



and you too **do** likewise

Sr. Carmela Paloschi

Homes for abandoned children

*Anyone who welcomes one of these little children
in my name, welcomes me (Mk 9:37) - Part II*

«ISTITUTO DEGLI ESPOSTI ALLA PIETÀ» - VENEZIA (1849-1977)

The foundation of the «ospissio de la Pietà» (home of Mercy) in Venice dates back to 1340 and is, providentially, associated to the Franciscan friar Pietro of Assisi (1300-1349). He was a learned person, a scholar and teacher of «human letters»; his heart was wide open to compassion and kindness. Being in Venice for preaching purposes he used to meet lots of children abandoned along the streets. Driven by his irresistible charity he opened a shelter to give them a possibility to find a ‘family’ and affection. In order to be able to assist and to provide for them a minimum of human dignity, he used to go from house to house asking for alms, repeating: «Pietà, Pietà» (have mercy): this is the reason why the Institution is called «S. Maria della Pietà» and he was nicknamed the ‘Pietruzzo’ della Pietà (of mercy)¹.

In 1346 he founded «Mercy hospital», juridically recognized by the Veneto Republic; upon his request, the Senate decreed the recognition of reliable public help and the permission to collect alms to pay the wet-nurses and the personnel working at this charitable

¹ RANZATO FR LEONE di Chioggia, OFM, *Cenni e documenti su fra Pietro d'Assisi*, typ Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Ad claras aquas prope Florentiam, 1915, in AGSdC, Opuscoli.

place². An inscription of 1523 placed in the entrance of the church states: «The alms diminished, the needs of the charitable home grew, so means had to be sought by kindling the ancient piety and the permission to collect alms through drawing pictures and playing music along the streets».

Our presence among the little foundlings begins early, in relation to the origins of the Institute, exactly in **October 1849**; here the sisters were respected and admired by the managers, the personnel and the inmates up to **September 1977**. At the beginning two sisters were present, in 1849 they were already three and in 1854³ they were seven and constituted the first community founded by Sr. Serafina Rosa, vicar from 1849 to 1856; she was sure that this apostolic work responded to the charism of charity of Bartolomea⁴.

The Republic of Venice has always supported the Institution with the proceeds of criminal sanctions, the ferry ride income, the staging entertainment incomes and legacies coming from benefactors. According to the foundation charter and the Statute of 1938 (art 2,3,5) the Institution of the foundlings has the function of offering shelter, sustenance and assistance to the abandoned children, sons of unknown persons and those born of illegitimate unions, denounced as children of unknown persons or recognized by the mother, if in real state of poverty; in the maternity ward also illegitimate pregnant women were accepted. The home for foundlings is one of the most praiseworthy charitable works of the Veneto province⁵.

² PANCINO AVV. ANGELO, *Cenni sulle origini e le vicende dell'Istituto della Pietà*, Tipografia provinciale in S. Servolo, Venezia 1946. Some houses at «S. Francesco della Vigna» were the first residence of the Home, then some houses were added for girls at 'Celestia', later on they had a new and a unique residence at 'Bragora'; finally, they moved to the large palaces of the rich families 'Gritti and Cappello' with the patronage of the Doge, in that period was Andrea Dandolo, in AGSdC, Opuscoli.

³ Sr. Paola Zanchi and Sr. Benvenuta Zetta soon after some other sisters join the community: Sr. Metilde Martinelli, Sr. Diomira Volani, Sr. Pellegrina Sala, Sr. Orsolina Consoni, Sr. Vincenzina Zocchi, cf. Community Data, in AGSdC.

⁴ PREVEDELLO A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, I, 168-172, Venezia, 1933.

⁵ From the fall of the Republic (1804) to 1807 the Institution is administered by the Municipality; from 1807 to 1826 it becomes autonomous; in 1836 it receives

Up to 1807 «the poor babies Mercy Home» used to be dropped into a *scafetta*, a small niche located within the boundaries of the Institution, in a non evident spot, where the babies were placed, at times they had to be pushed, as originally it was conceived for newly born babies while, in fact, weaned babies were also accepted; today there are no traces of the spot where the niche was placed. During the day it was covered by two wooden shutters; through a small hole it was in communication with one of the rooms inside and as soon as the warning bell rang, compassionate hands used to pick up the foundling baby. Some children were breast-fed by available wet-nurses, others were sent either to the country-side or to the mountains and entrusted to sharecropper's and farmer's families in order to rescue them from death or from the danger of ill-health as they were always indoors within the unhealthy environment of the hospital, since the wards were crowded with many beds close to each other.

