

Images and stories of saints in the regional territory and in its museums

Montone, Chiesa-Museo di San Francesco

Tommaso di Arcangelo Bernabei known as Papacello

(Cortona circa 1500 - 1559)

Vittorio Cirelli

(Montone, documented from 1532 to 1552)

Annunciation and Saints Fidelis and Lazarus

Oil on wood; 260 x 180 cm

Inscriptions: in the cartouche on the bottom step "*Sub priorati Fabricj Andree Petri: / Thomas Cortonensis Victor Cirellus / pictores hoc opus faciebant*"; on one side of the lectern: "*AD / MD / XXXII*"

The panel was painted for the high altar in the church of San Fedele in Montone in 1532. It was commissioned by the prior Fabrizio di Andrea di Pietro from Tommaso Bernabei known as Papacello and from Vittorio Cirelli.

The top part of the painting is dominated by the group of the Annunciation, inside a pillared portico that has two steps as a base, on which Saints Fidelis and Lazarus are seated.

Saint Fidelis, to whom the church is dedicated, is distinguished by the Episcopal insignia: the mitre and the pastoral staff; he holds a book in his left hand, the attribute of wisdom.

Saint Lazarus, bound with a red cloth that provides a glimpse of his leprous pustules, displays a wooden clapper, the instrument used by lepers to warn people of their presence. Beside him is a dog, which recalls the evangelical parable of the rich man Dives. Saint Luke (16, 19-31) relates that a poor man named Lazarus lived in privation outside the house of Dives, where dogs would go to lick his sores. The man who while alive had made do with the leftover scraps from the rich man's table, on his death was welcomed into paradise, into the "bosom of Abraham", whilst the miserly Dives deserved eternal damnation.

Mediaeval popular tradition identifies Lazarus with the leper and, as if he was a figure who really existed, he was canonised and his role as a protector from all

manner of diseases was recognised. He shares this responsibility with Saint Roch, the saint *contra pestem* par excellence. Perhaps to establish still further an iconographic parallel between the two saints, Roch's traditional attribute, the dog, also appears beside Lazarus.

We do not know the reasons behind the collaboration on this painting of Papacello of Cortona, a painter who at that time was already well reputed, and Cirelli, who probably came from Montone and was known only for having painted a panel of the *Immaculate Conception, prophets and sibyls* (1552) for the local church of San Francesco. It is not easy, moreover, even to establish which parts can definitely be attributed to Cirelli. The conception is without doubt due to Bernabei, who attempts here a synthesis of motifs of more modern Roman culture – after Peruzzi, Giulio Romano and Raphael – with a component that is still in the manner of Signorelli. Cirelli's hand might be identified in the weaker parts – the face of the Angel and the figure of Saint Fidelis – characterised by a schematisation of the shadows and by an impoverishment of colour that can also be detected to a certain extent in the later *Immaculate Conception*.