

Easter in Scicli (RG) – Testimonianza di un Viaggiatore - A traveller's account

*We recommend searching for images of these extraordinary festivals on search engines and YouTube by typing in "Easter in Scicli", "Gioia Scicli" or "Capossela Gioia Scicli".*

Holy Week and the 'Uomu Vivu' festival

The week leading up to Easter is marked by celebrations and processions with statues from 1600 - 1700 accompanied by the Band and interested citizens and visitors.

Palm Sunday (evening). Procession of Our Lady of Sorrows from Santa Maria la Nova, linked to a very ancient cult dating back to St William. A large crowd of devotees arranged in double rows, with the characteristic torches with a bridle-paper collar, lit, follows La Pietà, a group of statues made of wooden sculptures.

Holy Tuesday. Holy Tuesday procession with the Our Lady of S. Bartolomeo, a rite introduced more recently, as if to underline the rivalry between the two Archconfraternities.

Holy Thursday. "Maundy Thursday 'Function', with the setting up, in the chapels of the various churches, of the 'Saburcara', the Sepulchres, to be visited, as tradition dictates, in odd numbers.

Good Friday (evening). Good Friday procession. A beautiful simulacrum of Our Lady of Sorrows (kept in the church of S. Giovanni) is carried in procession, dressed in the traditional black dress, and a sword pierces her chest. In front of the Church of the Madonna del Carmine there is the encounter with the Dead Jesus. The procession concludes in the Church of S. M. la Nova with the 'Scisa 'a Cruci' (Descent of the Cross) Christ deposited from the cross.

Midnight of Holy Saturday. On the afternoon of Holy Saturday, the Confrats of Santa Maria la Nova move the simulacrum of the Risen Christ from the niche where it is kept all year round to a place behind the High Altar. Here the Statue is slowly raised by a crank mechanism by which during the night - 'crisci, crisci' (rise, rise!) our fathers used to say - the Resurrection will take place. A crowd overflowing from every aisle of the church of S. M. la Nova welcomes with shouts of exultation the statue of the Risen Christ - 'u Gioia' -

raised by hundreds of arms in a blaze of sound and colour, amid deafening applause and shouts.

Easter Sunday. Procession of the 'Venerable'. At 8 am, 21 cannon shots announce Easter Sunday. Through the streets of the city, the 'Venerable', the monstrance, is carried in the hands of a priest, under a large four-posted canopy; the procession is opened by a very heavy banner 'u stunnardu', made of blue silk with gold embroidery, ' ... with a star embroidered in gold and a large tassel, at the tip, touching the ground, hanging from a long pole, which bends in an arc, is carried, tied to the waist, by young men, who thus demonstrate their vigour. They proceed with measured steps, the pole threaded through a leather cap, hanging from the front, with a strap tightened at the hips, the torso bent backwards, one arm outstretched, holding the pole; the tip of the banner crawling on the ground'. (B. Cataudella; Scicli. History and Traditions).

A moment of intense emotion and spectacularity is when late in the morning, on the return of the 'Stunnardu'. a crowd of young people, crowding together, lifts the statue of the 'Living Man' onto their arms and, to the sound of the Busacca Hymn, proceeds, with a forward-backward gait, from inside the church to the churchyard where the beautiful statue of the Risen Christ finally appears to the waiting crowd, making it visible as far as the 'piano del Cònsolo', represented in the guise of a young man with a harmoniously vigorous body, covered by a golden yellow sash, a red cloak covering his neck, with the rays of the rising sun, symbol of rebirth, behind him, the paten on his head and his right hand raised and blessing, while with his left he holds a blue banner, the colour of resurrection.

To the sound of the Royal March and again of the Busacca Hymn, the statue advances, swinging, down S. M. la Nova street.

M. la Nova street. The 'Feast of Men' explodes, as Vinicio Capossela so aptly sang it, after seeing the statue that '...with its three fingers the Way seems to indicate', while it 'staggers, wobbles on the back of the crowd'. It is certainly difficult to describe, to those who have not seen this celebration at least once, the jubilation of the crowd, amid the shouts of 'Evviva' and 'Gio-gio- Gioooooia! " and the shower of flower petals that descend from the balconies as the statue passes by.

The Statue is taken to the Church of the Carmine, from which it will be taken back before midnight to be escorted back to the Sanctuary of Santa Maria la Nova, again accompanied by the Band Corps and once again by a festive and enthusiastic crowd.

The Sicilian Region has decided to include 'The rites of Holy Week in Scicli' among the Great Events, and to inscribe the event thus named in the R. E. I. , the Register of Intangible Heritage. Scicli's events inscribed in the R.E.I.: St. Joseph's Ride, Holy Week, Easter Resurrection, Our Lady of the Militia, Immaculate Conception Songs.

For the text on Holy Week on the website of the Municipality of Scicli:

<http://www.comune.scicli.rg.it/.../Ser.../L/IT/IDPagina/5638>

To find out more, contact directly the Arciconfraternita di Santa Maria La Nova, the precious guardian and promoter of Easter Resurrection in Scicli together with other Active Subjects in the town (info@arciconfraternitasmlanova.it) and the Scicli Town Council's Tourist Information and Promotion Office based in Palazzo Spadaro, via Francesco Mormina Penna (Heritage of Humanity). Tel. 0932 839611.

Free composition from available texts.