it is decorated in ornate late Baroque style, that includes various plaster angels that flank the painting over the main altar and the arches.

The church and the retreat are dedicated to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple. This episode in the life of our Lady is not found in Sacred Scripture, but in an apocryphal account from a text called the *Protoevangelium of James* (7:1-8:1). It inspired the feast, November 21 (a date that is associated with the dedication of the new basilica of St. Mary in Jerusalem in 543) that celebrates “when the child [Mary] turned three years old, [her father, St.] Joachim said: ‘Call the sinless daughters of the Jews. Let each one take a lighted torch and keep it lit so that the little girl does not turn back, and her heart is not attracted to anything outside the temple of the Lord.’ They did so until they were in the temple of the Lord. The priest welcomed her and, kissing her, blessed her. Her parents looked down and praised the Lord God that she did not turn back. Mary was raised in the temple of the Lord like a dove and received food at the hands of an angel.” Here Mary was therefore prepared to become the true temple of God through prayer and work.

## 1

### THE MAIN ALTAR AND THE PAINTING OF THE PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE

Paul of the Cross had great devotion to this event in the life of our Lady and to the liturgical feast day calling it the “holy day” (Processes, IV/2, 314s), because it reminded him of his being clothed in the garb of a penitent. His clothing in penitential garb took place in the city of Alessandria in 1720. It was initially scheduled for 21 November, a Thursday, however Paul wanted the event postponed until the following day. On 21 November he recalled the self-offering that the Virgin Mary made to God, whereas on Friday, he recalled the mystery of Jesus’ death on the cross. This took place in the private chapel of Bishop

Francesco Arborio de Gattinara, the bishop of Alessandria. Paul was clothed in a black tunic and began his “penitential life”. Consequently, the Passionists observe this date as the foundation of the Congregation of the Passion.

Consequently, Paul of the Cross wanted the first retreat, the first province and the first monastery of the Passionist nuns to be dedicated to the Presentation of Mary. He always went to great lengths to celebrate this feast at this retreat on Monte Argentario. When he could not physically come here, he returned here spiritu-

ally “with ineffable nostalgia” (Annali 1722, 46). In the Marian event of the Presentation in the Temple, Paul perceived all the



The painting of the Presentation of the BVM in the Temple.

elements of his own spirituality—the total offering of himself to God, the retreat in the solitude of the mountain, the transformative union with his “sacramental Spouse, Jesus” (Diary, January 1). During the 6<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Congregation in 1775, the last Chapter when the Founder was present, Mary Presented in the Temple was declared Patron of the Congregation.

Above the main altar of the church of typical nineteenth-century style, there is a painting of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, attributed to the artist Sebastiano Conca (1680-1764), commissioned by Cardinal Lorenzo Altieri (1671-1741). The Cardinal, as Abbot of the Abbey of the Tre Fontane in Rome, was the ecclesiastical superior of Orbetello which was not in the Diocese of Soana and Pitigliano but was a dependency of this Abbey.

Until this painting was placed here, there was a large crucifix above the altar that is now located in the small chapel on the left side of the entrance to the church.

## THE TWO LATERAL ALTARS AND CHAPELS

The original construction of the church was gradually restored and adapted over time, until it assumed its current design including, among other things, the two side altars near the presbytery: the altar on the right, built in 1746, is dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene, the penitent disciple present at the foot of the Cross and first vigilant witness of the Risen Lord, on the day of Easter. On the left hand side, is the altar dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel. This altar was constructed earlier and dates back to 1739, only two years after the inauguration of the Retreat.

St. Mary Magdalene and the Archangel Michael are thus honored in a special way;

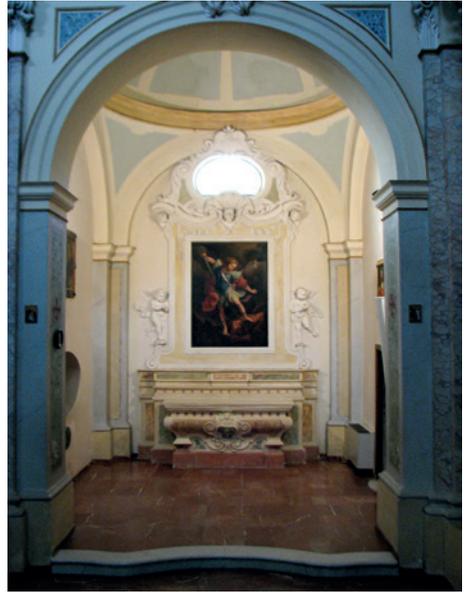
and if the mountain on which the retreat stands alludes to the historic Calvary, it may surprise the visitor to learn that the first Protector of the Congregation was St. Michael the Archangel, not the Blessed Virgin Mary presented in the temple as depicted in the painting above the central altar, in the apse of the church, to which the monastery was dedicated.

The two small chapels of the Crucifix and St. Paul of the Cross, that flank the main entrance to the church were added to the original structure in 1855.

St. Michael the Archangel was chosen as the first Protector of the retreat and of the Congregation by the Founder, Saint Paul of the Cross, and by his brother, the venerable John Baptist who, in honor of the Archangel, chose as his religious title "St. Michael the Archangel". Paul believed that the Archangel defended the work of the Congregation from its beginning, intervening with power to protect it from those who wanted to prevent them from initiating the construction of the Retreat. The material for construction came from Porto Santo Stefano at the foot of the mountain. Therefore the materials had to be carried up steep and impassable mountain paths on the shoulders of the laborers to the point where it is today. Each night, however, villains arrived and demolished what had been built during the day. However after Paul invoked the intercession of the Archangel, St. Michael appeared at the site one night in a flash of light causing the thugs to flee from the site and to desist from their evil intentions. The event was reported in the *Processi* for Paul's canonization and recorded in the *Annali* 1736.

This was only one of many moments in Paul's life when he experienced the intercession of the Archangel, beginning with his visit to one of the most renowned shrines of St. Michael the Archangel in Europe, near the Italian city of Foggia. In 1724 he and his brother, John Baptist, made a pilgrimage here on their journey to the city of Troia where they were guests of Bishop Emilio Cavalieri.

The oil painting of St. Michael the Archangel is a copy of the original painting by the artist Guido Reni in 1635 and is kept in Rome in the Capuchin church of Santa Maria Immacolata (on Via Veneto). It is an



The chapel of St. Michael the Archangel.

artistic representation of the description found in the book of Revelation: *"Then I saw an angel come down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the abyss and a heavy chain. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil or Satan, and tied it up..."* (Rev. 20: 1-3)

### Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls.

Amen.

This chapel is entitled the “Chapel of the Crucifix” because of the large 18th century crucifix. The crucifix dates from the time of St. Paul of the Cross and, as noted above, in 1741 was originally placed over the main altar so that Mass could be celebrated on the altar below and also so that the Blessed Sacrament could be reserved in the tabernacle. When the painting of the Presentation of Mary was installed, the crucifix was moved to another location and is currently located in this chapel.

The crucifix and others of this same time period may surprise someone because of its detailed graphic, even gruesome realism. It is possible that Paul of the Cross used this crucifix when he preached public missions. It is constructed of *papier-mâché* and is an example of devotional art that was also catechetical in nature since it helped the viewer to imagine the intense sufferings that Jesus endured for us sinners during his Passion. Consequently, the objective was to move the viewer to repent of his sins and change his lifestyle in accord with the Gospel and the teachings of the Church. There are also other



An 18<sup>th</sup> century crucifix used for preaching.

crucifixes from the same time period that are of a more “classical” nature and do not offer such a detailed and shocking depiction of Jesus Crucified.

### PREACHING POPULAR MISSIONS AND THE MISSION CROSS

Following are some historical notes so that the visitor may have a greater appreciation of this type of crucifix and preaching used by St. Paul of the Cross and his religious.

This crucifix and many others of this type that were used by our religious well into the 20th century were designed to be portable, i.e. light weight and capable of being reduced in size and thus easily transported. Typically, the legs and arms

of the corpus could be removed or at least were on hinges, thus reducing the overall size of the object. As explained below, the corpus could also be dramatically removed from the cross for various devotional activities.

In his work in the series “*Historical research and Passionist spirituality*”, No. 33, entitled “*The Popular Passionist Mission in Italy*”, and in his book “*La Maremma Toscana nel Settecento*” (The Tuscan Marem-

ma in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century), Fr. Fabiano Giorgini offers a description of the historical context and the type of popular mission preaching used by St. Paul of the Cross and subsequent generations of Passionists in the area of Italy between Naples and Rome known as the *Maremma*. For those who lived in the Maremma during the 1700's there were only two means of religious instruction: catechesis and preaching. Large sections of the population were employed in the fields and herding livestock. Many were illiterate and thus lacked religious instruction. Hence, an important means of religious instruction was the preaching of popular missions, public spiritual exercises, and sermons during Advent and Lent. The overall purpose of the missions was to rouse the listener from spiritual lethargy through the remembrance of the origin and purpose of each person, of the future life that awaits him, and the definitive judgment of God. These sermons were generally welcomed by the listeners, urging them to change their way of life. The catechetical instructions then better enlightened the faithful about God, about the duties of their own state in life and helped them to prepare for a good confession with the missionaries to whom they could open their souls with greater freedom and confidence than with the local clergy.

During the period of the 1700's various preachers, among them the Redemptorists and the Passionists, preached using theatrical effects and drama to help common people to meditate on the death

of Jesus on the cross. Additionally, the purpose of the preaching and the liturgies regarding the Passion was to urge those present to imitate the Savior who forgave those who crucified Him, by forgiving others as they desired to be forgiven.

The preachers frequently constructed a platform or a raised stage area from which they preached and on which a large mission crucifix such as this one was erected. Frequently, during the meditation, the crucifix, that was previously on the platform, was brought from the sacristy accompanied by the clergy carrying lit torches. As soon as the crucifix arrived at the stage, the missionary addressed the image of Jesus on the cross with feelings of great pity and devotion. Then he showed the crucifix to the people,



St. Paul of the Cross preaching during a mission.



“Oh, if the fruit of these missions would only last.”

as he knelt down before it and placed a crown of thorns on his own head and rope around his neck. [In fact, St. Paul of the Cross died with this kind of rope around his neck, and it is preserved in the room where he died in Rome.] He asked forgiveness from the clergy and the people for any possible shortcomings that he committed towards them and invited those present to also examine themselves and to ask forgiveness for their sins and to ask one another for forgiveness.

Sometimes there was a ceremony called *the removal of the nails* from the body of Jesus on the Cross. Each of the nails was used to symbolize a sin or sins. As the listeners were willing to repent of these sins, one of the nails was removed from the cross, until the body of Jesus

was totally freed. Then there was the ceremony of the deposition of Christ from the cross and the procession with the effigy of the dead Christ.

In a letter dated 20 June 1742, Paul wrote to Abbot Count Pietro Garagni—“*Oh, if the fruit of these missions would only last. Blessed people! In all trust they came out totally purified, at peace, and without scandals. But the deplorable shame is that in a few places there are a few who make themselves as a wall for the House of Israel. Ah, sad world! In what evils you stand! How many sins flood over you! Faith is tepid; piety is chilled almost to the ground.*” Hence the Crucifix and the preacher must continue to proclaim that the Passion of Jesus “is the greatest and the most overwhelming work of God’s love!”

### **Prayer to Christ on his Cross of Love**

God of compassion, Creator, and Redeemer of mankind, You sent your only Son into this world to die that we might live, and to restore us to your friendship, lost by the sin of Adam. Keep before our eyes the mystery of Christ crucified, so that we may preach to the world the redeeming love of your Son. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

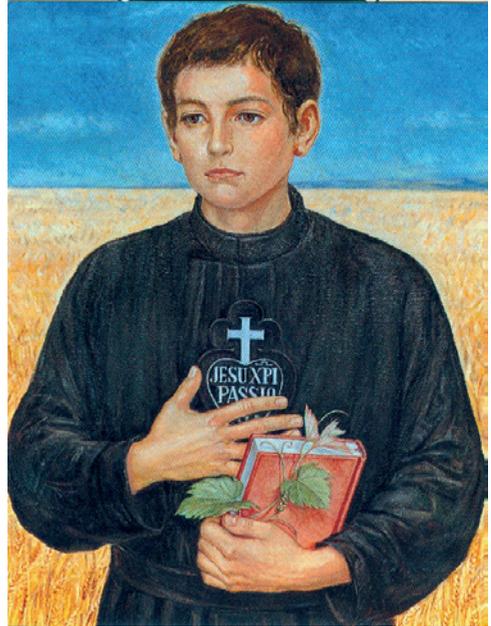
Amen.

