



## The history of the church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco



# The church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco



The church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco is a two-floor church:

- **the upper church on ground floor.**

Here is where priests say Mass and people pray.

Today you can see many pictures and a few statues here



- **the lower church on -1 floor.**

That church is called lower because it's under the upper church and it's underground.

Often underground churches are smaller than the other ones.

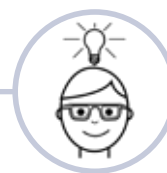
This lower church, on the contrary, is as big as the upper one.

For this reason, it's a very special one.





In the lower church people used to pray for the **souls** of Purgatory, priests used to say Mass and bury the dead as people do in cemeteries. Here the city poor people and the persons who didn't have a home nor a family anymore were buried as well.



Find out what is a soul on page 31

Today you can see many **skulls** here.

A skull is the head of a person who died a long time ago.

Today in the upper church people pray and listen to Mass, but dead people are not buried here anymore.



## What is a soul

Thoughts and emotions of a person are the **soul**.

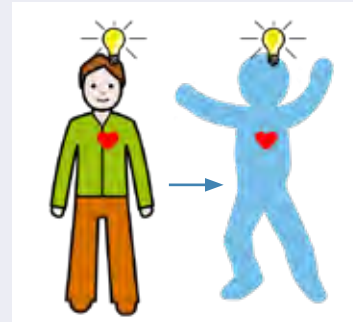
The soul is inside people.

You cannot see or touch the soul.

Some people think that when somebody dies the soul goes to some places.

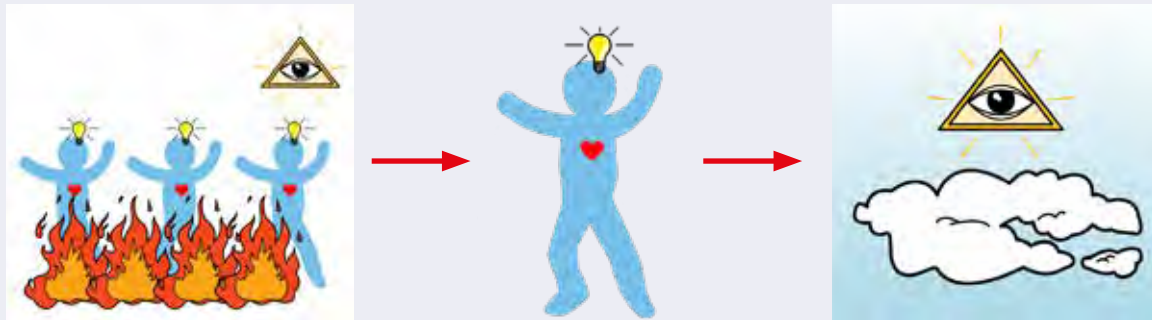
Those places are:

- **Paradise, where the souls of very good people go**  
Here souls are happy.
- **Purgatory, where the souls of the people who hadn't been too bad nor too good go**  
Here souls burn in the fire and are sad.
- **Hell, where the souls of very bad people go**  
Here souls are very painful and very sad.





You cannot see those places.  
Some people think those places exist,  
some think they don't exist.



Some people think the souls in Purgatory  
should stay there until they become good.

Living people pray so that the souls can become good souls.

The Purgatory souls that have become good souls  
can go up to Paradise.



# The history of the church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco



This church is called **Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco**.

Mary was Jesus' mother and helped Purgatory souls.

Mary was a saint.

A saint is a person who prays a lot and behaves always.

This church is called this way because here they pray a lot for the Purgatory souls and because there was a stone arch nearby a long time ago.

The stone arch is not there anymore.





Some **noble** persons built the church a long time ago together with other persons.

Noble persons are very rich and important persons.

**Those noble persons had created an association called Opera Pia together with other persons.**

An association is a group of persons who do things together.

The Opera Pia persons used to do good things for the others:

- they helped the poor
- they buried the dead.

At the beginning Opera Pia persons used to meet in some churches in Naples.

After some time, they decided to build a new church where they could meet.

To build the new church Opera Pia used the money donated by Pietro Antonio Mastrilli to the association.

Pietro Antonio Mastrilli was a person of the Opera Pia group and had given a lot of money, **4000 ducats**.

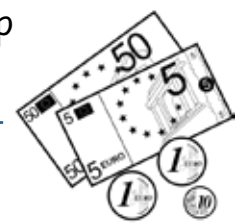
A ducat is a coin of a long time ago.

Opera Pia persons asked the architect Giovan Cola di Franco to design the new church.

An architect is a person who builds houses, palaces and churches.

After some time this architect died, and Opera Pia people called another architect.

Gian Giacomo di Conforto is the architect who completed the church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco.





The church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco was built on 2 floors:



- the upper church



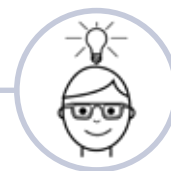
- the lower church.

