

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A CHURCH

Originally, the tower of that church should have been taller, clearly visible from a distance, and one should have entered the church directly from the street, passing through a noble Romanesque Revival portal. Eventually, everything turned out to be different. The church is embedded in a row of houses and provided with an inconspicuous entrance hiding away well the treasure it conceals from the times of adversity. It came to being by a miraculous interplay of thoughts and destinies of men who had decided to walk untreaded paths of their time.

The first one of them was Peter Desiderius Lenz, a German architect and theoretician of what was called the Beuron Art School, who spent his life looking for an ideal way of capturing reality in such a manner as to reflect both itself and the one whom he believed to have created it. He was followed by F. Václav Klement Petr, founder of the Congregation of Brothers of the Holy Sacrament, who was not afraid to invest his last vital strengths in carrying out an ambitious architectural project and running an unusual social programme of aid for middle working classes. The other ones included Jakub Stabernak, architect and builder coming from České Budějovice, and the Czech painter and frescoer Jaroslav Pantaleon Major, Peter Lenz's student, who decorated the interior of the church building with the assistance of a group of Beuron School artists. These men, together with a great number of nameless people – the brick masons, stone masons, plasterers, tile layers, carpenters, painters, blacksmiths, glassworkers – met at the right place and at the right time to make come true what up until then had only been their great wish.

The guide through this inconspicuous church is not merely intended as a description of its decorations, but also of the people and thoughts hidden behind them. It wants to tell of their creative courage, moral strength, as well as everyday faithfulness and endurance. You are invited to hear a literary testimony of people who have, to the present day, spoken through the walls of this little big temple.

Once upon a time, there was a church...

...AND FAR LIVED THE ONE WHO HAD DREAMED IT.

F. Desiderius Peter Lenz, OSB
(Haigerloch, 1832 – Beuron, 1927)

Painter, architect, art theoretician, founder of the Beuron Art School, tireless and faithful seeker of “the perfect art”.

Beuron is the name of a small town along the upper reaches of the Danube River in Baden-Württemberg, as well as the denomination of a Benedictine congregation that has existed for almost 150 years. Beuron, however, also stands for a nearly forgotten, and yet very interesting school of art founded by Peter Lenz. In it, Lenz created a form of art, through which he desired to capture the perfection of all that surrounded him – the environment, the nature, the people and their creations. In such representations, he beheld, on the one hand, a reflection of the perfect God whom he believed to be the Universal Creator, and, on the other hand, a foundation of “the perfect space”, worthy of becoming the place for God's glorification, that is, the only appropriate liturgical space.

In his time, people were fed up with ideals. They doubted their authenticity, turning back to reality again. Darwin's thoughts penetrated even the world of art. Radicalism would lead some artists as far as to worship the nature, while others would try to represent the same nature so realistically as to render their realism unrealistic. What Peter Lenz missed in the contemporary art was an objective basis – something peculiar and stylish, defined by a solid

form and clear-cut criteria that would provide the man with a sense of security. It was this contemporary orientation that came to influence and turmoil Peter Lenz's mental universe and set him upon the path of searching for a new and original form of artistic expression.

Peter Lenz was born on 12 March 1832 in Haigerloch in the principedom of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen in Upper Swabia. A significant milestone in his artistic career was his study visit in the City of Rome, for which he left in autumn 1862. It was there that he discovered his primary and most important source of inspiration – the ancient Egyptian, Byzantine and Greek arts and their perfect harmony of ideal proportions.

For Lenz, it was geometry with all the simplicity and peculiarity inherent in simple numbers and relations that became the basis of all art. It has been demonstrated that certain proportional relations have a stronger and more natural impact on people than some of the others do. The human eye is used to the symmetry of blossoms, of the seed layout in fruits, of the direction in which tree leaves and branches grow, perceiving them as natural, agreeable and harmonious. Mathematicians, as well as artists tried to generalise this pattern, infinitely reproduced in nature. Its basis came to be referred to as the extreme and mean ratio, or the “golden section” – i.e. the ratio $1 : 0.618$ – and was found in plant physiology and anatomy, in chemistry (crystalline structures and compound compositions), or in astronomy (positions of stars and planets). In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, drawing heavily on the culture of Antiquity, mathematicians were so amazed by the ratio as to call it the “divine proportion”, even speaking about a “cosmic law”. As Johannes Kepler put it: *Geometry has two great treasures: one is the Theorem of Pythagoras; the other, the division of a line into extreme and mean ratio. The first we may compare to a measure of gold; the second we may name a precious jewel.*