Nearly all the foundling kids had a recognition sign which were various and original, such as: a holy picture cut in half, a tiny rosary bead, a tiny silver or metal medal, playing cards, half coins, ribbons, degli *agnus dei* (wax tablet with the symbol of the lamb), or a simple piece of paper with odd shapes; at times there were earrings, various forms of jewellery or carved wooden objects cut into half. The distinguishing objects were often furnished with a piece of paper with a few lines jotted down stating the reason of the abandonment and the main bibliographic data; usually the notes

the new regulations, later on extended to the other Institutions for Foundlings of the province of the Veneto region; in 1865 the administration is united to the other Charitable Work Institutions; in 1871 it becomes a Provincial Institution. cf. *Memorie sull'Istituto Provinciale degli Esposti di Venezia*, Venezia, Stabilimento Antonelli, 1887, 7; Statute approved by the board of directors in 1935 and by the Home Office February on 3 February 1938, in AGSdC, Convenzioni, 662/E.

were written either by the mother or the mid-wife. In one of these letters conserved there are the names to be given to the baby girl: Rosaria Maria Maddalena; another one states: «Maria Silvia is baptized. I ask you to keep her in the city»; another one writes: «Within three months I will come to take her back»; another one puts the list of the poor kit of the baby stating: «On the 15th of the month at about 2 p.m. a newly born baby, Prudencia, in swaddling cloths marked by two red stripes, with two false silver brooch or medals a lace ribbon, a lace bonnet and an old webbing *Agnus Dei* with a ribbon». Very moving, if not heart breaking, were the reasons that induced the parents of a baby boy to abandon him, namely extreme poverty: «We must entrust this innocent baby to the care of this Institute for foundlings. In the name of God, of the most Holy Virgin and all the Saints, may the heavens let us have him back in our arms». Through the research work done, it turned out that the kids were aware of these recognition objects and they hoped that one day someone would come to take them back. When more than a month passed, no one would come to take them; in 15 years, from 1836 to 1851, on the average of 400 kids accepted per year, there were only 51 restitutions⁶.

The name, inspired by the saint of the day or by names commonly used in that period, was always given by the Inspector of the wet-nurses according to a careful alphabetical order; the babies brought to the Institution one after the other used to get the name beginning with the same initial: in 1825 they started to give also the surname which, until 1835, used to have the same initial of the name. At the beginning they started giving odd surnames, often humiliating; in the late 19th century it was substituted by a more reasonable and honest surname, however, never foreign, nor historical surnames of well known families. Later on, in order to remove the sad sign ‘son of no one’, the names of both parents preceded by the verb ‘departed’ was given. The foundlings and the illegitimate kids were respectively called ‘sons’ and ‘daughters’.

⁶ cf. Gazzettino Sera, 31 marzo 1953; La Domenica di Repubblica 37 / giugno 2005, in AGSdC, Pubblicazioni, 662/E.

From 1835 to 1859, the high infant mortality reached the 56%; the main reasons were the problems connected to the moment when they were abandoned by their parents, subsequently due to diseases, harsh winter months, great number of babies especially in certain months of high influx, the care given to the child in the first days of life. The inmates were divided into six groups: the breast-fed; the weaned kids up to seven years (the Italian expression is *figli da pan*, that is children already eating bread); the boys up to thirteen years; the working boys up to eighteen years who were trained to a job so that they could provide their own living; the girls able to work from seven years until they got married; the unmarried girls and those who, due to their physical condition were unable to work, were kept in the Institution until their death⁷.

