

Altarpiece of Santa Tecla by Tiepolo

The grandiose apse altarpiece (oil on canvas measuring 6.84 x 3.94 meters almost 27 square meters) is the work of Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770). The title of the work is **"Saint Tecla praying to the Eternal Father"**. The altarpiece was ordered by the magnificent community of Este with a resolution of 29 June 1758 and delivered on 24 December 1759 in the presence of the author and his son Giandomenico.

The subject was indirectly suggested by the cardinal, bishop of Padua, Carlo Rezzonico: in 1748 he wanted the altarpiece from the presbytery (now preserved and visible in the sacristy) to be removed, which depicts the canonization of San Lorenzo Giustiniani, the work of Antonio Zanchi in 1702. In accordance to the liturgical rules of the time, the altarpiece was too celebratory of the people, and the Paduan bishop wanted a new altarpiece that, according to the liturgical indications of the time, represented the Lord or the titular saint of the church, as more suitable for prayer, praise and thanks to God.

The Este historian Isidoro Alessi, following the orientation of the cardinal bishop, proposed to the Council of the Magnificent Community "that Este should be made in prospect and Santa Tecla in the act of recommending it to God". In this work, it was involved the most famous painter existing at that time Tiepolo.

This extraordinary painting is recognized by most critics as Tiepolo's masterpiece among works of a religious nature. It represents the prayer of Santa Tecla, patron saint of Este, who gathered the sufferings and anxieties of the Atestine city and invoked from God the Father for liberation from the plague.

The epidemic had broken out in Este in 1630-1631 and it seems that in Este it caused the death of more than 3,400 people out of a population of about 14,000 inhabitants.

God the Father, surrounded in heaven by his angels, disperses with his strength the shadow of death and evil represented in the dark figure that moves away towards the bottom left. In the background, you can recognize the city of Este with some of its monuments, the cathedral, the bell tower, the Palazzo del Principe on the hill, the Carrarese Castle, the Torre di Porta Vecchia. The removal of the plague by the beneficial action of the Father seems to offer greater brightness to the landscape.

In the lower part of the painting appears Santa Tecla: she is not portrayed in a triumphal attitude, but in humble prayer with her hands gathered and her eyes turned to the Father. Near the Saint there are some characters who show the pain brought to the city by the plague epidemic: a little girl weeping for her dead mother, the desperation of a man with his head in his hands, the fear of another character who puts his hand in front of his mouth and nose.

This painting was preceded by a model (80 x 45 cm) which is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

The peculiarity of this altarpiece is that it is tensioned on a curved frame that follows the trend of the apse: this has always created difficulties for the altarpiece which required various restorations. The first time it was restored in 1893, and it was thought to put it on

a loom. That didn't work out very much. Then it was restored in 1923: it was reupholstered and placed again in a curved position as had been suggested by Tiepolo. Another restoration took place in 1929 and 1961. In 2012 a major restoration began with the aim of cleaning the shovel of all the deposits of these three hundred years and with a new curved frame.

The life of Giovanbattista Tiepolo

Giambattista Tiepolo (or Giovanni Battista or Zuan Batista) was born in Venice on March 5th, 1696 and died in Madrid, March 27th, 1770. He is one of the greatest painters of the Venetian's eighteenth century.

He was brother-in-law of the painter Francesco Guardi, whose sister, Cecilia (1702-1779) he married in 1719, with whom he had nine children, including the painters Giandomenico and Lorenzo Tiepolo.

A highly sought-after fresco painter, he left a magnificent body of works in Italy, Germany, Sweden, Russia and Spain. In total he created more than 800 paintings, over 2,000 drawings and numerous engravings, as well as numerous frescoes. He is considered the last **great Venetian painter** of large frescoes from the Baroque period. His works were often elaborate narrative forms through an enchanting pictorial style, representing the culmination of Italian **Rococo** in the 18th century.

His first training began at the age of 14, in the studio of the Venetian **Gregorio Lazzarini** (1655-1730). from which he learned, as well as the first rudiments, the taste for the grandiose and theatrical in compositions. He soon headed for the so-called "tenebrous" painting of Federico Bencovich and Giovanni Battista Piazzetta. In addition to his contemporaries, his studio turned to the greats of the sixteenth century in Veneto, Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese,

The painter's first important work was for *the Bishop's Palace in Udine*. Here emerges the personal style of the artist capable of creating a new form / light / color relationship, which underlines the solidity and plasticism of the human figure, also with the use of colors enhanced by sunlight. In his compositions, he combined narrative wit and scenic fiction, also making use of the contribution of the quadrature, often created by the collaborator Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna.

On his return from Udine, where he had also painted frescoes in the Duomo, he was in **Milan** (*decorations in the Archinto and Dugnani palaces, 1731*), in **Bergamo** (*Cappella Colleoni, 1732-33*), in **Vicenza** (*villa Loschi-Zilieri*). Alongside the numerous profane paintings, important achievements for the religious institutions of **Venice** date back to this period, such as *the frescoes for the church of the Gesuati (1737-39) and the paintings for the church of Carmine and S. Alvise*.

