

## San Benedetto Giuseppe Labre ai Monti



**San Benedetto Giuseppe Labre ai Monti** is a tiny 18th century devotional shrine chapel at Via dei Serpenti 2, near Santa Maria ai Monti in the rione Monti. It is dedicated to St Benedict Joseph Labre. (It may be noted that his name can be rendered in Italian either as Benedetto Giuseppe or as Giuseppe Benedetto. In English, only “Benedict Joseph” is correct.)

### History

St Benedict Joseph was an 18th century homeless French pilgrim beggar. He is perhaps the most notable example in the Roman Catholic church of the "Fool-for-Christ," found more often in the Eastern church tradition especially in Russia. In the last years of his life (only thirty-five years long) he was at Rome, for a time living in the ruins of the Colosseum, and would leave only to make a yearly pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto. He was a familiar and well-loved figure in the city, and was known as the "Saint of the Forty Hours" (Quarant' Ore) for his dedication to Eucharistic adoration.

Apparently he became a Franciscan tertiary, although it has also been claimed that he was a Benedictine oblate at some stage (he had tried his vocation with the Cistercians and Carthusians).

He gave away almost all that he received when begging to other beggars, and at the end of his life was in an abjectly starved and filthy condition. He finally collapsed on 16 April 1783 after praying for two hours in front of the icon of Our Lady at Santa Maria ai Monti, was picked up unconscious in the street outside and carried to a nearby house. He died there of malnutrition, and was buried in the church.

Shrine

Devotion to him began immediately, and the number of reported miracles ascribed to his intercession reached three figures within a few months. The room in which he died was set up as a devotional shrine, in which were kept the filthy rags that he had been wearing when he died and which had been peeled off his body when it was laid out.

This shrine was the main focus of devotion to his memory, until he was beatified in 1860. Then his body was exhumed and enshrined in Santa Maria ai Monti. After his canonization in 1881, an altar and shrine were dedicated to him in the church.

Oblates

The little shrine has been maintained meanwhile in the house where he died. It is now in the charge of a secular institute of sisters known as the Apostolic Oblates (Oblate Apostolice), who were founded at Rome in 1950 by Bishop Guglielmo Giaquinta as part of his Campaign for Holiness (Movimento pro Sanctitate). The house is now run as a convent. The Oblates call their convents "Bethanys" (Betanie), so this is the Betania San Benedetto.

Exterior

Look for a very simple round-headed doorway on the west side of the street just north of the Piazza della Madonna dei Monti. There's a marble plaque commemorating the saint to the left of the door.

Interior

The shrine consists of a Museum Room, and the chapel proper. The former displays the actual bed on which the saint died, and also the possessions that he had with him (he owned nothing else). Noteworthy is the soldier's mess tin in which he used to keep the food which he was given.

The chapel has the site of the deathbed in the near right hand corner of its nave, which is now occupied by a life-sized stucco statue of the dying saint. Above him on the wall is a painting of Our Lady bestowing a crown, accompanied by putti with roses. Next to the bed is a cabinet with ex-voto offerings.

There is a separate sanctuary, separated from the nave of the chapel by a low triumphal arch. A pedimented Baroque altar has a tondo altarpiece depicting the saint within rays of glory. A pair of cabinets with more relics flank the altar, the one on the left containing the death mask. A painting of the saint at prayer is to the left.

### Access

According to an unofficial source the shrine is open to visitors daily, 10:00 to 12:30, 16:00 to 20:00. Visitors are very welcome, and the shrine is a popular pilgrimage attraction.

Mass is celebrated publicly here on 16 April, the saint's feast-day, and many people attend. Other liturgical events are advertised around this day as well.

Location:

Coord: 41°53'42.2"N 12°29'25.8"E

Address:

Via dei Serpenti 2

External links

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Photo of entrance](#)

[Montitv video](#)