Assistance included physical and moral education, civil and religious instructions and apprenticeship. The day used to start at 7 a.m. in winter and at 5 a.m. in the months of June and July; all the kids had two hours compulsory study in the morning and one in the afternoon dedicated to language and handwriting, four hours for professional activities in the morning and two in the afternoon such as, hemp spinning, the art of shoemaking and male tailoring for the boys; hemp and linen spinning, knitting, sewing linen and making dresses for the girls. On feast days the school subjects were substituted by the catechism classes, given by the chaplain in the church of the *Pietà* who used to keep the doors closed to the public. In the choir, for nearly half an hour daily, they used to recite the Christian prayers and those purposely prepared by the director D. Nardi in 1851, because he noticed that the kids returning to the Institution (kids breast-fed outside the Institution who on their return were kept apart from the others) did not know anything about religious principles⁸. Among the prayers some intercessions are moving: «Lord,

⁷ cf. PANCINO A., *Cenni sulle origini e le vicende dell'Istituto della Pietà, nel sesto centenario della sua fondazione*, Venezia, Tipografia Provinciale in S. Servolo, 1946, in AGSdC, Opuscoli.

⁸ cf. Letter of the director D. Nardo to the patriarch 8.4.1851 in the archives of the patriarchate, in AGSdC, Lavori, 662/E.

bless us, your poor children... keep our faith always alive... receive in your glory the souls of our departed benefactors; through their generous donations we, poor abandoned, owe to them our lodging, education and boarding... we have always cherished in our heart feelings of gratitude for all the benefits received...»⁹; in this way the foundlings were induced to learn to be grateful towards the persons who sponsored them and to make them understand their poor standard and to develop in them a reverent dependence.

It was obligatory to give a helping hand in the Institution; they used to help in the kitchen, dining room, laundry and infirmary; they were engaged for ten hours per day in working and studying, they had one hour dedicated to meals and recreation. The only contacts with the outside world was the city walks, twice a month, and the children were obliged to behave properly and to control themselves walking in silence. An atmosphere of austerity, discipline and observance reigned within the establishment, therefore, if the kids 'who did not belong to anyone' did not behave accordingly, some punishments were imposed: subtraction of some favourite food, closing them in a solitary place. If they behaved nicely they used to receive rewards: special food, new dresses or going out for a walk...

When the boys reached the age of eighteen and were trained for a job (stone-cutter, weavers, shoemakers, dockyard labourers), they had to leave the Pietà and had the right of access to trades and corporations; in order to avoid that other youngsters may pretend to belong to the Institution, the inmates were signed with a printed letter 'P' (the initial letter for *Pietà*, Mercy) on their left hand. When the girls who were maintained by the town council, were introduced into a family, they used to work as farmers, housekeepers, waitresses or engaged in embroidery and glass beads trades, while the choir of about sixty girls, used to have a musical education and they were trained to singing and to learn to play various musical instruments; they were normally instructed by famous masters, such as Antonio Vivaldi, music teacher and choir master from 1703 to 1720. They used to play the violin, organ, oboe, cello, bassoon and sing-

⁹ Prayer booklet prepared by the direttore D. Nardo, 1851, in AGSdC, Opuscoli.

ing: they had no specific surnames, but they were recognized by their voice and the instrument played: Pelegrina of the oboe, Prudenzia of the contralto, Candida of the cello, Lucietta the organist... Some of these girls, the talented girls, were called the 'privileged choir girls' as they themselves composed the music they used to play, while the 'choir masters' used to teach music to the kids coming to the *Pietà* from several parts of Europe; they joined the Institute at the age of two years and they were allowed to stay up to 16 years. They were called children receiving education. The choir girls had also some other duties (nurse, pharmacist, in charge of the pantry) and had better and a greater quantity of food; moreover, when they were sick they were sent in a family of one of the governors in order to recover their health. If they remained in the Institution they used to become members of the hospital; the few who got married could no longer practice their profession as musicians¹⁰.

By the decree of 17 October 1849 «The royal delegation, in accordance with the provincial college and the appeal of the head office of the Institution for the foundlings in Venice, entrusts to the virtuous sisters of charity of St Vincent de Paul the surveillance of the breast-feeding ward in the hope that it may improve...». This quotation is recorded in the Register signed by the director Domenico Nardi and by the superior general, Sr. Teresa Bosio: on 20 October, after the arrangements with the superior of the Female Penitentiary Institution of Venice, Sr. Colomba Sali and two sisters, one as supervisor and the other as assistant in charge of the breast-fed ward. On 22 October the cardinal patriarch, Mgr Giacomo Monico, hastily sends his thanks to the priest of Lovere, Fr A. Bosio, for having sent two sisters for this charitable work, which he

¹⁰ cf. BARTOLINI DONATELLA, *Bambini abbandonati a Venezia tra Ottocento e Novecento*, testo monografico estratto da «Popolazione e storia» (2), 2001, pp. 45-72.