(Solemn Commemoration of the Passion)

Also located in this chapel is an urn containing the remains of a young Passionist novice whose cause for canonization is in process. Following are some biographical notes.

Galileo was born on 17 June 1882 in the town of Capranica, near the major city of Viterbo. His family noted that even from a young age, he seemed to possess extraordinary intellectual and spiritual gifts. Gradually the Lord was preparing him, speaking to his heart, and he listened attentively and obediently. The Nicolini family were benefactors of the Passionists and frequently they offered traveling missionaries hospitality in their home. In February 1894 the Passionists preached a mission in the parish church of Capranica and Galileo attended. The following August, he received First Holy Communion in the Passionist monastery church in the nearby village of Vetralla. To prepare himself for this sacrament, he spent ten days at the Passionist retreat of Sant'Angelo in Vetralla. He participated in the community prayer and edified the religious. One of them noted: *"Being with him is like being with an angel."* When he returned home after his First Communion he remarked—*"During my First Communion Jesus told me that I should become a Passionist."* At the age of 12 he decided to follow the road to religious life.

On 5 March 1895 he arrived at the Passionist minor seminary at Rocca di Papa, on the outskirts of Rome where he spent 13 months as a postulant and then was transferred to the retreat of L'Angelo on the outskirts of Lucca to begin his novitiate. He was vested with the Passionist Habit on 9 May 1896 and was given the name "Gabriele"; however he would always be called "Galileo". His master of novices,



Ven. Galileo Nicolini

Ven. Nazareno Santolini, later commented— *"As soon as I met him I knew that he was a precious pearl that was given to me by God, and I felt fortunate to number him among my students... He possessed a mature and solid character, while retaining the simplicity and meekness of a child."* On 27 February 1897, the anniversary of the death of St. Gabriel, he awoke feeling ill and was subsequently diagnosed with full-blown tuberculosis. He would live only another two months.

It was decided to relocate him to Monte Argentario. He spent the last days of his life here in the infirmary of this monastery. As he lay dying he would pray— *"Lord, increase my sufferings, but also increase your grace... O God, your will be done. Ave Maria, Ave Maria."* And he added— *"Suffering because of love is not painful – because if we suffer lovingly, it becomes*

*pure love*". Suffering because of love—this was his secret. Even though he was under age, the Superior General gave permission for him to profess First Vows. He died as a Passionist in a state of holiness on 13 May 1897. He was originally buried in the cemetery of Porto Santo Stefano and his sanctity was immediately acknowledged by the local townspeople. Two years later, in 1899 his body was exhumed and relocated to this monastery church.

Pope St. John Paul II declared him "Venerable" on 27 November 1981. Subsequently, a bronze urn was prepared by the Passionist artist and sculptor, Fr. Tito Amodèi (1926-2018) and the relics of Galileo were relocated here in this chapel.

### Prayer for the canonization of Galileo Nicolini

Lord Jesus, in Galileo Nicolini, Passionist novice you offer young people and adolescents a great model of generous response to the missionary vocation. Full of trust we ask you that, if it is your will that Galileo be glorified in Your Church, you manifest it to us by granting us the particular grace that we ask of You (here mention the grace). We make our prayer through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, to whom Galileo was always fervently and lovingly devoted.

Amen.

## The right-hand side

4

### THE ALTAR OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE

In 1746, almost ten years after the dedication of the church in 1737, this altar was dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. In addition to St. Michael the Archangel, the great Protector, why an altar to St. Mary Magdalene?

In his work, "S. Paolo della Croce" (Vol. II, pp. 1212-13) Fr. Enrico Zoffoli, gathers information that explains the devotion of the Founder to this saint— "the loving and fearless witness to Passion". In the Processes for his canonization, one of the religious recalled that St. Paul referred to her as the "Co-protectress" of the Congregation and he was particularly devoted to her "because she loved Jesus Christ very much, and because of her penance and solitude." In a letter he requests to be remembered in prayer on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, "praying to this great penitent Saint to implore for me from the



"St. Mary Magdalene" -- Anton Angelo Falaschi.

loving Redeemer true compunction of my heart, and to help me to yearn, to repent with tears of love and pain for the very serious offenses made against my good God.” In summary, he saw in St. Mary Magdalene the ideal contemplative. He recommended to one of his spiritual daughters that “she should be solitary within herself, in the tabernacle of her heart, alone with Jesus [...]; listen to him by embracing his divine feet, like Mary Magdalene, and you will feel that he will speak to your heart words of eternal life.” “Do not move ... from his divine feet and stay there as did the Magdalene, who listened to the sweet voice of this loving Savior.”

This particular painting of St. Mary Magdalene contemplating the cross was painted by Anton Angelo Falaschi (1701-1768). At the bottom of the picture, in inverted form, is his signature. He was the father of two nuns, a Cistercian in

the Monastery of the Duchess in Viterbo and another, a Poor Clare in the monastery of Farnese (VT). Paul probably knew them because he had preached retreats in these monasteries. Therefore it is also very likely that it was through them that Paul met their father, whom he commissioned to do the painting.

### **Prayer to St. Mary Magdalene**

O God, whose Only Begotten Son entrusted Mary Magdalene before all others with announcing the great joy of the Resurrection, grant, we pray, that, through her intercession and example, we may proclaim the living Christ and come to see him reigning in your glory. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

## **5**

### **THE CHAPEL OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS**

On the occasion of the beatification of Paul of the Cross in 1853, this chapel was constructed. It contains a painting (1880) by Pietro Aldi (1852-1888) depicting the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus indicating to the Founder the place where this Retreat of the Presentation was to be built.

The inspiration for the painting comes from the description of a vision that St. Paul would have had between the end of 1730 and the beginning of 1731 in a clearing in the trees that was called “the palazzaccio” [the old house] because of certain ruins that were there. Based on information transmitted during the Processes for the canonization of the Founder, Fr. Giovanni Maria Cioni (1727-1796) offers a detailed version of this event.

In his work “I Primi ritiri dei Passionisti, Storia delle fondazioni (1737-1796)”, edited by Fr. Max Anselmi, p. 32 [The First Passionist retreats, History of the foundations] Fr. Giovanni Maria Cioni describes the incident as follows: “One day, while dwelling in the Hermitage of St. Antonio, and passing through the estate called St. Antonino, in the jurisdiction of Orbetello, just over a mile from the aforementioned Hermitage, seeing from the said Promontory the City of Orbetello, Paul knelt down, and as was his pious and praiseworthy custom, worshipped although from afar the Most Blessed Sacrament [down below in the cathedral of Orbetello] and also while reciting the Litany in honor of Mary most holy, and in profound meditation, it was revealed to him by the Lord, that

this was precisely the place where his Divine Providence had established, that the longed-awaited Retreat was to be founded. The precise year when this occurred is not known, but as [Paul] himself stated on a certain occasion, that after such a clear revelation, the Lord made him await the fulfillment of the inspiration for about eight years. Therefore it can be clearly inferred that he received this inspiration during the early years that he was living at the hermitage of St. Antonio. Thus with the approval of the Most High the first Retreat on Monte Argentario was founded in a very delightful and pleasant setting due to the views of the distant sea and of the land that is always verdant due to the continuous fresh breezes in summer as well as winter. It is well supplied with the necessary water and abundant wood, and benefits from temperate climate (being a peninsula of the sea).”

An interesting detail that the artist presents in the painting is that the panorama of the city of Orbetello corresponds to the reality of the area in 1733, the time period of St. Paul of the Cross, i.e. that the embankment connecting the mainland to the island did not exist. In fact, it was only



Paul of the Cross' inspiration to found the first Retreat.

in 1842 that the roadway was built that unites Argentario to Orbetello. Therefore, St. Paul and the first Passionists had to be ferried across the lagoon every time they wanted to access Monte Argentario.

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## FINAL NOTE

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Behind the main altar of the sanctuary of the church, is the “choir” (chapel) of the community. (See Chapter 5 for a description of this room according to Passionist tradition.)

In 1990 the then Province of the Presentation began renovation work on the community sector of the retreat. Part of the work included this “choir” (community chapel). The work was entrusted to the Passionist sculptor and artist, Fr. Tito Amodèi. He designed the semicircular monastic seating of walnut wood and painted the frescos of the Stations of the Cross.

Of historical importance is the image of “The Madonna of Monte Argentario” above the altar. Following is a translation of the plaque at the right side of the altar describing the image. It refers to the Napoleonic invasion of Italy and the occupation and sacking of the retreats and the sacrileges committed by the soldiers in May 1799.

(From the “Platea” of the community of the Presentation, Vol. I, p.62)

*“There was and there still is located in the Choir a very beautiful image of Mary*

Most Holy that is enclosed behind glass. It was brought to this Retreat [in 1745] by Fr. Thomas of the Holy Side [1706-1780, when he joined the Passionists], who later became Bishop Struzziere [of Todi-Amalia]. He used it when he preached missions prior to joining the Passionists. However this sacred image was the object of insults by villains, one of whom struck it numerous times with a sword, breaking the glass into pieces, and desecrating the holy image. And while conscious of what he had done, if that was not enough, he took it outside the church (I do not know what his original intentions were, but surely they were not noble). However Mary Most Holy wanted to remain with us because when our religious later found it in the area of the Macchia, they immediately took it and brought it to a safe place in Port'Ercole." [Probably after a certain period of time, some of our brothers or lay employees went to look for wood for the kitchen in the forest and they found the image of the Madonna. They brought it back to the retreat and repaired it as best as they could.]

The oil on canvas painting, 70 x 94.5 cm. is attributed to Carlo Maratta (Cam-



The Madonna of Monte Argentario.

erano, 15 May 1625 – Rome, 15 December 1713) Unaware of the title of this image of the Madonna, on 8 May 1958, after a Marian pilgrimage in the three towns of Porto S. Stefano, Orbetello and Port'Ercole, we Passionists proclaimed it to be the "Madonna of Monte Argentario".



## THE CRYPT (BENEATH THE CHURCH)

Outside in the piazza in front of the church, there is a door that leads down into the crypt below the church. In 1988, in conjunction with the 250th anniversary of the foundation of the retreat, work was begun for the general renovation of the retreat. In September 1990, the Passionist architect, Fr. Ottaviano D'Egidio prepared this area of the crypt as an oratory for prayer and the celebration of Mass with small groups. The Passionist artist, Fr. Tito Amodei, executed various works of art for the locale that include a statue of St. Paul of the Cross and a space for the remains of various Passionists, and in particular of two religious and a laywoman who were intimately associated with St. Paul of the Cross and this Retreat.



The space dedicated to three historical Passionist figures and other Passionists.

### The left-hand side

## — THE SHRINE OF THREE HISTORICAL PASSIONIST FIGURES —

Behind the large cross of interlaced iron bars are the remains of three individuals whose lives are intricately connected with St. Paul of the Cross and the early days of this Retreat – the Passionists Brother Giuseppe Pitruzzello (di Santa

Maria), Fr. Fulgenzio Pastorelli (of Jesus) and the laywoman, Agnese Grazi. Following are biographical notes to help the visitor to better appreciate these historical figures.

### BROTHER GIUSEPPE (OF SANTA MARIA) PITRUZZELLO (1722-1768) -- THE FIRST LAY BROTHER OF THE CONGREGATION

Born in Augusta, Sicily in 1722, because of his small stature, he was usually referred to as Brother “Giuseppino” (little Joseph). He was orphaned at an early age, and sub-

sequently was entrusted to an uncle to learn a trade. Even as a child, he was pious in nature. He was taken to Naples to be a servant to a military officer, but soon af-

terward he took him with him to Orbetello. There he heard St. Paul of the Cross preaching and was so impressed that he asked to become a Passionist. He was vested in the holy Habit on 11 June 1741, the same day on which the Pope officially approved the Congregation, and when the first religious made their profession of vows. He became the first lay brother of the Congregation. He exercised the offices of cook and mendicant (questuante). The Founder often took him with him on missions. He was very energetic, and it is said that he did the work of three men. He was humble and faithful in everything, and a deeply prayerful man.