The Renaissance artists would create their works using complex structures based on the “golden section”, allowing their paintings and sculptures to be analysed into the smallest surfaces. Without a conscious or subconscious use of the golden ratio in the design or composition, there was no good painting, violin or drama. Artists were to respect the principle and make do with elementary forms, for the simpler their perception would be, the readier they would be to approach “The Supreme One” and render their work precious and unique.

Another significant milestone in Peter Lenz's life was August 1872, when he joined the Beuron Benedictine monastic community as an oblate, i.e. layman sharing in the monastic life without the binding vows. At that time, there was already a group of brothers in the monastery interested in art. However, in 1875, as the anti-catholic policy of Otto von Bismarck intervened in the Benedictine community life, the monks were forced to leave.

In 1880, at the invitation of Cardinal Bedřich Schwarzenberg, they found a new refuge in Prague, with the Emmaus Monastery in Slovany becoming their new home until World War One. There they replaced the Benedictines from the Catalan Monastery of Montserrat, who had lived there since 1636. It was here where Peter Lenz took his vows and definitely joined the monastic community as Brother Desiderius.

The older Desiderius grew, the more he desired to systematically raise his students. In 1894, favourable political and cultural conditions enabled Lenz's artistic activity, carried out for as many as thirty years and governed by specific theoretical theses and principles, to receive a name. What Peter Lenz used to do informally in his work now became a formal institution – the “Beuron Art School” for the oblate boys. Two years later, thanks to his contacts with the Emmaus monastic community, Peter Lenz started to teach Benedictine nuns at St. Gabriel's Abbey in the Prague district of Smíchov, where he was painting the interior of the Church of the Annunciation at the time.

The Beuron Art School was a parallel to the medieval Cistercian movement. Its works are still to be counted, as they are dispersed in the form of more or less coherent church paintings, partial ornaments imprinted on chasubles and liturgical vessels or decorations behind the altars of rural churches across Central and Western Europe, but can also be found in Israel, China or America. There are as many as forty Beuron monuments in Bohemia and Moravia; however, their historical and artistic values are very different. With the significant personages involved gradually passing away or leaving, the School's activities were slowly subsiding to cease completely in 1928. This is also the year when, on 28 January, F. Desiderius Lenz died in Beroun at the age of 96.

The Church of the Virgin Mary of the Rosary in České Budějovice represents one of the most significant coherent Beuron monuments in the Czech Republic. In addition to that, only partial Beuron paintings or traces of the Beuron Style in other churches and chapels in České Budějovice can be found. Another artist directly associated with the interior decoration of the Church of the Virgin Mary of the Rosary in České Budějovice is one of Lenz's students, Jaroslav Pantaleon Major (1869–1936).

One of the typical features of the Beuron School is **a canon of proportions for the human figure**. Lenz, observing divine beauty and perfection in simplicity, consistently drew human figures and faces in equilateral triangles and circles, combining ingeniously their numerical proportions in an effort to design an ideal canon for the male and female figures. The basis of the canon relied on the circle, representing infinity, and the equilateral triangle, representing unity.

Although **ornaments**, heavily employed by the Beuron art, rely on the tradition of Arabic and Byzantine arts, they are not ornaments in the true sense of the word. Lenz's ornaments, though not appearing different to a lay observer, have been "rationalised", i.e. premeditated and carefully calculated according to the "golden ratio".

Another ornamental feature of the Beuron Art School is **writing**. Some letters are distinguished by special graphics peculiar to the Beuron art. For instance, letter E is recorded as a mirrored three; the crossbar connecting the two stems of letter A takes the form of a caret sign turned upside down; and letter U is written as letter V, the only feature differentiating it from the latter being a somewhat bolder line.

