

The Chapel of SS. Sacramento

History

Built at the end of the seventeenth century by the *SS. Sacramento* Congregation, this Chapel is the most important Baroque monument of the Archdiocese of Reggio Calabria – Bova.

The chapel essentially dates back to the times of the Spanish Archbishop Ibanez de Villanueva (1675-1695) who renovated the Cathedral employing Baroque forms. In the late Eighteenth century it was the nicest chapel inside the great Latin cathedral (Norman in origin) repeatedly destroyed by Turkish invasions).

The terrifying earthquakes in 1783 and on December 28 1908 caused serious damages to the monument causing it to be reconstructed. In the new current Cathedral the reconstruction works of the chapel endured over several decades and were interrupted by the damages provoked by a bomb in 1943. During these works, the original place of the chapel (in *Cornu Evangelii*) was not respected to prefer the end of the left transept. The chapel was finally reopened with the intervention of the Archbishop Giovanni Ferro on December 25 1965.

Description

The chapel has a square plan with corner pillars and its architectural structure is made of groups of half columns which separate the niches housing the statues from the frames with paintings.

All the walls are covered with polychrome marbles inlaid with motifs of flowered racemes and birds. The lower parts are decorated with large drawings with wider chromatic areas, whilst the upper parts are decorated with a number of densely distributed smaller drawings.

Over the altar, four huge and valuable monolithic columns colored with yellow-hinted *Nero Portoro* marble edge the nice painting by the Seventeenth century painter Maroli from Messina representing Melchizedek's sacrifice and prefiguring the Holy Eucharist. The whole structure is reminiscent of the opulent Roman Baroque.

In the walls' niches eight marble statues represent the four Evangelists, Saints Peter and Paul, St Thomas and St Bonaventura (reconstructed in the twentieth century). The two paintings *The Dinner of Emmaus* and *An Angel Awakens the Prophet Elijah* are modern reinterpretations by the local painter Bava, as well as the frescos in the upper lunettes (*The Multiplied Bread* and *Water from the Rock*). The two candlestands in the form of angels placed on the altar's sides are signed by Di Raco, a sculptor from Reggio Calabria. Near the columns, great white marble flowered scrolls with little angles stand out, but the altar is decorated with a series of tarsias except for the *Paliotto* (the altar frontal) that is inlaid with racemes around the central elliptic part where the chalice with the consecrated host is clearly perceivable. This part was realized earlier than the decoration of the rest of the chapel that is a typical example of the "spectacular" Baroque decoration with tarsias or marble fragments very commonly used in Sicily. The grandiose decoration, reminiscent of the incredibly sumptuous Neapolitan marquetry, is made of Sicilian marbles (the Rose marble from Taormina, the yellow Castronuovo) and of other marbles varieties, primarily porphyries, tourmalines and chalcedonies. This work was performed by the *marmorai* (marble workers) from the city of Messina, a significant artistic centre in the Eighteenth century.

The chapel decorative motifs (which can be found, in Reggio Calabria, in very valuable holy vestments dating back to the same historical period) are perfectly in harmony with the classical structures of balustrades, capitals, cornices and the rich white marble decorative friezes, thus making emerge the whole peaceful beauty of this gorgeous church Reggio Calabria boasts.