He died at the age of 48, while he was on the quest in the village of Giuncarico, in the province of Grosseto, on 21 April 1768. Many graces were received through his intercession, both when he was still alive and after his death.

He was originally buried in the church of the novitiate of San Giuseppe. However on 12 May 1929 his remains were placed in a small urn and were moved here to the

church of the Presentation and were placed near the altar of St. Michael the Archangel. However, during the general restoration of the retreat and church, that included work on the crypt, his remains were transferred to this shrine-space in 1990.



Bro. Giuseppe Pitruzzello.

**FR. FULGENZIO (OF JESUS) PASTORELLI (1710-1755)  
-- THE ALTER EGO OF THE FOUNDER**

After the two Danei brothers, he is among those who initially joined the Institute and became a member of the first communities that Paul established in various places. Additionally, Fr. Fulgenzio was the first religious who persevered until his death in the Congregation in 1755. He was born in Pereta, near Grosseto on 17 June 1710. He was initially ordained a diocesan priest in 1733. However soon afterward he met the two Danei brothers while they were preaching in the towns of Santa Flora and Magliano. When they came to preach in his hometown of Pereta, he was filled with youthful enthusiasm, and he began

to collaborate with them in their pastoral activity. Fascinated by their holiness and entirely in accord with his own ascetical aspirations, he decided to follow them in religious life. He joined Paul and John Baptist in the hermitage of Sant'Antonio in 1735 and he was among the first who professed vows with them in 1741.

He was the among the first religious who totally embraced the charism, appropriated it, identified himself with it, and confirmed its validity as a means of human development and eternal salvation. In particular he lived an austere lifestyle to the



Fr. Fulgenzio Pastorelli.

point of exaggeration, even so much so as to endanger his health, much to the consternation of Paul. It is said that he was an authentic continuation of the Passionist charism entrusted to the Danei brothers. Consequently from this date, 1741, until his

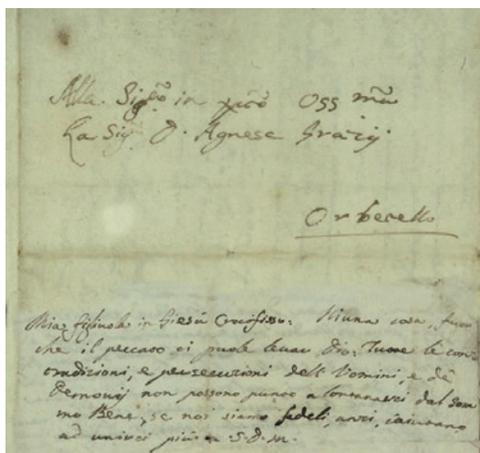
death he was almost always master of novices on Monte Argentario. In 1746 he was also rector of this retreat for a few months and then, the following year, he was appointed rector of the retreat of Sant'Eutizio. Additionally he was a fervent preacher and spiritual director. We have numerous letters written to him by St. Paul of the Cross concerning many practical and spiritual affairs of the fledgling Congregation.

He died on 16 April 1755, at the age of 45, in the house of the Grazi family (see below, Agnese Grazi) in Orbetello. He was greatly esteemed by everyone and generally judged to be a very holy man. St. Paul of the Cross held him in very high regard and was deeply grieved by his death. In fact, the Founder said— “He could surely be canonized”. (Zoffoli, III p. 1708). Two former Superiors General, Fr. Giovanni Maria Cioni and Bl. Bernard Silvestrelli wrote biographical sketches about him in which they highly praised him for his holiness and administrative skills. His remains are located here in this crypt.

**AGNESE GRAZI (1703-1744) LAYWOMAN, SPIRITUAL DAUGHTER, AND BENEFACTRESS**

Agnese was the daughter of Marcantonio Grazi, the captain of the Military Garrison of Orbetello, the capital of the State of the Presidi. She was born in Orbetello in 1703. Her mother died when she was 12 years old, however she was well cared for and educated by her father and in particular her brother who was a priest.

In 1730 she attended a mission preached by the Danei brothers in Talamone, a town not far from her family estate. She was very inspired by their preaching and in particular by the person of St. Paul of the Cross. She asked to meet with Paul and eventually made a general confession of her life to him. This encounter became



A letter of St. Paul of the Cross to Agnese Grazi.

a spiritual turning point in her life, a true conversion experience. Paul eventually became her spiritual director and he guided her through 165 letters of spiritual direction that comprise the spiritual legacy of the Founder. They had a true spiritual affinity for each other. However, although Paul had great respect for her, he did not refrain from admonishing her, while at the same time observing with amazement, the movement of the Holy Spirit in her life.

In 1734, because of political reasons, the Grazi family had to flee Orbetello and went to live in the city of Viterbo. There Agnese took up residence in the Dominican nuns' monastery in the city. It was during this time period that there was copious correspondence between Agnese and Paul. The family returned to Orbetello in 1737, and it can be assumed that she was present at the inauguration of this retreat on 14 September 1737.

Returning to Orbetello, Agnese lived a life of intense prayer, without however orienting herself either to marriage or to consecrated life. One of the reasons for this hesitation was her fragile health. In fact, in Viterbo she was diagnosed with a serious, incurable illness which caused her great suffering. Paul of the Cross' letters to her testify to his concern for her and his



encouragement in the face of what was a true sharing in the Passion of Jesus, that would soon lead to her death. During the last days of her life she had the grace of hosting Paul of the Cross, who was recovering from an illness in her family home. He assisted her at her death that occurred on 6 June 1744, at age 41. On 7 June, at Paul's request, she was buried in the crypt of this church as a sign of his gratitude for being a benefactress of the Congregation, as well as his spiritual daughter. Her remains lie in this crypt. (See Chapter 7 for the location of the Grazi family home in Orbetello and the plaque placed on the outside of the home by the Passionists in 1998.)

### The right-hand side

There are showcases in this area that contain various objects used by St. Paul of the Cross while he lived here. Particularly noteworthy is the historical first stone that was placed in the foundation of the Retreat on 4 March 1733. As noted above, it bears the roughly-written inscription—"DIO TI SALVI 1733" (May God save you).



The foundation stone: "DIO TI SALVI 1733"

## 5. THE RETREAT OF ST. JOSEPH



The retreat/novitiate of St. Joseph

The retreat of “San Giuseppe” was the tenth retreat founded by St. Paul of the Cross and the second retreat that he founded on Monte Argentario. Up until then the novitiate had been at the Retreat of the Presentation; however, Paul judged that this was not a good location for young novices because it overlooked the then stagnant waters of the Orbetello lagoon which was infested with mosquitos during the summer time and consequently, posed a health threat for contracting malaria. Therefore, he built the novitiate on the northern side of the mountain, above Porto Santo Stefano and facing toward the city of Talamone.

The site where the retreat of St. Joseph currently stands was chosen by the Founder in the first days of November 1753, during the novena of the Presentation. The day after he arrived at the community for the visit, he sang a hymn to St. Joseph and then “outlined with his staff the place for the church and for the retreat with all the necessary and oppor-

tune components...” (Fr. Giammaria Cioni, *History of the Foundations*).

Since the land was the property of the State of the Presidi, the next morning he went to Orbetello and he asked Giuseppe Ignazio de Masdeu, the king’s minister and *intendente generale*, to obtain from the court of Naples “a royal dispatch”. On 23 November de Masdeu wrote to Charles III, and from the latter he received a favourable response on 5 December. The deed of concession was granted on 12 April 1754.

In addition to offering the young novices a place with more salubrious air, he also hoped that the former rooms of the novices in the retreat of the Presentation, could then be used for ten or twelve retreatants. In the Autumn of 1755, the work of the construction began. It was done in great part by Passionist Brothers who dug the rocks for the foundation, prepared the lime, and did the carpentry work, etc. The retreat was inaugurated in July of 1761. At that time the decision was made that the two communities of the Presentation and St. Joseph should be considered as one sole community. It was only in 1914 that the administration of the two retreats was separated.

On 23 December of that year 1761, the first novices were vested with the holy Habit. Paul was sick in bed and could not be present for the opening of the retreat and only saw it in March 1762. However, in the introduction to the decrees he issued on this occasion he recalled the scope of the work: “*This retreat has been founded to serve as a novitiate and to be a seed-*

*bed of saints to provide the Congregation with stalwart and competent men, who will be intimately united with God by charity, will work for the salvation of souls by being sonorous trumpets of the Holy Spirit, and will proclaim to all men the sufferings of Jesus Christ - the most efficacious means for the destruction of sin - and to urge souls to perfection.”* He placed the novitiate under the immediate dependence of the local Superior and concluded by exhorting him *“to guard with the utmost diligence this holy retreat as a sanctuary entrusted to him by the Lord to raise up for Him holy and truly apostolic*

*men who will be the pleasing fragrance of Christ in every place and in them the most holy Name of Jesus Christ will be glorified.”* (Annali, 450)

It served as a novitiate from 1761 until the 1970s, with repeated interruptions, due to the lack of resources and to political and social events. In the tradition of the Passionists, however, it has always remained “the Novitiate”. Since 1975 the retreat has been destined as a house of prayer and hospitality for priests, religious, and lay people.

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## VISITING THE RETREAT

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As noted above, one of the important ways to understand the charism that Paul of the Cross sought to concretize in the Congregation of the Passion is to visit and study the “retreats” he designed and built, because they were inspired and constructed with a very specific purpose-- to gather men who, detached from everything, would live solely for God, at the foot of the Cross together with the Sorrowful Virgin Mary. For this reason the retreats would always be located in areas that would provide silence and solitude. They would be simple, yet adequate, nothing superfluous, everything enabling the recollection of the Passion of Jesus. Unfortunately, of all the retreats founded by St. Paul of the Cross none has remained basically unchanged-- except for this Novitiate of St. Joseph.

The nucleus of the church and the retreat is formally more homogeneous than the retreat of the Presentation. The church, on the south side, has a unique shape, almost circular, and seems to be larger than it is due the height of the cupola. It can be accessed from the ground floor of the retreat as well as from the

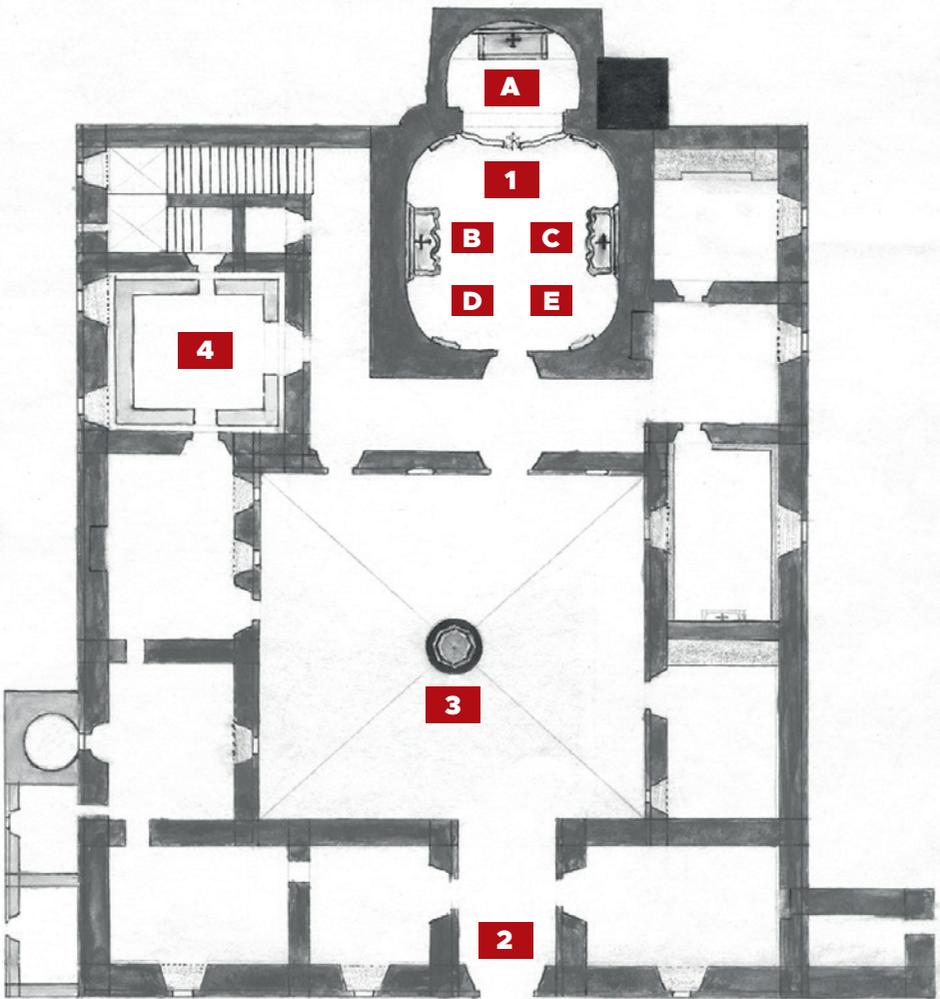


“Blessed solitude; the only happiness”

upper floor where the community choir is located with a balcony overlooking the church. It is surrounded on three sides by the cells of the retreat.

