

The "Redemptor

The chapel is in the Vatican and its renovation was made possible thanks to the Sacred College's gift to the Pope for the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination.

Pope John Paul II made himself clear. Once renovated and decorated, it was crucial the *Redemptoris Mater Chapel* highlight the point where East and West meet. The Pope said: "The Chapel is going to be a sign of the union of all the Churches represented with the Holy City. In addition, it shall serve as a meaningful example of the time honored traditions in the Vatican." And so it was. The book *"La Cappella 'Redemptoris Mater' del Papa Giovanni Paolo II"*, published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, tells the whole story about the chapel, from how the decision was reached to renovate it, to a recount of the work done. Henceforth, monsignor Piero Marini, bishop of Martirano and master of the papal and liturgical celebrations, tells how everything originated from a gift made to the Pope from the Sacred College in 1996, when the whole church celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of John Paul II. Monsignor Marini explains, "On that occasion, the Cardinals wanted to surround the Pope with their presence

LA CAPPELLA
REDEMPTORIS MATER"
DEL PAPA GIOVANNI PAOLO II

The pictures and some passages of the article published in these pages are extracted from the book *"La Cappella Redemptoris Mater del Papa Giovanni Paolo II"*. The volume, edited by Apa-clement-Valenziano (format 260x355, 297 pages rich in illustrations), is available at

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We thank them for their donations of the pictures and text used for this article.



and their affection. Some of them had been present at his election, most had been appointed by him; all of them wanted to express their devotion and esteem to Peter's successor with a significant gift. The gift given by the Sacred College consisted of

"Our Lady of the Sign" Chapel



a certain amount of money that the Pope himself would assign, in his judgment, to some important work. On November 10, 1996, concluding the jubilee events, the Pope addressed the Sacred College with these words: *'Thank you whole-heartily for the*

sum you have offered on this occasion through the Cardinal Dean. I'm sure you will appreciate my assigning it to a work that will remain in the Vatican. I have chosen the



renovation and decoration works of the Redemptoris Mater Chapel in the Apostolic Palace.'"

The Redemptoris Mater Chapel, named Matilde until 1987-88, is in the same Vatican buildings that house the recently renovated Sistine Chapel. It is accessible through the Sistine Salons, where some Mapei products were used a few years ago for the Vatican Library Galleries (see Realtà Mapei n. 21, page 2). The design and carrying out of the mosaic works in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel were entrusted to the Center of Ezio Aletti (Centro Ezio Aletti), Pontificio Istituto Orientale, and to the indefatigable work of Father Marko Ivan Rupnik and his aides, all under the supervision and authoritative expertise of Father Tomas Spidlik. Since the chapel is meant for liturgy celebrations, especially those officiated by Pope Wojtila, the renovation team didn't focus solely on the mosaic decoration, preferring to also consider a worthy renovation of the whole area, where the Pope would exercise his papal functions.

Works, times and stages

• *The assignment* - In 1996, the art department of theological studies at the Aletti Center was entrusted with the renovation of the Redemptoris Mater Chapel. Father Marko Ivan Rupnik and

Father Tomas Spidlik were in charge of the theological and artistic sides of the planning and execution of the chapel.

• *The wall of Celestial Jerusalem* - The Aletti work staff relied on the cooperation of Russian mosaicist Alexander Kornoukhov who was entrusted with the execution of Celestial Jerusalem. Kornoukhov worked on this project for six months, from December 1, 1996 to June 30, 1997.

• *The other walls* - The other walls were carried out by Father Rupnik and his aides. The Centro Aletti team worked on this project from November 5, 1997 to August 30, 1999.

• *The vault* - The mosaic execution of Father Rupnik's designs for the vault was entrusted to master Rino Pastorutti from the Spilimbergo School. Pastorutti worked from January 12, 1999 to August 16, 1999, helped by Master Livio Del Frari in the final stage.

• *The execution of the works* - The first task consisted of the removal of all the velvets previously covering the walls. The underlying plaster, which was in dismal condition and could not support the load of the new mosaics, was pick-axed. The preexistent nineteenth-century wall decorations, which were only partly visible, had no special artistic value and had in fact been tampered with during some previous renovation works.

However, the pavilion vault presented a number of bi-chromatic, eighteenth-century decorations of some interest. Centered in these decorations was a rectangular panel bordered by varied rows of valuable polychrome sixteenth-century tempera paintings in stuccoed frames. The quality of these paintings required their preservation, so a self-bearing contact vault was installed in which the artwork was laid. This vault consisted of a metal grid, the bearing bars of which were inserted in the boundary walls on dividing slabs applied with shrink-proof mortar. The secondary bars acted as spacers within which some large-diameter wire nets were welded together. A Nervometal net smoothed with NIVOPLAN® and PLANICRETE was critical in defining the arches of the new vault. The same procedure was followed for the walls by applying a Nervometal net blocked by electro welded wire nets by means of expanding rivets in the walls. Finally, to fasten the mosaics, the KERABOND+ISOLASTIC® flexible system was applied in a 1:3 ratio. This system was used for the vault and most of all the other surfaces.





TECHNICAL DATA

"Redemptoris Mater" Chapel - the Vatican
Project: renovation and mosaic decoration of the
vault and walls

Years of project: 1996-1999

Design and execution: Ufficio Tecnico
Governatorato, the Vatican City

Head of Technical Department: Engineer
G. Cusianna

Design and execution of mosaic works:
Centro Ezio Aletti del Pontificio Istituto
Orientale, under the guidance of Father Marko
Ivan Rupnik and Father Tomas Spidlik.
In cooperation with Russian mosaicist
Alexander Kormoukhov, Master Rino Patorutti
from the Spilimbergo School and Master Livio
Del Frati

Mapei products used: NIVOPLAN,
PLANICRETE, KERABOND+ISOLASTIC
Mapei coordinator: Pino Mancini

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