paternally blesses in the hope that it may flourish. On 26 October the royal vice chief executive, G. Zem, writes to the superior of Venice: «...I am sure that the Institution – guided by the affection and by the charitable assistance of two sisters, who according to their holy Institute work for the prosperity of the public well-being – will very soon perceive the salutary effect of their precious cares». The minutes – dated 29 October mention the arriving and welcoming at the establishment of two sisters, Sr. Paolina Zanchi and Sr. Benvenuta Zetta – inform that Lord baron, Girolamo Fini, chief executor of the province, «places vital trust in the religious souls of the sisters, charitable and philanthropic, who will surely put order even where there was lack of care when taking over the task of looking after those unhappy little ones, children of misfortunes». What animated the sisters in this service of charity, was not a philanthropic feeling, but the charism of Bartolomea and the spirit of Sr. Vincenza; hence, the sisters considered the assisted foundlings as true children of God and not just ‘children of misfortune’.

On 4 March 1851, the ‘prioress’¹¹ of the ward of the adults and of the girls who returned back to the Institution passed away and the following day the two wards were entrusted to Sr. Benvenuta Zetta. In December 1854, the warden in charge of the returned girls, Mr Bianchi, was appointed secretary of the municipal deputation of Pellestrina and another sister replaces him, but temporarily. In fact, the director D. Nardi «thought that it was not convenient to entrust this guardianship to a sister as he considered it more fit for a man»¹².

¹¹ In 1348 the boys were separated from the girls: the boys were entrusted to a male confraternity of «S. Francesco» in the home at the Bragora and the girls to a confraternity of Pious Ladies at «S. Maria dell’umiltà» depending upon the prioress of the home at the ‘Celestia’. In 1535 the assistance to the ‘babies’ at the home of Mercy was united and entrusted again to the Pious Ladies; their prioress who was normally elected autonomously, could take over the governorship only after receiving the confirmation of the doge. cf. PANCINO A., *Cenni sulle origini e vicende dell’Istituto della Pietà nel sesto centenario della sua fondazione*, Venezia, Tipografia Provinciale in S. Servolo, 1946, in AGSdC, Opuscoli.

¹² Letter of 27 June 1857 to the superior Sr. Benvenuta Zetta, in AGSdC, Corrispondenza, 662/D.

From the Registers of 1857, signed by the director Domenico Nardi and by the superior general Sr. Teresa Bosio¹³, we deduce that the sisters were in charge of the on-going moral and economic supervision of all the wards of the Institution for the Foundlings: breast-fed ward, the wards of the boys who returned to the Institution and the ward of the adults; other sisters were in charge of the 'wheel', the linen room, laundry, kitchen, the supervision of the wet-nurses section and the infirmaries; one sister was in charge to oversee and instruct the girls who returned back; the superior who was also a superintendent had to preside over all and she was in charge to deal with the head-office.

In the abstracts of an undated hand written document were fixed the detailed norms for the directress (nn 175-220) and for the sisters in charge of the linen room (nn 221-232); another document specifies the norms for the personnel in charge of the administration office¹⁴.

The beneficial activity of the sisters, who worked with dedication and respect for the different competences, was immediately noticed; the director Nardi states in a letter to the superior general, Sr. Teresa Bosio, on the occasion of the death of Sr. Benvenuta Z., superior of the community and superintendent of the wet-nursing ward: «...her departure caused a great sorrow among the personnel of the Institution. We deeply feel how much grave is her loss – as a superior she carried out superbly the important and delicate tasks entrusted to her, which required special practice, talent, diligence and prudence. May the Lord recompense her blessed soul; as it is not possible to show her our last affectionate testimony and gratitude, I ask you to accept our cordial and heartfelt feelings... we will cherish in our hearts the memory of her distinguished and really Christian merits which she has testified during her stay in this Institution as superior and superintendent, Sr. Benvenuta Zetta of blessed memory» (7 September 1859). Dr. Ugo Bertoli, former secretary of the board of administration from 1913 to 1924,

¹³ Regesto, in AGSdC, 662/E.