The retreat, on the other hand, is four-sided, approximately 20 x 20 meters (65 x 65 feet) and is arranged around an inner courtyard with a cistern for water in the center. On the north side, the building has a doorway that opens out toward the sea. As is the norm, those rooms needed for community life are located on the ground floor. The cells of the novices and the other religious are on the upper floor.

## THE GROUND FLOOR



### (1) The Church

- (A) Main altar
- (B) The Altar of Our Lady of the Rosary
- (C) The Altar of St. Paul of the Cross
- (D) Plaque 1
- (E) Plaque 2

### (2) The Main entrance

- (3) The courtyard with the cistern
- (4) The refectory

## THE LOCATION

Anyone visiting the novitiate is immediately impressed by its lovely location. It is at an elevation of about 300 meters (almost 1,000 feet) above sea level and dominates the Gulf of Talamone and the Lagoon of Orbetello. When there is good visibility, one can gaze along the Tyrrhenian coast from Amiata to Piombino and discern the islands of Elba and extreme details of Corsica. For obvious reasons St. Paul of the Cross chose a location for the novitiate which would combine good air quality with an enchanting setting. In fact, at the entrance gate to the retreat there are two plaques which immediately inform the visitor about the essence of the building and the site. On the left hand side the plaque states: "AER PURIOR + COELUM APERTIUS + DEUS FAMILIARIOR" (Pure air – Open skies – Intimacy with God). The plaque on the right hand side contains a quotation attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux-- "O Beata Solitudo – O Sola Beatitudo" (The Latin phrase, literally translated, means Blessed solitude; the only happiness. This phrase is used to emphasize that only by separating oneself from temporal desires and from others is it possible to find tranquility for the soul and true happiness.)



"Behold your Mother"

## THE FAÇADE OF THE RETREAT

The façade, while very unpretentious like the rest of the building, has elements that contrast with the simplicity of the whole structure. The marble ashlars

(stones finely cut into squares that serve for building construction) of the central doorway were part of the fortress of the city of Talamone.

### 3

### THE COURTYARD

Once inside there is a small courtyard which is surrounded by the original walls. In the center is a cistern originally used to collect rainwater from the roofs; currently the cistern is used as a wine cellar. Subsequently a marble statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary was placed where the cistern

was originally located. During the Jubilee Year of 1950, the statue was moved outside to the promontory, near the statue of St. Joseph and the Child Jesus. On the pedestal there is a Latin inscription-- "*Ecce Mater Tua*" (Behold your Mother).

### 1

### THE CHURCH

Moving through the courtyard and a corridor is the entrance to the small church. It is modest in size because it was only intended for use by the novices; yet its simple elegance served to give the novices a sense of the importance of divine worship.

The church is square-shaped and beveled at the corners. The very high ceiling ends in a "false" cupola that is embellished with paintings depicting scenes from the life of St. Joseph (the marriage of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the flight into Egypt, the Holy Family in Nazareth, and the death of St. Joseph) attributed to the 18th century Roman painter, Nazareno Diotallevi. The cupola is considered "false" because it not visible from the exterior of the church and is covered by an ordinary roof in the form of a circular "lantern". It extends beyond the body of the church in the form of a small semi-circular apse that surrounds the main altar and the presbytery.

There are three altars currently containing paintings of St. Joseph, our Lady of the Rosary and St. Paul of Cross presiding at a Vestition which was commissioned by the General Curia on the occasion of the Beatification of St. Paul of

the Cross. The painting of St. Joseph, by Antonio Cavalucci (1752-1795), is the only one of the paintings that was commissioned and installed at the time of St. Paul of the Cross. It contains a unique feature-- in most paintings of St. Joseph with the Child Jesus, the Saint holds a flowering staff, symbol of his authority as the head the Holy Family; however in this painting it is the Child Jesus who bears the staff. Due to high level of humidity in the church and the fear that these paintings done on canvas would be irreparably damaged, it was decided to make copies of the painting of St. Joseph and Our Lady of the Rosary. Therefore these paintings currently in this church are copies of the originals and were replicated on slate panels rather than canvas. The original paintings on canvas can be found in the original refectory of the Presentation retreat.

Originally the Founder indicated that the two side altars were to be dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows and to the young Polish Jesuit saint, Stanislaus Kostka. Therefore paintings of these subjects were placed above these altars. However, after the beatification of St. Paul of the Cross (1853) a painting (by an anonymous artist) of the Founder in the act of presiding at a Vesti-



“St. Joseph and the Christ Child”,  
Antonio Cavalucci

tion of a novice was brought to the novitiate and replaced the painting of St. Stanislaus Kostka. Subsequently, a painting of Our Lady of the Rosary, also by Antonio Cavalucci, replaced that of Our Lady of Sorrows.

On the wall above the entrance are two commemorative plaques. The plaque on the left reads: *“This temple, erected under the patronage of St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was dedicated to God. With the consent of the commendatory abbot it was consecrated with a solemn ritual on the 9th day of June 1779 by the bishop of Montalcino, Giuseppe Pecci. The relics of Saints Desiderius, Aducto and Leontia, martyrs, were placed in the main altar. The anniversary day of its dedication is established as the 9th of November.”* The plaque on the right contains quotations from the book of Revelation (Rev. 21:3) and the book of Genesis (Gen. 28:16-17): *“Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. + How awesome this place is! Truly, the LORD is in this place [...] This is nothing else but the house of God, the gateway to heaven!”*

By dedicating the Retreat and the church to St. Joseph, St. Paul of the Cross entrusted the Saint with the care and protection of the church, the retreat, and the novices.

## THE UPPER FLOOR OF THE RETREAT (1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR)

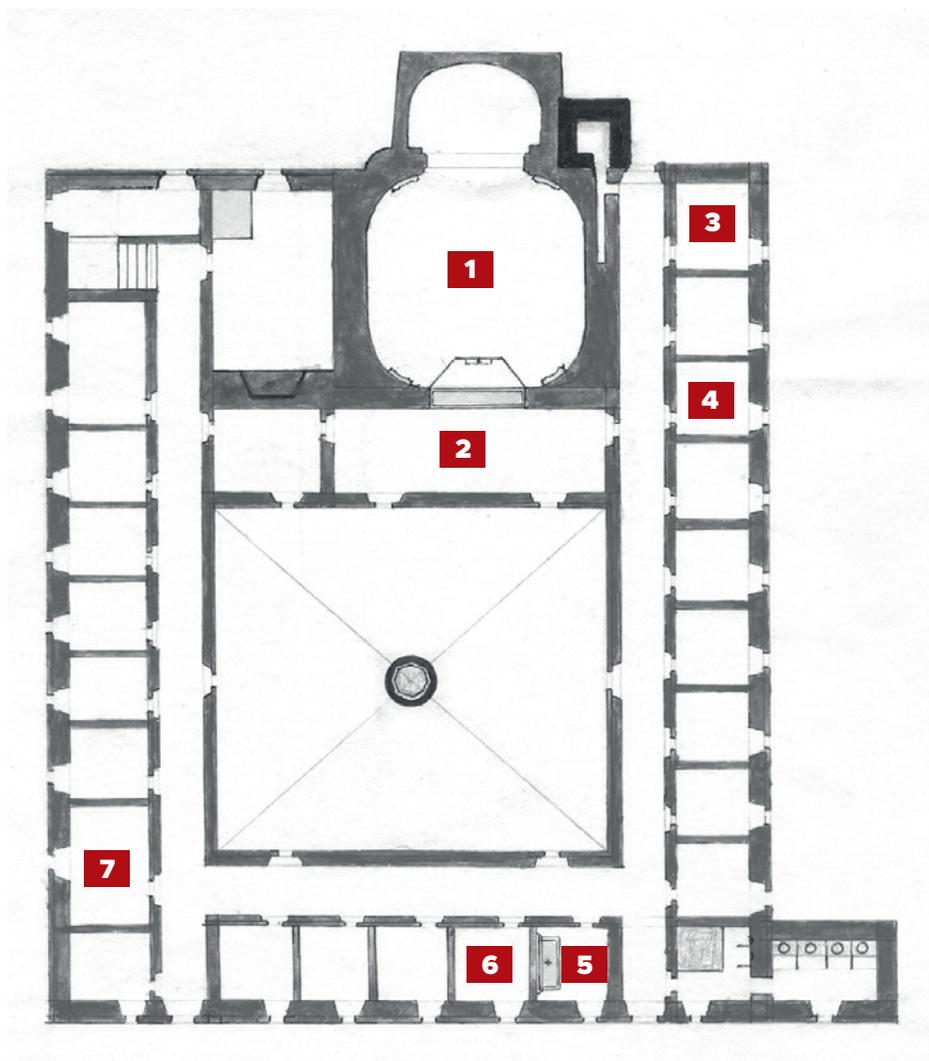
### 2

### THE CHOIR

In this retreat the choir is located on the upper floor and is accessed via a staircase that was significantly modified compared to the original one. In Passionist tradition, the place in the Retreat where the community prays is called the “choir” (rather than the more common name “chapel”) because the religious are divided into two groups for praying the psalms in a “dialog” fashion, i.e. praying alternately the verses of the psalms, or singing hymns. In his

book entitled *“La vita quotidiana dei Passionisti”* (*The daily life of the Passionists*, 2019, Effata’, p. 70), Fr. Tito Paolo Zecca (MAPRAES) offers a valuable description of this important element of a Passionist retreat, which may be especially helpful to keep in mind when visiting this retreat designed by the Founder. *“Every retreat had to have a room, called a choir, for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, for personal and community prayer as stipu-*

## THE UPPER FLOOR



(1) The Church

(2) The Choir

(3) Cell-Nazareno Santolini

(4) Cell-Giuseppe Molajoni

(5) Cell-The Founder

(6) Cell-Vincent Strambi

(7) Cell-Bernard Silvestrelli

lated by the Rule and the liturgical norms of the Congregation. It was used day and night and was, in addition to a religious' own room, the most frequented community location. It had to be internal and contiguous to the church. It could be located either on the ground floor or on the upper floor, however it needed to be easy to access, with a capacity proportionate to the religious community and of harmonious proportions. It had its unique sacred nature, simple and at the same time solemn, and was and is one of the most important places of the retreat complex.

The benches (choir stalls) had to be placed along the walls, raised a little from the floor with a platform, similar to that of the refectory, with a backrest, a seat, a kneeler, and a lectern (reading stand used to support a book in a convenient position for a standing reader or speaker.) The places occupied by the religious Brothers did not have a lectern; however, the choir was the same for the brothers, as well as for the clerics. In each place there was a small shelf to store books. Under the shelf, until the first decades of the twentieth century, there was a "spittoon"

(cuspidor) filled with calcium oxide [...] All the furnishings had to be of wood without refinements. Against a wall in front of the stalls there was an altar or a shelf on which a sacred image was placed. Along the walls there was the Stations of the Cross and other religious paintings [...]"

The choir of this retreat is a long and narrow room with sturdy walnut choir stalls that were the gift of the Passionist bishop Giuseppe Molajoni [Molaioni] (1780-1859) (see biographical note below) who enhanced the furnishings of the whole room. In the center of the choir there is an arched opening that allows a view of the church below. On the grill in the center is perhaps the most distinctive work of art of the whole novitiate -- an image of Our Lady of Sorrows that is attributed to Tommaso Conca (1734-1822). As is noted below, it was originally placed above the arch, however, in recent years the Passionist artist, Fr. Tito Amodei (1926-2018) and the Passionist architect, Fr. Ottaviano D'Egidio installed the metal grill work and lowered the painting to eye level, resting above the sarcophagus of Ven. Nazareno Santolini.