Today, the era of Beuron art is over, having been of marginal interest to researchers for about three quarters of a century and remaining absolutely unknown to general public. Nevertheless, it has undoubtedly influenced a number of excellent artists and architects, such as Alfons Mucha, Josip Plečnik, Otto Wagner, Jan Kotěra, Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, Viktor Foerster or Felix Jenewein.

An eccentric or a genius? In a way, Peter Lenz was both. In his lifetime, he produced countless designs of wall paintings and handicraft equipment for sacred buildings in several European countries. It was with courage and ease that he refused what was the certainty of life for his contemporaries, and it was with the same courage and ease that he created the new. He rejected both the Gothic and Renaissance and condemned realists and naturalists only to be repudiated and mistaken by his friend, his superiors, his fellow brothers, and part of the artistic world. For having a church interior fashioned by Beuron artists according to Peter Lenz's canon would then be as uncommon as having church walls painted with graffiti today, a feat worthy of daredevils who are scarce. Luckily enough, F. Václav Klement Petr, who

eventually commissioned the decoration of the Church of the Virgin Mary of the Rosary in České Budějovice, was one of them.

In his work, Peter Lenz managed to combine the heritage of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Byzantine period and early Christianity, integrate it within Christian Mysticism and promote it to a journey in search of God, for “[God has] disposed all things by measure, number and weight” (Wis 11,20). He achieved an extraordinary link between religion, art and mathematics, creating an ideal difficult to realise by human means. Nevertheless, he followed that ideal with a Don-Quixote-like endurance and folly, and it is for us to either take our hats off to it all, or give it all an indulgent smile.

Once upon a time there was a church...

...AND A MAN WHO WISHED TO HAVE IT FOR THE PEOPLE.

F. Václav Klement Petr, CFSsS

(Sušice, 1856 – České Budějovice, 1901)

Catholic priest, founder of the first Czech male congregation, called Congregation of Brothers of the Holy Sacrament, and initiator of the construction of the Church of the Virgin Mary of the Rosary in České Budějovice, who eagerly promoted and implemented a number of social projects focusing on education of the Czech youth, care for workers and late vocations.

At that time, industry across Europe saw an intense development, bringing about, like any other societal changes, lots of good things and lots of bad things. Many an invention gave momentum to dramatic blossoming of civilisation, radically influencing the daily lives of citizens. A breakneck speed of the economic growth, however, left a social stain behind – a large-scale migration of people from the rural areas into the cities, as well as an increasing number of unskilled workers, usually undernourished, who lived in poor dwellings and received inadequately low wages, constantly struggling, together with their families, under the poverty line. There were many tensions within the different social classes. Pope Leo XIII issued first social encyclicals and a number of people throughout Europe got down to work. In Italy, Jan Bosko started building a social security network for homeless children; in Germany, Adolf Kolping began his work; in Warsaw and Vienna, Klement Hofbauer launched his activities; and Václav Petr followed suit in České Budějovice.

Václav Petr was born in Sušice of the Šumava Mountains on 16 January 1856 to the local furrier's family. It is hard to say whether it was his illness, the poor family's condition into which he had been born, his friendship with Bishop Jan Valerián Jirsík or his readings of Pope Leo XIII's social encyclicals that eventually led to Václav's decision to become a priest and develop a skill to understand the needs of people, whose lives were swept by the industrial revolution storming through Europe.

After a short-term work as chaplain in Blovice, he was summoned unexpectedly by Bishop Jirsík to take up the office of Vice-Rector of the seminary in České Budějovice. At that time, Václav Petr visited regularly, among other places, the Deaf and Dumb Institute at Mariánské Square in České Budějovice, founded by Bishop Jirsík, had mastered the sign language and, to the astonishment of everyone around, celebrated the sacraments with eighty patients of the institute. He would see days of fulfilment and joy followed by those of exhaustion and weakness, induced by his illness and strict and stringent religiousness, through which he had set himself, *in bona fide*, strict and precise life rules.

