

The bonfire of wishes of the people of Varese

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Attention was focused on the Saint Anthony Bonfire, an event that is popular among the people of Varese, and which, also this evening, Sunday 16 January, **brought thousands of people to the city centre**. The people crowded Piazza della Motta, and great numbers watched the whole event, thanks to VareseNews' live broadcast.

The event continues to be popular, also because, as the saying goes, "Saint Anthony, with your white beard, help me find what I need". Great numbers came to the fire **to throw in their wishes, while others delegated this act to VareseNews**, who, in the early evening, headed straight for the piazza with a box full of notes, 474 to be precise. "I'm looking for someone that loves me", "I'm looking for love", "some money", "good health", "a new job", were the most popular requests made to the Saint.

The pile of wood was lit at 9 p.m. by the Mayor, **Attilio Fontana**, the parish priest, Monsignor **Gilberto Donnini**, the auxiliary bishop, Monsignor **Luigi Stucchi**, followed by the Police Chief, **Marcello Cardona**, the Colonel of the Carabinieri, De Marco, the town and regional councillors, **Stefano Tosi** and **Alessandro Alfieri**, and the Senator **Antonio Tomassini**, after the traditional procession, which started out from the statue of the saint in Piazza della Motta. At about 10 p.m., Minister **Umberto Bossi** also arrived for the celebrations.

The large pile of wood burned for several hours, as the people of Varese continued to walk among the stalls, with a nice glass of mulled wine and a sugar-coated fritter. The evening would have been incomplete without the food laid on by the association **Monelli della Motta**, this year's organisers of the Saint Anthony Festival; in addition to chips and "cotechino", they laid on a surprise for the people of Varese, **a show by fire-eaters**. The street artistes performed in front of the fire, and along the streets in the town centre, with their bolas, clubs, fire chains and fire-breathing, enchanting the children and adding a bit of magic to the crisp air that filled that town. And that was not all.

We expect to see almost as big a crowd **for the morning of animal blessings**, which will be held on **Monday 17 January at the end of the solemn mass at 11 a.m.**, followed by the releasing of balloons by children. Saint Anthony is the protector of animals, and many people bring their four-legged friends to the church courtyard for the blessing and the mass. Immediately afterwards, there will be the "secular custom" of releasing balloons, while shopping from the stalls continues.