## THE IMAGE OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS

Although various authors state that St. Paul of the Cross commissioned Sebastiano Conca to paint this image of Our Lady and he that guided the artist as to how to depict the subject, it is more probably the work of Tommaso Conca, the nephew of Sebastiano.

However, before studying this painting of our Lady of Sorrows, there is an interesting episode concerning a miniature version of this subject that the artist, Sebastiano Conca, had prepared for St. Paul of the Cross, either as a trial for a larger version, or as an object that could

be used when traveling. In 1777, during the Processes for the canonization of the Founder (POR, III, 240v) a diocesan priest, Giuseppe Suscioli testified concerning the devotion of St. Paul of the Cross to the Virgin Mary. Suscioli was a canon of the cathedral of the cities of Sutri and Nepi. He met the Founder for the first time in 1742 and was impressed by his sanctity. A friendship developed between the two men and Suscioli became a benefactor of Paul and the Passionists, offering them lodging whenever they were traveling near his home in the city of Sutri as well as

offering them other forms of material support. Paul also knew other members of his family, including his niece Maria who subsequently joined the Carmelite monastery of Vetralla and assumed the name Sister Maria Dolcissima of Calvary. We have several letters that Paul addressed to both of them. Later, Giuseppe testified at the Tribunal for Paul's canonization. In particular he reported the following incident: "One day, as I was going to Vetralla to visit a niece of mine, a nun in that monastery [the Carmelite cloistered monastery], on the way I stopped in the retreat where Father Paul was and after we spoke for a while, he put his hand in his sleeve and with a big smile on his face, he took out a portrait, representing the Sorrowful Blessed Virgin, which had been painted by Cavalier [Sebastiano] Conca, at the request of the Servant of God, who had asked the artist to depict the subject as sorrowful as he could. Then he said— 'Take it' he told me, 'I give it to you, because the expression [on the face of the Virgin Mary] is not as sorrowful as it should be. I saw her more sorrowful than this.' I gave the image to my niece [Maria Suscioli, the nun at the Carmelite monastery] and it is preserved in that monastery among other religious images."



Subsequently, Sebastiano Conca may have returned to the subject, and produced a final, larger version that Paul approved and accepted. As far as is known, there is no record of such an item. However, according to the Platea of the retreat of San Giuseppe, the history of the image of Our Lady of Sorrows that is currently in the choir dates to approximately 1820. In the years just prior to this date, the Italian political situation became very difficult due to the Napoleonic invasion. The suppression of religious institutes began and became widespread in May 1810. The Passionists, including those at Sts. John and Paul and the two retreats on Monte Argentario, as well as the other retreats, had to leave these communities and return to their hometowns. Upon the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, the Passionists took steps to return to community life.

The novitiate of San Giuseppe was reopened in 1815. However, during the years that the community was absent from the retreat it was inhabited by French troops. When the religious returned they found that it had been stripped of its furnishings. In the Platea of the novitiate we read that the Superior General, Fr. Tommaso Albesano (1752-1820) was aware of the "deplorable state of this retreat, and also of the severe poverty of the retreat of the Presentation. When the novices stopped in Rome [to visit him while on their way to Monte Argentario] he gave



The choir with the image of Our Lady of Sorrows and the tomb of Ven. Nazareno Santolini.

them several good books, some simple woolen blankets, but in good condition, several copper vessels, iron utensils for the kitchen, and two beautiful paintings with gilded frames-- one of [which was] Our Lady of Sorrows, which [subsequently] was placed in the middle of the choir above the arch.”

Apparently it remained in place in the choir of the novitiate until another period of political unrest in Italy in 1865—the “Risorgimento” and the annexation of the Papal States by the newly formed Italian Republic. In 1866 religious institutes were suppressed and the two communities on Monte Argentario had to be vacated. In December of that year, officials of the Italian government appeared at the retreats

to take possession of them. Again in the Platea of the novitiate we read that the officials did an inventory of the surrounding lands and of all the furnishings. However, the officials conducted themselves “with moderation” and the image of our Lady of Sorrows in the choir was spared. It was only in 1880 that the novitiate was reconstituted, and the novices and the professed religious returned to the retreat.

Thus hundreds of novices, including outstanding religious such as Ven. Nazareno Santolini and Blessed Bernard Mary Silvestrelli, prayed before this historic image. It silently remains as a testimony to the tumultuous and rich history of the Passionist Congregation and the triumph of the power of the Cross over evil.

## THE ADJOINING CORRIDOR AND THE ROOMS OF THE RELIGIOUS

From the choir one moves into the section where the individual rooms (cells) of the religious are located. There is a narrow corridor, which goes around on three sides, that is airy and graceful due to the arched vault ceiling. Spaced throughout the corridor are 20 tiny rooms in which

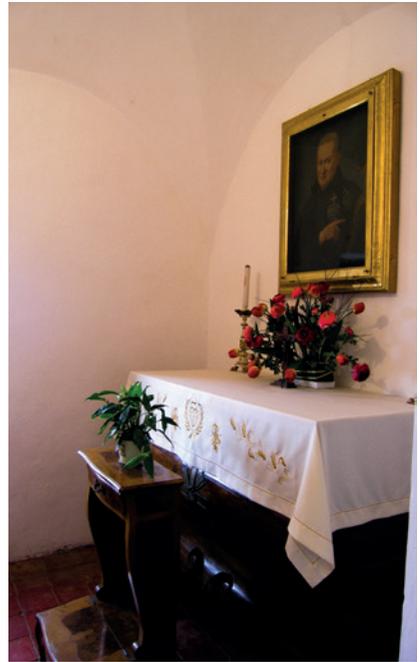
the novices lived. Each one measures about 6 square meters (20 square feet) with a sail vault, has a small window of 60 x 80 cm. (approx. 2 square feet) and the only furniture is a bed, a small table, two chairs, a crucifix, and a very simple sacred image, i.e. the bare essentials.

5

### (No. 9) THE ROOM OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

Some very holy and eminent men lived in some of these rooms. Among them was our Founder, St. Paul of the Cross. The room is number 9 and above the door there is a plaque with a Latin inscription: "Cubiculum S. Pauli a Cruce" (Cell of St. Paul of the Cross). He stayed in this room whenever he visited the novitiate. The last time that St. Paul lived here was in 1770, shortly before he moved into the retreat of Sts. John and Paul in Rome in 1773. It was subsequently transformed into a small oratory (chapel). The altar, made of walnut wood was the gift of the Passionist Bishop Giuseppe Molajoni.

In the room there are several relics of the Saint: a fragment of a cilice (hairshirt of sackcloth worn as a penitential practice) and in particular the first Passionist Sign worn by him. It is made totally of cloth, and it bears the seal of its authenticity of Fr. Giovanni Cioni, the confessor of St. Paul of the Cross. It is said that our religious placed it upon the sick and many of them were granted miraculous healings.



The cell of St. Paul of the Cross.

### THE ROOMS OF OTHER NOTEWORTHY RELIGIOUS

- Bishop Giuseppe Molajoni [Molaioni] (1780-1859)
- St. Vincent Mary Strambi (1745-1824)
- Ven. Nazareno Santolini (1859-1930)
- Bl. Bernard Mary Silvestrelli (1831-1911)

The plaque on the door of this room states: “Bishop Molaioni, the bishop of Nicopolis (Bulgaria), lived in this cell for 12 years and died here.” Despite the brevity of the inscription on this plaque, the life of this heroic missionary bishop and humble and zealous Passionist religious merits some brief biographical notes.

Fr. Giuseppe Molaioni was born in Rome on 25 March 1780. He entered the novitiate in 1803. He professed vows in 1804 and was ordained a priest in 1806. However, this young religious and priest began community life and ministry in a tumultuous political period in Italy and Europe in general. In 1796 the French army commanded by Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Italy. In 1804, he was crowned Emperor of France, and in 1808 the first suppression of religious institutes began in Italy. Its culmination was in 1810 with the general suppression of all religious institutes and the deportation of Pope Pius VII. The Molaioni family offered to shelter the Provincial of the Presentation Province, Fr. Paolo Luigi Pighi, Fr. Gioacchino Pedrelli, Brother Giorgio Pariggiani and Fr. Giuseppe himself in the Merlano Villa of the Molaioni family near Viterbo. Soon, however, only Fr. Giuseppe remained there, and became the parish priest of the nearby church of Santa Maria delle Farine. However, the priests of the area, who had almost all taken the oath of loyalty to Napoleon, persecuted Giuseppe, who in 1811 was relegated to the city of Civitavecchia, until 1813, the year in which he followed the other Passionists who were deported to Corsica and imprisoned in the Donjon of Bastia.

With the defeat of Napoleon, the Pope returned to Rome and the religious in-



Bishop Giuseppe Molajoni.

stitutes were restored. Upon reentering community, Fr. Giuseppe was elected the rector of the retreat of San Sosio (Frosinone); however in 1815 he was sent as a missionary to Bulgaria. In 1820 Molaioni was elected Vicar General for the whole mission. These were years of great difficulty and persecution by both the Muslim Turks and some Orthodox Christians. In 1825 he was elected Bishop of Nicopolis. He was ordained a bishop in the Basilica of Sts. John and Paul on 25 September 1825 by Cardinal Giuseppe Maria Spina. Returning to Bulgaria he soon had to face all the traditional scourges of humanity: war, hunger, and sickness. He also had to endure false accusations against poverty from the Congregation for Propaganda Fide in Rome and also from some of his fellow religious in Italy due to the fact that in Bulgaria they were living a lifestyle different from that of their confreres in their homeland and, in particular, because

many were functioning as parish priests, something explicitly forbidden by the Passionist Rule of that time.

In 1847, at the age of 77, Bishop Molioni, weakened by the painful experiences of life and of the missions, asked to be relieved of his responsibilities as bishop and he retired to the novitiate of San Giuseppe on Monte Argentario. There he participated in all activities of community life, including its daily prayer both day and night. He used the pension that he received from the Holy See for various restorations of the monastery (see above). He wanted to buy the entire hermitage of St. Anthony, but in 1854 a serious famine occurred, and he destined these funds for the poor.

Shortly after St. Paul of the Cross was beatified in 1853, he consecrated the newly erected altar that was prepared in the room where the Founder died at Sts. John and Paul [Note: this altar was removed during the restoration of the room in 1967]. In 1855 he ordained Blessed Bernard Silvestrelli a priest in the retreat of the Presentation. Silvestrelli, in turn, always remembered him with great affection. In his last surviving letter he expressed his joy to the Superior General, Fr. Antonio Testa, at the printing of the biography of Father Domenic Barberi and he offered a contribution toward the cost of the publication. Here was one Passionist missionary rejoicing in the life of another great missionary. He died on 16 July 1859 and was buried here in the crypt in the floor of the church.

## 5

### (No. 10) ST. VINCENT MARY STRAMBI

The plaque on the door of this room reads: “St. Vincent Mary Strambi lived in this room during his novitiate in 1768-1769).” Although the interior of this room is no different from the others in this corridor, the visitor may want to take a moment to read some biographical notes about this outstanding religious and saint of the Passionist Congregation.

St. Vincent Mary Strambi was born in the city of Civitavecchia, north of Rome, on 1 January 1745. He discerned a vocation to the priesthood and was ordained a diocesan priest in the diocese of Viterbo on 29 December 1767, at the age of 22. However, he felt drawn toward religious life. During a mission preached by St. Paul of the Cross in Civitavecchia, he met the Saint and was impressed by his holiness and missionary ardor. Subsequently he requested to enter the Congregation and as was noted, he made his novitiate here.

Vincent was a great missionary. He tirelessly devoted himself to promoting Christian life among the people of his time. He preached about the Passion of Jesus throughout almost all of Italy. At the request of the Pope, he often preached in the city of Rome to the local clergy and especially to the cardinals, bishops and prelates of the Roman curia and the papal court. For the opening of the Holy Year of 1775, Pope Clement XIV entrusted him, together with St. Paul of the Cross, with preaching to the people of Rome in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere.