¹⁴ cf. Convenzioni, in AGSdC, 662/E.

then managing director¹⁵, described the work of the sisters in the following way: Kind manners, understanding and loving care, constant and vigilant over the things of the Institution, patient and full of loving interest for the children, the teenagers, the adults who seek for maternal hearts that understand them, feel pity for them, instruct them and direct them; for the wet-nurses, unfortunate rather than bad girls, mothers of the inmate babies who need to find good souls able to promote their rehabilitation and the delicate accomplishment of their difficult task: these are the qualities of the good sisters who supervise the destiny of the orphanage without showing off, rich in self-denial, only attentive in accomplishing their tasks»¹⁶. The following statistic data shows the presence of the sisters and of the children in certain years, which I have chosen from the record-cards conserved in the secretariat of the religious province of Venice.

year	sisters	children	year	sisters	children
1849	3	277	1939	17	180
1879	8	323	1946	21	250
1896	10	265	1959	16	110
1912	18	249	1974	10	39

The number of the sisters has an upward trend from 1849 to 1946 – from 3 it reaches the highest number of 21 – then it diminishes to 7 in 1977¹⁷, the year in which the religious community leaves the service, for the reasons the provincial superior had already explained in 1975, to the card. Patriarch, Mgr Albino Luciani and to the superior general, mother A. Campanile: the socio-political situation of the time, the presence of a reliable group of active lay persons, the new methods of introducing the minors in families

¹⁵ cf. Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 662/D.

¹⁶ PREVEDELLO A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, I, 170-171, Venezia, 1933.

¹⁷ cf. Statistical data, in AGSdC.

and, consequently, the reduced number of foundlings¹⁸. In fact, the number of inmates which reached the highest peak in 1879, with 323 children; although, later on, the number diminished it remained steady, over 100 up to 1963, then it decreased to 39 in 1974.

In the course of the long service rendered by our sisters they had to deal also with difficult situations, mainly due to the two world wars. On 11 November 1917 the Institution had to evacuate and the following persons left by train: 59 breast-fed babies, 16 wet-nurses, 111 children, 38 adults, 40 including the assisting and serving staff, the sisters and the administration staff. Only third class wagons were available, which were quite comfortable, provided with mattresses and blankets for the babies who had to face a trip of 26 hours to arrive at the Foundling hospital of the Innocents in Florence. On 6 December, due to the overcrowding – there were already about 350 kids from the orphanage and 284 from the Institute Micesio of Udine – the personnel coming from Venice had to move to Figline Valdarno (FI), in a property of the hospital where they were welcomed cordially and kindly. But the outbreak of the grave epidemic, known as Spanish flu, spread in many parts of Italy and it did not spare the little ones; from 11 November 1917 to 12 March 1919, the date of the return of the refugees in Venice, 68 children out of 229 children (25,32 %), which is reasonably a high figure¹⁹. The fifteen sisters (two remained in Venice with a small group) shared hardships and sufferings.

The administration of the Institution had lots of difficulties also during the second world war. Knowing that the children were in great need of having a family to welcome, love and instruct them, the young superior, Sr. Giuseppina Perani, after having gone through great troubles in entrusting the children to good families of workers in Tuscany, was forced to stop such a maternal deed

¹⁸ Letter of 10 June 1977 and of 3 April 1978, in AGSdC, Corrispondenza 662/D.

¹⁹ PANCINO A., *Report of the town administrator for the extraordinary management of the Provincial Institution for Foundlings in Venice and short notes about the guidelines of the service*, 1-20, Venezia, 1919; PREVEDELLO A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, III, 514-515, Venezia, 1936.

due to the railway interruption and the bombardments; during the summer of 1943 she asked the administrators to rescue the tiny babies outside the city. They were hosted in the sanatorium connected to the hospital of Dolo, few kilometers away from Venice; the transfer cost the life of 11 children affected by chicken pox or tuberculoses. The affected persons were isolated in rooms which were not fit to the situation, so that the breast-fed babies and the wet nurses had to sleep on straw and the sisters, together with the staff, had to adapt themselves in the storehouses. When also the temporary refuge of Dolo was no longer a safe place – beginning of 1944 – they were challenged to take another decision, to avoid the risk of remaining cut out from the Institution. The return was fixed for 27 March, however, the transportation staff due to various reasons, wanted to postpone it to the following day: in times of war even the delay of an hour could be fatal! The superior, with unusual firmness, gave orders to leave for Venice at the cost of driving the boat herself together with her sisters. On 28 March the bombs fell upon the hospital of Dolo and along the route taken by the evacuated to return to the *Pietà*.