In 1747 he worked on the decoration of the *Palazzo Labia* in Venice, a long series of 13 representations of scenes from the *lives of Antonio and Cleopatra*. Here he uses a wide-ranging perspective, giving his style a feeling of exaggeration.

Called to **Würzburg**, Germany, in 1750 by the prince-bishop Charles Philip of Greiffenklau, he carried out *the decoration of the residence*, with the help of his sons

Giandomenico and Lorenzo, active in his workshop. The decoration, considered by many to be his absolute masterpiece, reaches a sumptuous effect in the hall decorated with white and gold stuccoes, and even more so in the vault of the staircase, with the grandiose representation of Olympus with the four parts of the world. This fresco is one of the largest ever made, impressive for the technique of realization and for the artistic value.

In 1753 he returned to Venice (1753) and worked on numerous commissions of all kinds: from 1757 are the frescoes of Villa Valmarana near **Vicenza**, while in **Venice** he painted in the Doge's Palace (Nettuno offers gifts to Venice, 1748-50) and for noble families Venetian (frescoes in Ca' Rezzonico, 1758). In 1759 he painted frescoes in the oratory of Purità in Udine.

Also in that year (1759) he painted the Santa Tecla altarpiece freeing Este from the plague for the cathedral of Este.

The Apotheosis of the Pisani family in the Pisani villa in Stra (Ve), the last work performed in Italy, dates back to 1761-62.

In 1762 the now international fame of Giambattista Tiepolo led him **to Madrid**, with his sons, to decorate the palace of King Charles III. Here he also painted another impressive fresco, the Apotheosis of Spain or the Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy. It was started in 1761, and earned Tiepolo an extraordinary fame in Spain, so much so that he worked with the monarchy for eight years until his death on March 27, 1770 at the age of seventy-four.

In front of one of his frescoes we are immediately pervaded by the sense of lightness that the brush has been able to create with virtuosic mobility in the soft lines and delicate colors. The compositional cuts and the play of light and shadow, which perfectly match the large dimensions of the ceilings, walls and panels, do not overwhelm the spectator but elevate and carry him up, on those clouds that so often welcome the Saints to him. represented. Giambattista Tiepolo is the master of the color palette and the lightness of the sign of eighteenth-century Venetian painting.

Tiepolo finds a way to express the vivacity of movement with very clear tones, harmonized in a refined ivory reverberation. His compositions open more and more on perspective scenographies, which correspond to the chromatic daring of the airy and excited colors. Beyond the perspective scenes, composed of architectures and figures placed behind the viewer, a skillful orchestration opens up composed of a whole repertoire of glimpses, gestures, details, as shown by the frescoes of maturity at Palazzo Labia, one of his happier and more spectacular cycles.

Of considerable importance is the graphic work of Tiepolo; of great interest are the drawings (preserved above all in London, Florence, Stuttgart, Venice, Trieste), which follow his stylistic evolution and reveal his extraordinary imagination and satirical vein. The engraving production is more limited: among the etchings we mention the twenty-four Scherzi and the ten Capricci, and various religious subjects.

Description of the Pala del Tiepolo

The altarpiece represents Santa Tecla in the attitude of prayer: it invokes the Eternal father for the city of Este.

Santa Tecla



The saint is placed on the left in the lower part of the painting. It is a new location: it is not placed in the center or in heaven next to the angels, face to face with the eternal Father, but it is among the people of Este and shares the miseries of the city that is experiencing the tragedy of the plague.

He is in an attitude of prayer, on his knees, with his hands joined; her arms seem to fall to her knees almost herself wounded and oppressed by the pain she sees around. His face is turned towards heaven in contemplation of God's action in favor of the suffering situation of men. It is a face which, together with the invocation, expresses trust and abandonment in a Father who does not leave his children alone. The two figures behind the Saint (an elderly man with a beard and a crying old woman with a dark cloak), on the contrary, are turned in on themselves and fearful of this presence of God who enters history with his powerful action. .

Santa Tecla wears clothes full of light: a yellow with golden reflections, an intense red, a

white rich in shades. Flashes of light on the folds and hems of the garments make the figure of the saint full of light and movement: the divine light and its action pour over all of reality and Santa Tecla, seeing it, welcomes it with confidence. Tiepolo is able to paint Santa Tecla as a woman fully immersed in the reality of her time but totally turned to God and in contemplation of his beneficial action towards men.

The Eternal Father



The prayer of St. Thecla is heard and God acts in history with an action that drives out all evil. The presence of God is revealed among the clouds of heaven as an epiphany, a revelation, a revelation. Tiepolo gave this Father's entrance a touch of solemnity and strength. The figure of God comes forward side by side between the angels. The painter gives depth and movement to the whole scene of God surrounded by his angels. With his left arm he wraps the whole world to indicate that it is animated only by goodness and mercy; with the help of the angels it supports and envelops the world highlighting a sense of protection and defense. With his right arm he acts in history bringing blessings and driving away every evil that threatens the world and in particular the city of Este. The biblical psalms often describe this strong arm of God acting vigorously on behalf of men and for their liberation. The host of angels accompanies God's action by strengthening the gesture of liberation from evil.