In 1888, being thirty-two years old, Václav Petr founded a monastic congregation, becoming Father Superior of the first Czech purely male monastic congregation. As a place of their congregated living, the brothers chose a former lath manufacture building on Schmerlingova

Street, which was of no more use to its owner. The first seven brothers moved in, and after the congregation was approved in 1891, F. Václav Petr took a monastic name Maria Klement. For their prayer service, the brothers contented themselves with a carriage-entrance fashioned as a chapel with a traditional statue of the Virgin Mary of Lourdes. Twelve boys from poor rural families immediately sought shelter under their roof, and before long, the brothers went on to establish, within their premises, a shoemaker's, a carpenter's, a tailor's, a locksmith's and a bookbinder's workshop. The brothers' place shortly became known as "Saint Peter's", and later as "the Petrines". As time passed by, the walled-in space was less and less capable of containing F. Klement's plans and ideals. He believed that through their deep knowledge of Christ and in their communion with Christ through the mystery of Eucharist, he and his fellow brothers would be able to live close to the people and provide them with fullness of life through the sacraments. It was with an immense belief in God's help and in the peoples' support that he turned, in 1898, to architect Jakub Stabernak of České Budějovice and Brother Jaroslav Pantaleon Major, together with other Benedictines from the Emmaus Monastery in Prague, in order to hold, on 21 August 1898, a ceremony to bless the foundation stone of a new church to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary of the Rosary.

The preliminary budget of just the shell construction of the church amounted to nearly 65.000 florins. The amount was collected bit by bit in small-value coins, and many craftsmen would reduce their price or charge only for the material. It was as if by chance that the construction became an important source of living for dozens of labourers. After an incredible period of two years, the construction works were successfully concluded and the church, built in the Romanesque Revival Style, was solemnly consecrated on 7 October 1900 by Bishop Martin Josef Říha. By the standards of the time, it was a monumental work, in which desires of the common people and the genius of a single man became materialised. However, it was not only the year in which the construction was completed, but also the year when the life of its initiator and spiritual father was coming to an end. Having invested his last vital strengths in the construction, F. Klement died of tuberculosis the following year.

F. Klement was succeeded by F. Pius Karpíšek, who had a mosaic made for the façade of the house found in front of the church. The Petrine brothers were opening new houses and working at different places. After World War II, during which the last Superior General, F. Adaukt Josef Krebs of Prachatice, who had been admitted by F. Klement Petr himself, died in the concentration camp of Dachau, the congregation had over forty members, with other brothers still preparing for their vocations. However, in 1950, when the brothers' activity was banned by the Communist regime, the students returned home and the brothers were dispersed into civil employments or pastoral cares at parishes, with many of them spending several long years in prison. After 1989, the Petrine brothers resumed their public service and restored life to their communities. In the entire course of the forty-year period, the Church of the Virgin Mary of the Rosary was not abandoned. Although masses were not celebrated there so often and despite being administered by the deanery at St. Nicolas Cathedral, it became a place where home was found by many for whom Christianity and faith did not lose their value under the totalitarian rule. Even today, in the restored presence of the brothers, the church remains a place where people come and meet.

Once upon a time, there was a church...

...WHICH ONE CAN ENTER, TOO.

The entrance gate squeaks, its handle pointing down as if held by someone all the time. People's hands have polished bright some of its brass, and in the bends and moulds of the finely ornamented hardware dirt set in, just as the residues of things touched during the day

get stuck under one's fingernails. Let us grab the handle as one of the crowd that has come, and is still to come, and step inside.

At first glance, it is hard to quickly find one's feet, and one may find it convenient to be able to lean against a column supporting the organ loft and take a look around. While most of the other sacred spaces will firmly capture the visitor's sight and aim it invariably at the altar, here one finds himself suddenly surrounded by colours, shapes, arches and columns. Somebody would say: "I think I'm in a square" or "It feels like in a garden", and yet somebody else might as well suggest: "This is an underworld full of precious stones, or the inside of a huge jewel box." – "It is the lower deck of a large ship." – "This is how I imagine human heart." – "Maybe this is what heaven looks like."

Nevertheless, as long as one keeps his feet on the ground, the space does not leave him in doubt that he is come inside a big house, lacking nothing of what usually goes with it: it has got firm foundations, walls with windows and doors, as well as a high ceiling above. Taking about ten more steps forward through the middle of the space, we stop right there. We are now facing an arch of another gate with a flight of stone steps, and beyond it, an arch of yet another gate with yet another flight of stone steps.