The war continued: over 300 persons were to be fed every day; water was lacking and there was no light; as soon as the sisters perceived the air-raid warning signals during the night they used to pick up two babies each and hasten to the shelter. In the evening of 7 December an awful roar and a strong explosion made everyone think that the Institution and the close by barracks of S. Zaccaria had been swallowed up; however, God's providence drew away the time bomb into the waters of the canal²⁰.

Worthy of happy memories and full of intense emotions and appreciated recognitions was the solemn celebration of the centenary of the presence of the sisters at the Foundling's Institute in 1949; many were the participants: ecclesiastical and civil authorities, great part of the population of Venice, many of our sisters coming from the communities present in the city and islands. We would

²⁰ cf. Statistic data of the Provincial Institute for infants «S. Maria della Pietà» (Our Lady of Mercy, was the name since 1935), in AGSdC, 662/E.

like to limit the praises and report only some passages of the letter by the president T. Scarpa Falce, whose remarks confirm what was already said by the director of administration U. Bertoldi²¹: «On this auspicious occasion of the first centenary of the arrival of the pious sisters of charity at this Institution I would like to mention with great pleasure, once again – and with a particular satisfaction today more than ever – the valuable work the sisters have done for the benefit of the babies. A real providential and evangelical mission, inspired by Christian charity of which the sisters are, not undeservedly, worthy daughters and servants, rich in self-denial, concerned only in doing their duty. Their watchful zeal, their patient modesty and maternal solicitude is being honoured for one hundred years with constant and unconditional appreciation by the administrators who followed one another in the governance of the Institute.

The tactful kindness and loving care, whilst they allowed these tiny derelicts to encounter maternal hearts that understand them, pity them, educate and instruct them, to the youth, often unfortunate more than guilty, they have ensured a safe guide for their moral and social rehabilitation [...] The board of directors of the Institute, on this happy occasion, in order to show their gratitude was honoured of donating the sum of £ 50.000 for the benefit of your sick and needy sisters [...]»²².

Moving were the respect and gratitude that the ‘children’ and adults had for the sisters; most of them got a distinguished place in society and they returned willingly together with their young families to visit the sisters who were real ‘mothers’ for them.

In 1957, when president Alessandro Barbaro asked for some sisters for the holiday house «Villa Contarini» in Preganziol (TV), mother C. Baldinucci responds: «...with real regret I am forced to let you know that I do not have persons available to assume the job. I trust, Lord Knight, in your benevolent understanding and I hope

²¹ See p. 6.

²² Letter to the superior Sr. Maria Concato of 30 October 1949, Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 662/D.

that you will not have difficulties in finding lay personnel...». The mentioned branch, due to economic difficulties, in 1975 was united to the establishment in the centre of Venice. The apostolic work was coming to an end; the cardinal patriarch interceded personally not to withdraw the sisters at that particular moment; the provincial superior, Sr. Carla Tagliapietra, in her canonical visit in 1977, after a long prayer session with the sisters, said: «Re-dimensioning is painful, but through the pain that it causes new life springs out. The sisters, spiritual mothers of children without families, know that the Father of all will not abandon their protected ones, but that his divine tenderness will guard them and lead them along the paths of life», therefore she gave the dispositions for the various transfers.

The type of assistance at the Institution «S. Maria della Pietà» went through an evolution due to the historical events, to the mentality of the directors and the pressing economic needs. Now the Pietà is a public service and charitable Institution and administers two educational communities (*Casa della Primavera* and *il Melograno*) that offer an innovative answer for minors and mothers with children, according to the tradition of the ancient *Spedale della Pietà*. Besides, the Institution organizes also interesting cultural events such as exhibitions, concerts and conferences. The documentary heritage which constitutes the historical archive is a valuable record of the life of the ancient hospital, the evolving strategies for the reception and insertion of the foundlings in society. There are also scheduled educational workshops and thematic courses for students during the scholastic year.

The church of «Santa Maria della Pietà», open to the public – where an elderly sister was in charge of the sacristy and the organist – displays a rich historical and artistic heritage, including the three frescoes by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo: the coronation of Mary Immaculate, David and the angel, the three theological virtues, and the main altarpiece portraying the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, painted by Giambattista Piazzetta and Giuseppe Angeli.