This church is called lower because it's under the upper church.





After a short time Giulio Mastrilli donated more money to make the presbytery of the upper church even more beautiful. The presbytery is the part at the end of a church. When Giulio Mastrilli died, his son had his father's statue built in the presbytery.



You can read about the statue on page 51

Today Opera Pia association helps keep this church nice and takes care of restoring it.

To restore means to clean or fix damaged objects, rooms or palaces of a long time ago.

Opera Pia transformed the church into a museum because it wants let everybody know its history.

Many people can visit the church and see the artworks, and learn the history of Purgatory souls.



## What is Purgatory souls

Inside the lower church people pray a lot for the Purgatory souls. They started praying for those souls a long time ago, when people used to believe that God could send the dead's souls to 3 different places:

- **Paradise, where the souls of very good people used to go. Here souls were happy**



- **Purgatory, where the souls of the people who hadn't been too bad nor too good used to go. Here souls used to burn in the fire and were sad**



- **Hell, where the souls of very bad people used to go. Here souls were very painful and very sad. Souls would remain in Purgatory until they became good and could go to Paradise.**



Prayers of the living could help those souls go to Paradise earlier. Today some people still think that the living's prayers help those souls go to Paradise.



A long time ago people from Naples used to call Purgatory souls **pezzentelle**.

They called them like that because those souls used to ask living people for prayers to go to Paradise earlier.

In Naples living people were not afraid of the dead.

With their prayers, living people helped the dead's souls go to Paradise.

From Paradise the dead's souls helped the living people.

Many women used to pray to help those souls.

The women who prayed used to ask a **reward** to the souls they had helped.

A reward is a gift you give a person to thank for the help received.

People asked the souls help them get things they wished, like:

- recover from illness
- find a job
- find a husband or a wife
- have a beloved person come back from war
- have a baby.



Many people also used to give money to the church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco. With that money, priests used to say Mass and pray that the Purgatory souls could go to Paradise earlier. When there were many Masses and prayers, souls would stay in Purgatory for a short time.

In the lower church they used to bury also the poor and those who had remained alone in life. Those people were buried all together in the same tomb. **Women used to pray for those people's souls, choosing a skull to take care of.**

A skull is the head of a person who died a long time ago. Women used to do many things to take care of the skulls:

- they put them in a niche.  
A niche is a hole made in the wall to put something important inside
- they used to polish them
- they put them on white napkins or cushions
- they put many candles, flowers or rosaries around it.

A rosary is a necklace with a cross.

You keep it in your hand while you're praying.





Women used to go to the lower church to pray and take care of the skulls **every Monday**.

In exchange for all those things, they always asked for a reward.



Find out why every Monday on page 41

When a woman dreamt of the soul she had chosen, it meant that taking care of that skull was the right thing to do.

Sometimes the soul

didn't give the woman the reward she had asked for.

In that case the woman would punish the skull

by choosing a different skull to help and to ask for a reward.



After a long time, Naples bishop decided that people could not take care of the lower church skulls anymore.

A bishop is a very important priest.

Nowadays people keep praying for the pezzentelle souls to help them and have a reward back.



## Every Monday



A long time ago people in Naples used to believe that the most important day for Purgatory souls were Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

### **Saturday**

People thought that every **Saturday** the Madonna would go down to Purgatory to choose those souls that had become good. Madonna is Mary, Jesus' mother.

At Purgatory, the Madonna used to tell angels which souls could go to Paradise.

### **Sunday**

Every **Sunday** priests used to say Mass and people prayed a lot. Prayers were used to give relief to the souls that were burning and suffered a lot in Purgatory.

### **Monday**

On **Mondays**, Purgatory souls had become stronger and were ready to reward the persons that had helped them.

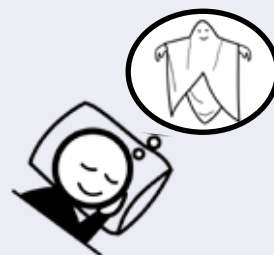
**This is why every Monday women used to go back to the lower church, to pray Purgatory souls and ask for their reward.**



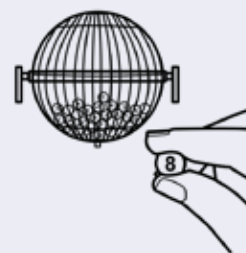
## Pezzentelle souls and Lotto game



In Naples many people  
used to ask pezzentelle souls  
to show up in their dreams.



In dreams they asked pezzentelle souls  
to tell them winning numbers for Lotto game.



In Lotto game you need to guess 5 numbers.

The 5 winning numbers

were picked out of a big box with **90** numbers.

Those who guessed all the 5 numbers would win a lot of money.

Those who guessed fewer numbers would win a little money.

People in Naples used to like this game

a lot and prayed pezzentelle souls to help them guess  
the winning numbers.

Today some people still ask pezzentelle souls  
to help them with the lucky numbers.