Vincent also wrote books on the lives of the saints and the spiritual life, including one on the Precious Blood to which he had special devotion. He was an eminent spiritual director guiding, among others, St. Gaspare Del Bufalo, Blessed Anna Maria Taigi, Venerable Maria Luisa Maurizi and Maria Clotilde Adelaide of Savoy. He was the first biographer of St. Paul of the Cross.



St. Vincent Mary Strambi

In 1801 Pope Pius VII appointed him bishop of the Italian cities of Macerata and Tolentino where, with tireless apostolic zeal, he worked to reform the clergy and the people, proving to be a true Shepherd of his flock. He lived an austere, penitential, and exemplary life. In 1805 Napoleon Bonaparte began to occupy the Papal States, including the city of Macerata. During this political upheaval Vincent was a fearless advocate for the freedom of the Church. In 1808 he chose an unjust and painful exile rather than the unlawful oath of allegiance to Napoleon in accord with the political machinations.

When he returned to his diocese after nearly six years of exile spent in Novara and Milan, he resumed his pastoral activities with even greater zeal. However, after many years of suffering, exile, and poor health, he asked the Pope to be allowed to return to religious life in one of our monasteries and to prepare himself for death.

In 1823, Pope Leo XII reluctantly accepted his resignation as bishop of the diocese. However, the Pope wanted him to be with him for spiritual support as his adviser and confessor. He took up residence with the Holy Father in the Quirinal Palace in Rome. Every day he would go to the Basilica of Sts. John and Paul, where he was consecrated bishop, to pray at the tomb of St. Paul of the Cross. In December 1823, the Pope became seriously ill.

On 23 December, Vincent was called to administer the Sacrament of Viaticum to the dying Pontiff. With great effort the Holy Father whispered to him, "*Vincent, I had always thought that I would declare you a saint, however another Pope will have to do so.*" Vincent responded, "*Have courage your Holiness; the Lord will not deny the Church its pastor in these difficult times. There is a person who will offer his life for your recovery.*" On the 24th, Vincent celebrated Mass, offering his life for the Pope. Shortly afterward, the Pontiff began to recover and on 1 January 1824, Vincent died in the Papal palace.

3

### (No. 11) VENERABLE NAZARENO SANTOLINI

The plaque on the door of this room reads: "The Servant of God [currently "Venerable"] Nazareno of [Mary] Immaculate lived in this room for 24 years." Again, since the interior of this room is no different from the others in this corridor, the visitor may want to take a moment to read

some biographical notes about this noteworthy religious who dedicated his life to the formation of future generations of Passionists. In fact, for over 29 years he was master of novices for many religious of the Italian provinces. Generally this ministry is the most delicate of all of the phases of

initial formation since this period of time the future religious begins to understand and be conformed to a particular charism, in this case, the Passionist charism. Father Nazareno garnered the esteem of his superiors so much so that he was entrusted with the ministry of formation throughout most of his religious life.

Nazareno was born in the Italian city of Caldarola in the province of Macerata in 1859. He was the son of a medical doctor and therefore belonged to a family that was financially stable. He enjoyed a lifestyle that was not common in Italy at that time, including extensive opportunities for education. At the age of 12 he began studies in the renowned Capranica College in Rome. He studied there for the next ten years eventually obtaining a doctorate in philosophy and a licentiate in theology.

He made his novitiate at Sts. John and Paul in Rome from 1881-1882 and was ordained a priest in 1883. That same year he was immediately named Vice-master of novices. He assumed various positions of responsibility in different retreats of the Congregation, however it was in the novitiate of St. Joseph where he spent the longest period of his life doing formation ministry. Especially in this retreat, Fr. Nazareno profoundly lived the silence and solitude that are central to the Passionist lifestyle. He was humble, unassuming, silent, and prayerful. The unifying element of his spirituality can be considered the pure and total acceptance of the will of God, that



Ven. Nazareno Santolini

was strengthened by a continuous awareness of being in God's presence and by a deep desire to do everything for the honor and glory of God. Thus by his lifestyle and his instruction he taught generations of young Passionists that everything starts from our relationship with God, from listening to God, and from prayer.

The life of Fr. Nazareno ended as it had unfolded. After considerable suffering that he experienced in the last years of his life, he died placidly in the novitiate of St. Joseph on 4 January, 1930. The process for beatification was begun in 1949. He was declared venerable in 1989. As was noted above, his remains are located in the choir of this retreat where he spent hours of his life in prayer and meditation.

**7**

**(No. 15) BLESSED BERNARD MARY SILVESTRELLI**

The plaque on this room states: "The Servant of God [Blessed] Fr. Bernard Mary Silvestrelli lived here." Below are some biographical notes concerning this outstanding Passionist Superior General.

Blessed Bernard Maria Silvestrelli was born in Rome on 7 November 1831 of a noble and wealthy family. He was ordained a priest at Monte Argentario (Grosseto) on 22 December 1855 and made his religious

profession on 28 April 1857 in Morrovalle (Macerata) where his fellow novice was St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin.

He held various important positions in the Congregation– Director of students, master of novices, local Superior, Consulor and Provincial Superior. Finally, he was Superior General for 25 years. Reluctantly, Pope Pius X accepted his resignation as Superior General due to ill health; but he retained the honorary title of Superior General. He died on the outskirts of Rome in the retreat of Moricone on 9 December 1911. He is currently buried in the church of that retreat.

The period during which Father Bernard was Superior General was one of the most turbulent in the history of the Congregation. There were various internal problems caused by its presence in new countries, as well as the political storm that led to the suppression of religious orders. He worked for the expansion of the Institute while safeguarding its charism that was threatened by those who attempted to reduce the importance of the communal and contemplative aspects of our life. He established pre-seminaries for young men who wanted to be Passionists.

In his ministry as Superior General, he experienced many joys but also many sufferings. He lived the joyful moments with gratitude, and he faced the difficult times serenely and patiently, humbly, and yet with determination. He was an enlightened and prudent superior, paternal and unwavering, intuitive, wise, and insightful. He was able to address concrete projects, linked to sound traditions and was open to new ventures.

This holy Superior General continually called the religious to be faithful to the



Blessed Bernard Mary Silvestrelli

Founder and he constantly invited them to remain anchored in the traditions of the Institute and to draw genuine vitality from them in dealing with new situations. During his tenure as Superior General, the Congregation enjoyed an extraordinary flowering of ministry, vocations, and new religious houses. At his death, he had doubled the number of religious, monasteries and provinces.

Above all, Blessed Bernard was a holy religious and superior, filled with wisdom that was the fruit of prayer and God's grace. He used his family's wealth for the good of the Congregation, while personally living in great and beloved poverty. He wrote many books to raise awareness of the Passionist charism and to protect it.

Pope St. John Paul II beatified him on 16 October 1988.

## 6. EXPLORING ADDITIONAL SITES OF PASSIONIST INTEREST ON THE MOUNTAIN

Before leaving the mountain, one may want to visit other sites on the Mountain that are associated with the Passionists. For those who are physically able and

who may want to do some hiking, they are accessible by foot; otherwise, by auto they can all be visited during the course of 2-3 hours.

### 1) THE ROAD BETWEEN THE TWO RETREATS OF THE PRESENTATION AND ST. JOSEPH (SAN GIUSEPPE)

Over the years, the uphill road between the Retreat of the Presentation and the Novitiate of San Giuseppe was trod many times by the Founder and innumerable other Passionists. The actual distance between the two retreats is approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile (0.8 Km). Additionally, the Passionist bishop, Giuseppe Molajoni (see Chapter 5) is said to have measured

the distance between San Giuseppe and the Presentation and discovered that it corresponds to the distance between the *Pretorium*, the palace of Pilate [in Jerusalem] and Calvary. Following are several sites to visit on this road, and two other sites that are located south of the Retreat of the Presentation and father down the mountain.

#### THE SPRING OF WATER OF JOHN BAPTIST DANEI

Upon leaving the Retreat of the Presentation and beginning the ascent to the Novitiate, the visitor will come upon a local open-air restaurant. It is called “La Sorgente” (The Spring) because of a miraculous event that occurred here in the year 1733. A marble plaque with a base relief of the scene and a Latin text describe the episode. That year, during the excavation work for the foundation of the Presentation retreat, there was an urgent need for water. In the company of several religious, the brother of the Founder, Fr. John Baptist, with a crucifix in his hand, processed into the woods in search of water. At a certain point he dug deeply in the ground and immediately a spring of water gushed forth. Even today, at certain times of the year, this spring of water is still visible. The plaque was erected in 1927.



The Latin text of the plaque attests to this event:

DEFICIENTE AQUA EXTRUENDO RECESSUI/ P. JOANNES BAPTISTA/ S. PAULI A CRUCE GERMANUS/ COMITANTIBUS FRATRIBUS/ EFFOSSA TERRA A. D. MDCXXXIII/ HANC AQUAM USQUE MANANTEM INVENIT.

Translation: "In 1733, since there was no water for the construction of the Retreat, Fr. John Baptist, brother of St. Paul

of the Cross, accompanied by the religious, dug in the ground and discovered this source of water that still flows."

## THE PASSIONIST COMMUNITY CEMETERY



The Passionist community cemetery/mausoleum.

Continuing along the road is the Passionist community cemetery. Originally the religious who died in the two retreats on the island were buried in the respective churches of the retreats, as was already noted in the biographies of some prominent religious, in particular those whose cause for canonization is in process. At times (see Galileo Nicolini) they were even

buried in the public cemetery of Santo Stefano and Port'Ercole. However, in 1900 it was decided to build this small mausoleum to contain the remains of the religious that were exhumed from these churches. of the two retreats. In addition to an area for the unidentified remains of the religious, there are also individual niches for some of the more recent burials. It is usually closed, however the local religious of the Presentation retreat can provide access.

Additionally, next to the cemetery there is a small way-side shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary that was erected in 1927 May 1983 during the Holy Year. The inscription on the plaques that was placed here during the Holy Year of 1983 reads: IN QUESTA TERRA SON PELLEGRINO/ GUIDAMI O MADRE/ NEL MIO CAMMINO (On this earth I am a pilgrim/ guide me, o Mother, along the way)

## THE STATUE OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

In 1927, by the will of the Provincial of the then Presentation Province, Father Alfredo of St. Joseph (Cacialli), a large statue of St. Paul of the Cross was commissioned and placed on the road between the two Retreats. The statue of Carrara marble was sculpted in the town of Pietrasanta, in northern Tuscany. It weighs two tons and took 9-10 days to transport it from the foot of the mountain to this place where it was eventually installed on its pedestal.

The beautiful sculpture portrays St. Paul of the Cross facing the lagoon of Or-

betello, with his arms outstretched as if to embrace and protect the two Retreats. The statue was inaugurated on 3 July 1927 in the presence of the entire General and Provincial Curias and was blessed by the Superior General, Fr. Silvio Di Vezza (1849-1929). Additionally a beautiful iron cross was placed in front of the monument.

The Latin text on the plaque reads:

DIVO PAULO DANEIO A CRUCE/  
PATRI LEGIFERO/ IN HOC EDITO COSANI  
MONTIS JUGO/ UNDE LATOS TERRAE  
MARISQUE TRACTUS/ CIRCUMSPICIENS/  
AD COELESTIA RAPIEBATUR/ UBIVE PRI-



The commemorative statue of St. Paul of the Cross.

MUM JESU XPI MILITES/ BELLO IMPIETATI  
LICENTIAE INFERENDO/ CONGREGAVIT  
INSTITUIT/ UTI DUO QUAE HIC CONDID-  
IT ASCERTERIA/ TOTAMQUE PER ORBEM  
FAMILIAM/ SOSPITET AUKEAT TUEA-  
TUR/ SODALES A CRUCE ET PASSIONE  
JESU/ ANNO DNI. MCMXXVII/ M.P.

Translation: “To Saint Paul of the Cross, father, and founder, in this place that descends from Monte Cosano [ancient name of Monte Argentario] surrounded by the land and the sea, was captivated by heavenly things, where previously war had raged, he gathered and founded the followers of Jesus Christ, and built two retreats so that the whole family, spread throughout the world, might be defended, grow, and spread. The religious of the Passion of Jesus in the year of our Lord 1927 erected this memorial.”

Additionally a beautiful iron cross was placed in front of the monument.