In the apsidal recess over the canopy, paintings are clearly visible from a distance. The more we approach them, however, the more their size makes them escape the range of our vision. They will better be watched from afar. In the centre, over the painting of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary, Christ Pantokrator is seated on a throne hemmed with a blue mandorla. Standing next to Him, under the palm paintings, is Apostle Peter, holding a key, and Apostle Paul, holding a scriptural roll bearing an inscription: „From the Letter to the Romans: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?“ (*DE EPISTOLA AD ROMANOS: QUIS NOS SEPARABIT A CHARITATE CHRISTI?*). Since both apostles have been called "the pillars of the Church", it was not by chance that their paintings were placed as apparent extensions of the columns supporting the canopy.

A golden circle around the Virgin Mary's figure and the blue mandorla surrounding Christ the King are aligned along the same axis, depicting fullness of time – the daily sun and the starry night sky. The Virgin Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary, shows people the way to God's throne. The sky and the earth are connected through the grains of prayer and the Son of God having become man.

The longer one is exposed, in the centre of the nave, to the diversity of colours and forms, the more frequently and readily a single unifying word comes onto his mind. An art-loving man will think of beauty. A lover of life may think of perfection. A mathematician walking around will many a time recall the number 0.618, for by virtue of the Beuron art principles, everything is meant to reflect formal perfection through precisely calculated geometric ratios. And a Christian will echo the name of Mary, thousand times, in different forms.

Whether paintings, pictures, colours, ceiling cassettes, ornamental shapes, or words – they all point to Mary somehow. On the lower walls, we can follow her in fourteen woodcarvings of the Stations of the Cross. Above them, the whole nave is circumscribed by words of the prayer "Hail Holy Queen" (*SALVE REGINA*), and still over the prayer inscription, there is a series of fifteen paintings of the scenes from Mary's life. Consequently, we are forced to move, starting to turn slowly clockwise, in the sense of the passing time. The first painting of Annunciation in the right corner is thus followed chronologically by those of Visitation, Nativity, Presentation, Mary's losing little Jesus on the way to the Jerusalem Temple, and Crucifixion. Mary then reappears on the Calvary, standing under the Cross with Apostle John, and the series is closed by the paintings of Resurrection, Ascension, Descent of the Holy Spirit, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven.

Over these paintings, there is a row of seventeen windows. The larger ones of them are filled with grisaille glass panes showing the thirteen Apostles. Hence, on the right-hand side, one is watched by Apostles James the Less, Bartholomew, Thaddeus and Thomas, joined, on the left-hand side, by Andrew, Matthew, John and Simon. The image of the youngest Apostle, Matthias, is half-hidden in the fifth window near the organ, while apostles Peter and Paul are portrayed on two sidewalls of the presbytery. Paintings of Apostles Philip and James the Great, nowadays missing, were originally placed in the rose windows over the canopy. Between the windows of the nave, eleven tall palm trees have been painted. The trees are slender, their nine-branch tops reflecting the shape of a nine-fold shell imitating the ornament found on the lower walls. The palms bear fruits, just as the shells conceal golden pearls fashioned as crosses.

Once again, one is moved to spiral up his eyes in concentric circles to re-meditate on the Stations of the Cross, the text of “Hail Holy Queen”, and the painted Mysteries of the Rosary. He then feels inclined to raise his eyes even higher to see the windows with the Apostles’ faces looking down at him from between the stems of the noble palm trees, and higher still, up to the treetops and words singing of wisdom and grandeur of men.