God is depicted with vivid, intense colors: golden yellow, blue that takes the light reflections of the celestial and envelops the whole figure of God, the pale pink of the

robe, the luminous white of the clouds. The earth is devastated by the plague but God the Father brings his light and Santa Tecla is illuminated by it and so is the whole city of Este.

Evil

It is represented by a twisted figure that falls to the left, away from the force of divine action. This figure represents the plague and in general what it wants to do harm to man. The dull tones of the color used contrast with the intense colors of the figure of God and Saint Thecla. The plague seems to precipitate uncontrollably towards the abyss, bringing with it all the evil and misfortune of the pestilence. Whoever contemplates the painting receives a message of great relief and true liberation from all fear in the face of what often threatens the life of man.



The City of Este

The city of Este is represented by the view of the inhabited area with the precise emergencies of the Duomo, the Porta Vecchia, the Carrarese Castle, the Palazzo del Principe far up the hill. The light that comes from the strong action of God seems to illuminate the landscape as if after a dangerous storm. In the distance you can see a procession going to bury a dead man. Near Santa Tecla two people are desperate with their hands on their faces and heads. Farther on, two other people indicate something far away with a pointing finger: one of them holds her nose with her fingers so as not to smell

around. In the foreground on the lower right a little girl is crying leaning her arms over the body of her dead mother: she seems to be calling her crying. It is the description of the pain and death brought to the city by the plague of 1630-1631. It was Alessi, a famous Estense historian,

In this painting all the characteristics of Tiepolo's painting emerge: the movement of the figures, in particular in the group representing God the Father and the angels; the wide range and intensity of the colors used to bring the whole painting to life; the beauty of the figure of Saint Thecla and the Eternal Father which bring out Tiepolo's ability to give shape to the figures; the care for the surrounding figures who know how to express the pain and drama of the experience of the plague from which Este is freed through the intercession of Santa Tecla.

Conclusion Restoration of the Altarpiece of Santa Tecla by Tiepolo



The restoration of the Altarpiece of Santa Tecla by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo is approaching its conclusion.

It is already possible to admire the Pala by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo which depicts Santa Tecla **praying to the Eternal Father for the liberation of the city of Este from the**

plague. You can admire all its splendor and the fruit of the precious and meticulous restoration. It is also possible to see the pictorial details of this great work of art up close.

In the coming weeks it will be permanently placed in the apse at the center of the presbytery.

Adequate lighting will then be set up to enhance the altarpiece and the precious restoration carried out in recent years.

At Christmas 2020, 261 years after its location in the Duomo (24 December 1759) and 250 years after the death of the great artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (27 March 1770) we will be able to admire the totally restored Altarpiece.

THE TIEPOLO ALTARPIECE HAS RETURNED TO THE APSE OF THE CATHEDRAL

The Parish Church of Santa Tecla in Este has had back in the apse of the Cathedral its very own Pala del Tiepolo by Giambattista Tiepolo, where it rightly belongs: it was placed there for the very first time back in 1759, on Christmas's Eve day.

After 261 years from that significant event and eight years of meticulous restoration, the Pala del Tiepolo is placed again in the Cathedral: an event that we would have loved to celebrate with the Community, especially this year that makes the 250th anniversary of Tiepolo's death, but the situation only allows you to admire this great masterpiece.

Eight years have passed since the Pala left the city of Este to begin the long restoration process. Meanwhile, the Cathedral, built between the end of the 1600s and the beginning of the 1700s, has been completely restored, both externally and internally, highlighting all the peculiarities of its original elliptical-shaped architecture.

The restoration of the Altarpiece had to undergo a meticulous cleaning job, **but now Giovanbattista Tiepolo's Altarpiece has returned home and the joy of the Atestines, which they hope to share soon with all future visitors to the City, shines strongly already in the words of its representatives:**

How wonderful to see Tiepolo again after eight years in his natural location in the Cathedral! We take it as a sign of hope that can only fill our hearts of pure joy. There has been a great effort from many sides to bring the Pala back to Este as soon as possible. Now we can finally admire it in all its solemnity, says the mayor Roberta Gallana.

It is not possible to have a great party and inauguration due to the emergency we are experiencing – says the parish priest of the Duomo, Don Franco Rimano –, but this will help us enter into the meaning of this painting that describes with dramatic images the suffering of the citizens of Este due to the plague, but also the trust in the presence of God who acts with his strength in favor of men and for their salvation. Santa Tecla, patron saint of Este intercedes for the life of our city. On this Christmas, our patroness invites us not to lose trust in God who guides and supports us in this difficult situation.