## 2) THE HERMITAGE OF ST. ANTHONY THE ABBOT (SANT'ANTONIO)

Located below the two retreats of the Presentation and San Giuseppe and off the main road, there is the site that was the first dwelling of St. Paul of the Cross and the first Passionist religious on Monte Argentario.

After several year's absence from Monte Argentario, in March 1728, Paul and John Baptist returned to the Mountain, this time as ordained priests. However, upon their arrival they discovered that during their absence another priest had taken up residence in the hermitage of the Annunciation and he was not willing to let the Danei brothers share it with him. The newly appointed bishop, after learning about them and hearing their story about

meeting the Pope at the *Navicella* church in Rome and seeing the Apostolic Brief, was content to let them stay at another hermitage, Sant'Antonio, and furthermore, he allowed them to welcome others who might want to join them.

In October of that same year, Paul wrote to his friend Don Erasmo Tuccinardi at the Shrine of La Civita in Gaeta. He told him about this new hermitage which he said was “most suitable for seeking the highest perfection”, being very far from town. (Lettere V, 18) It was, he continued, “a small Retreat with only two rooms and the church; but the recollection and holy silence here would keep us in peace even if we were a hundred.”



The Hermitage of St. Anthony the Abbot.

The local bishop, Bishop Palmieri, described life in the hermitage as follows (see G. Cioni, *Storia delle Fondazioni*): *“They are priests who follow their own Rule, wearing a very rough black habit next to their bare skin; they always go barefoot, with head uncovered. Living from what is spontaneously given to them, they observe a continual Lenten fast in the hermitage, and the little rest they have is taken on straw. They celebrate the Office in their little church, both during the day and in the middle of the night, and the remainder of their time they spend in mental prayer and study.*

*The senior of the group, Paul, ministers as a missionary with zeal and fervour, going from one diocese to another giving missions; this year he has given missions*

*in my diocese and is now about to go to Piombino and other places in the Diocese of Massa, in this Province of Siena. His younger brother, John Baptist, goes with him and gives catechesis, preaches spiritual exercises to the clergy, and hears confessions. Both of them do a great deal for the spiritual growth of the people both by their good example and by the word of God.”*

As time went on, others joined Paul and John Baptist in the hermitage to the degree that it became too small to accommodate all who wanted to join them. It was at this point in 1731 that Paul decided that the time had come to prepare a proper “Retreat” for him and his companions. Construction on this new retreat began in 1733.

## VISITING THE HERMITAGE OF SANT'ANTONIO

Currently the Hermitage is privately owned. However, in agreement with the Passionists, the owner occupies the up-

per floor of the house, whereas the lower floor is maintained somewhat as it was at the time of St. Paul of the Cross. With the

permission of the owner, a day and time can be arranged for a visit.

Basically there are three rooms—a chapel, a kitchen/refectory, and a common room. Following are translations of the plaques on the wall of each room.

### (1) BENVENUTI - WELCOME

In this Hermitage of St. Anthony, St. Paul Danei of the Cross (Ovada 1694-Rome 1775) began the first Passionist community with his brother Giambattista, in March 1728. Here there was a shed that stood in front of the door of the hermitage and served as a kitchen. The garden offered herbs, legumes, and wood in abundance.

On 14 September 1737, the community of religious moved to the new retreat of the Presentation, however they had to return every day to the chapel of the hermitage to celebrate the Eucharist until 11



The chapel of the Hermitage.

June 1741 when, the Rule was approved by Pope Benedict XIV, and it was possible to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the church of the Presentation.

### (2) CAPPELLA [THE CHAPEL AND EVERYDAY LIFE]

The primary concern of the solitary devotees was for the Chapel-- they swept the floor, removed the cobwebs full of insects and dust, cleaned the old confessional, and adorned the altar.

In the middle of the night they would get up for two hours of meditation. Early in the morning they did another hour of meditation and celebrated the Eucharist. They spent the remainder of the morning until noon in the nearby woods for personal study.

Their meals consisted of a little bread that they received as alms, watered-down wine, herb and legume soup, and a meal of dried meat or fish. After lunch they spent a short period of time in recreation. They prayed Vespers and then returned to the woods for study or personal prayer until 5:00 P.M. This was followed by the fourth hour of meditation and the recitation of the rosary. Then two more hours of study, supper, and sleep.

At night, instead of going to sleep, Paul often retired to the woods for prayer and penance.

### (3) SALA COMUNITARIA [THE COMMON ROOM]

The Hermitage had three rooms-- two on the ground floor and one room upstairs that was as large as the two rooms on the ground floor.

The upper room was a dormitory. The beds consisted of small bags of straw that were raised above the brick floor on planks of wood. Each straw sack [bed]

was separated from the other by a canvas curtain. There was a modest library and an alarm clock for rising at night [for prayer]. In winter, the rain dripped profusely from the battered roof.

The lower room, adjacent to the chapel, was both sacristy, dining room, study

hall and recreation room. As the number of religious grew, the room was used as a dormitory.

The solitary religious used the nearby woods as a place of refuge for penance, contemplation, and personal study.

### (3) THE MONUMENTAL CROSS ON THE “PREDICATORE” (PREACHER) HILLTOP

Continuing the ascent from the two Passionist retreats, and somewhat off the main road, there is a large iron cross (19 meters/ 62 ft.). One of the initiatives of the Holy Year 1933 was the erection of this cross on a hilltop called the “Preacher” on Monte Argentario. It is a favorite destination for hikers because of its panoramic scenery. The *Platea* of the Presentation retreat offers a detailed description of its dedication.

“The Jubilee Year 1933, and exactly on April 28, the feast of St. Paul of the Cross, a monumental cross 19 meters high was inaugurated on the hill named the “Preacher”, in memory of 19 centuries of the Redemption. The expenses of the great iron cross were borne by several committees under the direction of the Rector, Fr. Antonio Casini. [...] The cross and the chapel below were blessed by Cardinal Camillo Laurenti [in the presence of the religious of the two retreats, as well as the Superior General, Fr. Tito Finocchi, the Secretary General, Fr. Mauro Liberati, and other civil authorities and many people of the surrounding communities.] That evening, and on the following two evenings, the cross was illuminated.” There are two marble plaques on the pedestal of the cross:

(1) “This monument/ was erected with the offerings of the civil authorities and the neighboring people/ under the direc-

tion of Most Rev. Fr. Antonio, Passionist Rector/ during the Pontificate of Pius XI/ the King of Italy Vittorio Emanuele III/ the Duce, Benito Mussolini/ 1934- XII Year of the Fascist Era.”

And (2) “This emblem of the saving Cross, widely visible to Etruscans and Latins, and this being the 900th year of the Redemption, and the 100th year of the foundation of the first House [retreat] will be a perpetual reminder for others.



The Monumental Cross.

On the highest peak of Mount Casano, where St. Paul of the Cross had decided that there should be Religious of the Cross and Passion to preach Jesus Crucified to the people by land and by sea.

They established the Jubilee Year 1933 for the growth of the flourishing faith under the auspices of His Holiness, Our Lord, Pope Pius XI, with Tito of Jesus [Finocchi], Superior General (and) Alfredo of St. Joseph [Cacialli], Provincial.”

The *Platea* continues with a glimpse into the sufferings of community and citizens of Argentario and the neighboring communities during World War II.

“On 27 January 1944, war episode occurred concerning the Retreat of the Presentation. In the afternoon, while the Community was in choir for the spiritual sentiment after vespers, the religious were terrified by the sudden and close roar of airplanes and violent volleys of machine guns. The Anglo-American Air Force was machine-gunning the monumental cross erected on the Mountain in the centenary year of the Redemption, hitting the three sides of the base facing east, but without damaging it too severely and obliterating two letters of the central inscription ‘X. P.’ There was never a clear reason for this attack. Perhaps the Allied forces suspected that it was a German outpost.”

In May of that same year, another attempt was made to destroy the Cross. Again the *Platea* offers a detailed description of the event. “During the fourth year of the war and exactly on 22 May 1944, the German authorities decided to demolish the monumental cross located on Mount Predicatore. The order executed by a German Marshal assisted by a marshal of the Italian navy, who without warning, attempted to demolish the cross. They used mines that were placed at the

base of the four iron supports that held it, and it fell toward the west. [...] The reason that the German authorities gave for the demolition of the cross was that it was a point of reference for allied aircraft. [...] After four years of war and the destruction of the towns of Porto Santo Stefano, Porto Ercole and Orbetello, including this **Monumental Cross**, it was restored and relocated on its pedestal.”

*At this point the visitor may want to spend a moment in prayer.*

***Pope Francis’ Meditation for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 2014***

“When we look at the Cross where Jesus was nailed, we contemplate the sign of love, of the infinite love of God for each of us and the source of our salvation. The mercy of God, which embraces the whole world, springs from the Cross. Through the Cross of Christ the Evil One is overcome, death is defeated, life is given to us, hope is restored. This is important: through the Cross of Christ hope is restored to us. The Cross of Jesus is our one true hope! That is why the Church “exalts” the Holy Cross, and why we Christians bless ourselves with the sign of the cross. That is, we don’t exalt crosses, rather we exalt the glorious Cross of Christ, the sign of God’s immense love, the sign of our salvation and our path toward the Resurrection. This is our hope.”

“We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world!”

## 7. THE CITIES OF PORTO ERCOLE AND ORBETELLO

There is ample information available through various sources (eg. internet) in various languages concerning the history and present reality of these seaside towns. Therefore this Guidebook offers only some brief generic information about them and instead will concentrate on places of Passionist interest in these two

locales. Additionally, as explained below, Paul of the Cross' ministry was within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Porto Ercole and the diocese of Sovana Pitigliano. Although John Baptist and Paul ministered in Porto Santo Stefano, however Porto Ercole and Orbetello would be of greater interest to a Passionist.

### PORTO ERCOLE

Porto Ercole, along with Porto Santo Stefano are the two major resort towns on the Island. Its name means “Port Hercules” and was first mentioned in 1296, when Margherita Aldobrandeschi, countess of Sovana, ordered the construction of a tower named Torre di Terra, in the oldest part of the town. It has two harbours--Porto Vecchio, the old town's port, and Cala Galera, located on the northern bay. It is also famous because in 1610, the Italian Baroque painter, Michelangelo Merisi, better known as Caravaggio, exiled by Pope Paul V and on his way back to Rome, died in an infirmary attached to the church of Sant'Erasmus in Porto Ercole. He was originally buried in this local church of Sant'Erasmus (St. Erasmus – see below). Today there is a monument to his honor in the town.

In 1722 when Paul of the Cross obtained authorization to live in a hermitage on Monte Argentario, he was assigned the hermitage of the “Annunziata” (the Annunciation) which was within the parish of Porto Ercole and the diocese of Sovana Pitigliano. This explains why initially he

practically had an exclusive relationship with the churches of Porto Ercole and the diocesan priests. When he began to live at the “Annunziata” Paul was not yet a priest,



The principal entrance to the Rocca Aldobrandesca fortress.

so every Sunday he went down to this village to attend Mass. After Castellazzo Bormida, Porto Ercole was the first place where Paul was allowed to minister as a spiritual guide, catechist and preacher.

Currently, the town has three churches—Sant’Erasmus, San Rocco (St. Rocco), and St. Paul of the Cross. Of particular interest to Passionists is the church of Sant’Erasmus (Erasmus).

## THE CHURCH OF SANT’ERASMO



The Church of Sant’Erasmus.

This small church is of particular interest to Passionists because it was the first site of the missionary activity of St. Paul of the Cross in the years 1722, 1729-1730. It is located at the highest point of the historic section of the village. Its foundation dates from the time of St. Gregory the Great in the 6th century who erected the church in honor of the Patron Saint of sailors, Saint Erasmo of Formia. Over the centuries it was renovated and enlarged, including an oratory that was added in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

The church is divided into two naves, one main and one side facing the sea. The ceiling of the main nave is supported by original trusses of the seventeenth century. On the right, there is the chapel of

the baptistry, with a beautiful baptismal font in polychrome marble. In the apse of the church is the main altar in polychrome marble, of Renaissance style. At its base are marble tombstones which cover the tombs of the nobility and governors of Porto Ercole. The first chapel on the left of the entrance contains a fresco depicting the martyrdom of St. Erasmus.

