

Jewish Lives Saved in Assisi A Museum of Memory

It was in a spirit of Franciscan hospitality that about three hundred Jewish people's lives were saved in Assisi during World War II. And today there is an exhibition to memorialize this slice of Assisi's history.

As soon as one enters the first exhibition gallery at the Palace Vallemanni on the Via San Francesco housing the "Museum of Memory, 1943-1944 Assisi," one can immediately sense the historical period.

The idea to have this exhibition was conceived by Marina Rosati, in collaboration with Casa Papa Giovanni and with the former Bishop of Assisi, Sergio Goretti. Translations of texts were done by Annabella Donà. The exhibition includes unpublished documents, photos, awards, essays, and articles about that historical period and the various protagonists who gave of their own lives to help save the Jewish refugees.

The exhibition displays the work of Father Aldo Brunacci, Bishop Nicolini's choice to direct the operation of hiding the Jews; Bishop Giuseppe Placido Nicolini, who guided the underground organization that spontaneously had arisen in Assisi; Friar Rufino Niccacci, guardian of the Franciscan sanctuary of San Damiano; Arnaldo Fortini, the mayor of Assisi; the German commander, Colonel Valentin Müller; Friar Michael Todde, and others who did their best to preserve the lives of many Jewish people otherwise destined for deportation to death camps.

One important section of the exhibition is dedicated to Luigi and Trento Brizi who printed false identity cards for the Jews. Besides viewing the antique printing machine used to produce the false identity cards at the museum's entrance, the exhibition displays the actual printing letters and other equipment used by the Brizis.

The exhibition, in both Italian and English, winds its way through four galleries that includes some writings, a documentary film featuring interviews with some of the protagonists given before their deaths, relating what was done by people in Assisi to preserve the lives of so many Jews. The exhibition is open daily at the Municipal Gallery of Assisi.