

Relive Pope John Paul II's climb up Sacro Monte, 30 years on

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It will be a special climb up Sacro Monte that awaits the pilgrims of Varese from next Sunday. On the thirtieth anniversary of **Saint John Paul II's** visit to Santa Maria del Monte (on 2 November 1984), an unusual "open air" exhibition is opening to the public along the *Way of the Chapels*, from the first archway to the Square of the Sanctuary, which will take visitors along a historical route that recreates Pope John Paul II's walk up **Varese's Sacro Monte**.

Thirty one large exhibits, distributed along the way, will remind the people of Varese, and not only, of the significance of that exceptional presence in that unique place. The 3-metre high exhibits, placed near the chapels, will show black and white photographs, taken by the Varese photographer **Carlo Meazza**, a rare testimony to John Paul II's pilgrimage, which was marked by his reciting the rosary, with lines of people on both sides.

"I did this work for an instant book, 30 years ago, thanks to the foresight and attention of Monsignor Macchi, who personally followed the publication of the picture story that I, Giorgio Lotti and Vivi Papi told," Meazza explained. "And I'm grateful to those who've decided to use these photos again, because it's an acknowledgement of one of the main characteristics ??of photography, the endurance of memory."

In selecting the photos, preference was given to those depicting the Pope's ascent, and the presence of the faithful, in order to give the people climbing the route a kind of "temporal mirror" in which to see themselves, and to appreciate and rediscover the significance of the past experience that they can relive today. "Each stage will have three large panels, two showing the photos, one of the Pope and one of the people, and the third will show a part of the speech that John Paul II gave on Sacro Monte," explained **Gianfranco Giuliani**, who, with **Andrea Benzoni**, organised the exhibition. "Those who climb the Way of the Chapels will literally be able to relive that moment, as they follow the sequence of panels, which, incidentally, will be in the open air, and so, can be seen and enjoyed at any time, with no opening hours."

The route will begin inside the new exhibition area dedicated to Pope Paul VI and to Monsignor Pasquale Macchi, beyond the first archway; where there was once a hotel-restaurant, "La Samaritana", there will now be a lovely space, open to the public, of the Paul VI Foundation. Here, a video will be shown of the scenes filmed on that 2 November 1984, and a publication will be available, which, with the volume published by Concreo Edizioni from Varese, will guide the pilgrims to the Square of the Sanctuary, where the prayer to the Virgin, written ??by Pope Paul VI and recited by Pope John Paul II during the private meeting with the parishioners of Santa Maria del Monte, will be placed, at the end of the climb.

The volume accompanying the exhibition contains a larger selection of photos, the transcriptions of the speeches given by the main participants of the 1984 meeting and a series of contributions edited, among others, by Monsignor **Gilberto Donnini**, the Chairman of the Paolo VI Foundation for Sacro Monte di Varese, by Monsignor **Erminio Villa**, the Archpriest of Santa Maria del Monte, by the Episcopal Vicar, Monsignor **Franco Agnesi**, by the Romite Ambrosiane Convent, and by **Riccardo Broggin**i, the vice-Chairman of the Paul VI Foundation for Sacro Monte di Varese. "I have a very good memory of that day," Broggin said. "As an Alpine soldier, I was amazed also by the strength of Pope John Paul, as he climbed the Way of the Chapels."

The exhibits will remain on display for more than two months (so, also over the Christmas period), until 6 January 2015. During the exhibition, a series of meetings and initiatives will be organised, which will be soon published.

The initiative is being promoted by the Paul VI Foundation for Sacro Monte di Varese, in cooperation with the parish church of Santa Maria del Monte, with the patronage of Lombardy Regional Council, Varese Province and Varese Town Council, which was represented by the Councillor for Trade, **Sergio Ghiringhelli**, who recalled the recent initiatives of the council of the village of Santa Maria del Monte, and with the support of banking foundations, public authorities and private individuals.

This important cultural event is being sponsored by Lombardy Regional Council. In a note, the President of the Regional Council, Raffaele Cattaneo, sought to highlight the importance of the initiative. He wrote, "I think the intuition of the organisers who have chosen to commemorate this event was right. **With its sponsorship, the Regional Council seeks to demonstrate our support for this initiative and our attention to the territory and its history**, especially to testify the presence of a Saint in a place that is a symbol for Varese and for the whole of Lombardy."

Redazione VareseNews
redazione@varesenews.it