Every Saturday St. Paul left the hermitage of St. Anthony and descended to Porto Ercole. Here he frequently spent the entire night in Eucharistic adoration. On Sunday morning, after celebrating Mass, he made himself available to the faithful, hearing their confessions for many hours. In the afternoon he walked through the

narrow streets while ringing a bell and invited the people to go to the church to listen to the word of God. The pulpit, which bears the date of 1718, was used by him. While Paul ministered in Porto Ercole, his brother John Baptist did the same in Porto Santo Stefano.



The pulpit used by the Founder in the church of Sant'Erasmus.

The church lost its importance during the mid-twentieth century, when the parish church of San Paolo della Croce (St. Paul of the Cross) was built in 1966 in the newer part of the town. The church is a modern building consisting of two vaulted chapels. In 1986 it was combined with the former parish of St. Erasmo. Consequently the historic church of Sant'Erasmus is only open for some Masses and on special occasions.

*At this moment, we invite the pilgrim to pray for those who are engaged in the ministry of evangelization.*

### Prayer

O God, whose will it is that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, look upon your abundant harvest and be pleased to send workers to gather it, that the Gospel may be preached to all creation and that your people, gathered by the word of life and sustained by the power of the Sacraments, may advance in the path of salvation and love. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

(Roman Missal)

## ORBETELLO

Although there are only several sites of Passionist interest in this city, it is important to recall Paul of the Cross' involvement in its history during a period of particular political turmoil. At this point it would be helpful to review the political situation in this city at the time when Paul of the Cross arrived and was trying to establish himself and the fledgling Congregation on Monte Argentario, while he ministered to the

faithful in the surrounding areas. The following offers a glimpse of a young, zealous, and courageous Paul of the Cross.

In his book, "Fascino e Mistero" (2019), Fr. Max Anselmi states that *"It would be difficult to calculate all that Paul accomplished on behalf of Orbetello and its human, moral and Christian advancement, because there are no terms of comparison.*



The Co-Cathedral of the Assumption.

*However, one can say with certainty that he did a great amount, in fact an enormous amount.”* Years later, Paul reflected on the deplorable moral status of the city at the time of his arrival, certainly due in part to the presence of foreign soldiers. It was through the various missions that Paul preached in the city, his ministry of spiritual direction, Confession, catechesis and surely the very presence of the religious of the retreat who also ministered in the city as well as to those who came to them in the retreat, that the moral and spiritual climate of the city greatly improved.

However, Paul’s ministry in the city was not only of a spiritual nature. He also ministered as a military chaplain, caring for the sick and wounded of the Austrian and Spanish troops that occupied and fought in the city. Additionally he made delicate political interventions to save the city and its citizens from possible death and destruction by the warring factions. During the Processes for his Cause of beatifica-

tion and canonization, Fr. Giovanni Maria Cioni noted that Paul intervened with the Spanish General, Don Jaime Guzmán y Dávolos Spínola, the Marquis De La Mina on behalf of the local citizens. He states: *“He similarly demonstrated heroic charity when, in 1735, they besieged the Presidi of Tuscany, and subsequently the Spanish bombarded the fortress of Monte Filippo. The Servant of God stood in the battle-field, under the cannon fire, to hear the confessions of the wounded soldiers and to help them to die well. And when the cannons fired in defense of Monte Filippo, against the Spanish forces, he was warned to take cover and get out of the line of fire. However, this was not the end of his heroic charity.*

*Having known and understood that the Lord Marquis De La Mina, the General of the Spanish army (who had placed himself under the spiritual direction of the Servant of God, and whose confessor he was at that time, and who loved and esteemed*

him very highly), had decided, as an act of war, to destroy all the vineyards of the citizens of Orbetello and to bomb the city, he knelt at his feet, and since only he knew what to say, he pleaded for mercy towards that poor and so beloved city. Accordingly, he obtained the grace which he so desired". Because of these heroic acts of charity, again Fr. Max states that "Orbetello should declare Paul 'Salvator Patriae'" [the Savior of the City] (p. 116).

*At this point, one may want to pause and pray for peace and peacemakers...*

### Prayer

O God, who have revealed that peacemakers are to be called your children, grant, we pray, that we may work without ceasing to establish that justice which alone ensures true and lasting peace. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Roman Missal)

## THE CO-CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION

This is the co-cathedral of Orbetello and is the main church of the municipal territory. Probably built on the ruins of a Roman temple of the fifth century AD, there are records attesting to the expansion of the building in 1201, and substantial rebuilding work was carried out between 1370 and 1376 at the behest of the Orsini family. In 1582 it was erected as a collegiate church by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, while in the following century it was again enlarged with the addition of the two aisles and the dome of the chapel of San Biagio (St. Blase) – the patron saint of the City. In 1981 it was elevated to the status of co-cathedral of the diocese of Pitigliano-Sovana-Orbetello.

Inside are interesting works of art including a nineteenth-century tempera painting with Our Lady enthroned among angels against the background of the Orbetello lagoon. Of interest to Passionists is the Confessional assiduously used by St. Paul of the Cross and the religious of the Presentation Retreat. It is located in the left side aisle. Before leaving this church, the visitor may want to reflect on this extremely important aspect of Paul's ministry not only here, but in every other place

where he preached missions and did spiritual direction. The following excerpt is from the one-volume Italian language biography of St. Paul of the Cross by Enri-



The confessional used by St. Paul of the Cross.

co Zoffoli-- "San Paolo della Croce", 1975, p. 271] The author refers to the Founder as "A Martyr of the Confessional".

*"[The Sacrament of] Confession was of vital importance to St. Paul of the Cross since it was the setting in which he could conclude his extensive missionary activity in a highly positive way. So that every person had the opportunity to have access to him, he organized his time schedule with ingenious foresight. There was no place or hour when it was not possible--and even easy--for everyone who so wished, to meet with him, including criminals who needed to take advantage of the night to avoid falling into the hands of the law. While his preaching service during the mission was well attended, generally the confessional was the most crowded.*

*Many also came from "distant provinces", greatly intensifying his work. Every day he would be "nailed" in place, hearing confessions for ten to twelve hours each day. He was patient, gentle and understanding, and although he could be challenging, he was extremely pastoral. He was able to immediately discern the nature of the matter and go directly to the essentials, thus leading the penitent to true interior transformation.*

*In particular, he knew how to assign penances that were feasible, because he understood that they fulfilled the dual*

*function of atonement and healing, aiming ultimately to re-establish one's relationship with God. This process often went beyond the simple acquisition of grace, to that of guiding the individual along the most demanding paths to sanctity.*

*When the penitents left him, even their faces seemed transfigured. One poor man, overcome with contrition, began to beat his breast with a stone, and he would have done severe harm to himself if Paul had not controlled him. Another fainted at his feet. Obviously, these are extreme cases. However, they demonstrate how effective and incisive was the sacramental ministry of a missionary who was endowed with all of the perfect charisms of a true 'minister of the Gospel'."*

In this church, we invite the pilgrim to pause and prayer for those who celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, both penitents and confessors.

### Prayer

O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of those who call upon you and forgive the sins of those who confess to you, granting us in your kindness both pardon and peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Roman Missal)

## THE HOUSE OF AGNESE AND THE GRAZI FAMILY

### The first benefactors of Paul of the Cross and the Congregation

This house is located on Via Giosuè Carducci near the entrance to the city. Currently it is privately owned and consequently is not accessible to the public. However, on 18 October 1998, a plaque was placed on the house, and it reads:

"This building of the noble Grazi Family, was the house of the first benefactors of St. Paul of the Cross' Congregation and the home of his first disciple, Agnese Grazi, noted for her sanctity of life (28.01.1703 – 7.6.1744) The Passionists of Italy and the world place this plaque in eternal remembrance. Q.M.P."

While visiting this site it is worth noting the relationship that Agnese and her family had in relation to the nascent Congregation and, in particular, to the construction of this first Retreat and the beginnings of the Congregation of the Passion. The Grazi family, while living on the outskirts of the city in a materially poor area, was one of the most prominent families of Orbetello. As was noted, Agnese's father was the military commander in the city. Eventually, a spiritual bond developed between the family and Paul of the Cross. They made their financial resources and their home available to supply many of the needs of the small Passionist community of Argentario. To better understand the close relationship between Paul Danei and the Grazi family one can note the numerous occasions when Paul of the Cross and his religious received fraternal and charitable hospitality in the Grazi house that included moments of brief rest while they did

errands in Orbetello, or while they traveled between preaching assignments. They also were guests there for long or short periods of convalescence from illness, having access to areas of the home that were normally accessible only to the family. Writing to Giovanni Francesco Sances, a mutual friend of the Passionists and the Grazi family, Paul stated that there was "no house of greater benefactors of our Congregation than this one".

Consequently, there was no way for Paul to repay the generosity of the Grazi family except by pledges of prayerful remembrance and perpetual appreciation as testified by the burial of three members of the family in the church of the Presentation Retreat: Agnese (1744), her brother Vincenzo (1766) and Maria Giovanna, his wife (1799). However, it is Agnese's memory that is especially honored in the history of this retreat and the Passionist Congregation.

At this point we invite the visitor to pray in gratitude to God for the Grazi family as well as all the past and present benefactors of the Congregation throughout the world.



The house of the Grazi Family.

### Prayer

O God, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit have filled the hearts of your faithful with gifts of charity, grant health of mind and body to your servants and the benefactors of the Congregation of the Passion, for whom we humbly beseech your mercy; and through the intercession of Mary, our Mother of Sorrows, and St. Paul of the Cross, our Father, may those who have passed from this world, attain a share in eternal happiness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Roman Missal)

## THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO DI PAOLA (ST. FRANCIS OF PAOLA)

Originally this church, located in Piazza Cesare Beccaria, was constructed in the sixteenth century together with a residence for religious and was a ministry site of the Third Order of Minims of St. Francis of Paola. It was during the seventeenth century that the structure increased considerably in importance, as evidenced by the tombstones of the governors of the State of the Presidi. The church underwent numerous renovations, altering its ancient façade with the addition of Spanish details. On the main altar there is a seventeenth-century altarpiece by Andrea Comodi of the Annunciation and St. Francis of Paola and St. Blase.

This church is linked with the very beginning of St. Paul of the Cross' association with the city of Orbetello and Monte Argentario. In 1721, after Paul's unsuccessful attempt to obtain an audience with Pope Innocent XIII in the Quirinal Palace and his profession of the "Passionist Vow" before the icon of Our Lady "Salus Populi Romani" in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, he left Rome. However before returning home to Castellazzo, he decided to have a closer look at Monte Argentario. When he arrived in Porto Ercole, he visited with the senior priest who directed Paul to the old hermitage of the Annunziata on the mountain (see Chapter 2). He was pleased with the prospect of residing there and subsequently departed to request permission from the local bishop in the city of Pitigliano. He left the island and returned to Orbetello on the mainland. In his life of the Founder, Enrico Zoffoli (I, p. 250) summarizes the event: "*Proposing to stay overnight in Orbetello, in the afternoon he descended from the cliffs and continues to the Plains, reaching Terrarossa. He embarked and landed after a few minutes at the quay of Porta a*



The Church of San Francesco di Paola.

*Mare [in Orbetello]. However, since it was already late and not knowing anyone, he went to Piazza San Francesco [di Paola] - close to the Pier - and [entering the church] entrusted himself to Divine Providence. He did not wait long before a religious of the Minims, coming out of the residence, approached him, questioned him, and invited him to follow him. He was presented to the Prior who paternally welcomed him. Later he would become a good friend to Paul and his confessor."*

### Prayer

O Lord, to whom no one is a stranger and from whose help no one is ever distant, look with compassion on refugees and exiles, on segregated persons and on lost children; restore them, we pray, to a homeland, and give us a kind heart for the needy and for strangers. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Roman Missal)

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Fresco by Fr. Tito Amodei, CP, private chapel of the Superior General, Rome.



**No matter how horrible these storms may be, do not ever abandon the support of hope in God, for you will never flounder, and although at times the storm is so great and the sea so enraged and it seems your ship is being sunk, it is not so [...] The pilot who is guiding the ship is Jesus Christ, and he holds in his omnipotent arms, even in the middle of his divine Heart, the tiny ship that is your poor soul.**

*(St. Paul of the Cross, June 24, 1760)*