Standing firmly on the ground, we can look up high above. Right over the head, there is a painting of the Holy Trinity with the inscription: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen” (*IN NOMINE PATRIS ET FILII ET SPIRITUS SANCTI AMEN*). Hovering in four circles around the Holy Trinity painting are the images of four seraphim with six rainbow wings (Is 6,2), together with the inscriptions “Holy, Holy, Holy” (*SANCTUS, SANCTUS, SANCTUS*), singing and showing reverence to God that is all but humanlike. Up ahead in the central part of the ceiling, there is a painting of the Virgin Mary as described by Evangelist John in his revelation on the island of Pathmos by the following words: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her had a crown of twelve stars” (*SIGNUM MAGNUM APPARUIT IN COELO: MULIER AMICTA SOLE ET LUNA SUB PEDIBUS EIUS ET IN CAPITE EIUS CORONA STELLARUM DUODECIM*, Rv 12,1). To the rear, one can observe the painting of John the Baptist holding a lamb encircled by the inscription: „Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist“ (*AMEN DICO VOBIS, NON SURREXIT INTER NATOS MULIERUM MAJOR JOANNE BAPTISTA*, Mt 11,11). Not only do the figures hover above one’s head, they also make an impression of “walking along”. This is because their feet point to the real church entrance and their head to the altar. There are three times six rectangles on the ceiling rimmed by seven times twelve squares, having the dimensions of the Heavenly Jerusalem, in accordance with John’s revelation.

Just as the enclosing sidewalls exclaim the word Maria thousand times and the ceiling above invites us to heaven, the word “altar” recurs in the wall paintings of the Triumphal Arch up in the front. The painting of the first altar is situated right on top of the arch. It shows Christ as the Easter lamb whom the Christians believe to have sacrificed Himself out of true love for the salvation of mankind. The lamb lies on the book sealed with seven seals, and the inscription under the fresco reads: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted; and with his stripes we are healed” (*OBLATUS EST, QUIA IPSE VOLUIT ET LIVORE EIUS SANATI SUMUS*, Is 53,5). Between the ten candleholders at His sides, there stand two times four angels, their number referring to the fullness of heaven. The words above them read as follows: “Lamb of God, have mercy on us” (*AGNUS DEI – MISERERE NOBIS*).

Adding to the forepicture of Christ’s sacrifice are the old wise men – Abraham and Melchizedek, the King of Salem. The altar on which Abraham is sacrificing his son Isaac, as

well as the one on which Melchizedek is offering bread and wine, stand out symmetrically from the inner sides of the arch. Abraham's sacrifice bears the following comment: "[He] became obedient unto death" (*FACTUS OBEDIENS USQUE AD MORTEM*, Phil 2,8), while Melchizedek's is accompanied by the following words: "Thou art a priest for ever" (*TU ES SACERDOS IN AETERNUM*, Žd 7,21). The main altar is complemented by two side altars. To the right, there is an altar dedicated to St. John of Nepomuk; to the left, an altar built in honour of the Holy Family. Ultimately, all altars make up a single whole – the image of an eschatological altar on the top, its Old Testament forepictures on both sides, and the real, marble altar on the ground as a place for celebrating the mystery of Christ's sacrifice.

Walking around the altar table and taking a couple of steps to the centre behind it, we have suddenly entered a new space. It feels much cosier than the space of the nave, very much reminding of a four-wall room in a house. The presbytery is organised like a sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple. By analogy, its walls have been decorated with flowers, columns and cherub wood carvings and there is a table for the unleavened bread, the only exception being that instead of a seven-arm candelabra and an altar of incense, on which incense was burnt every day to pay homage to God, one finds choir benches – the seats of people with hearts set on fire for their neighbours, whose prayers ascended heavenward like the incense.

The seats in choir benches total four times eight. They are likely to have been occupied the longest by those who had witnessed the first days of the congregation. Whatever the situations the brothers jointly struggled, their choir bench seats were inscribed by joyful words of joyful prayers, full of praise and determination. Hence, the brothers seated on the right-hand side would read over the heads of their fellows, perhaps so tired as to be falling asleep, the first verse of Psalm 95 carved in wood with golden letters: "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation" (*VENITE, EXULTEMUS DOMINO: JUBILEMUS DEO SALUTARI NOSTRO*, Ps 95,1). The other side of the choir was neither better nor worse off, as they would read the following determined words over the heads of their counterparts: "Before the gods, I sing your praise, my Lord!" (*IN CONSPECTU ANGELORUM PSALLAM TIBI, DEUS MEUS!* – inspired by Ps 138,1). And, for the oblivious brothers, initial words of choir prayers were recorded in golden letters on the blue strip: "Make haste, o God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, o Lord! Glory to the Father" (*DEUS IN ADIUTORIUM MEUM INTENDE, DOMINE AD ADIUVANDUM ME FESTINA; GLORIA PATRI*). Such a paradoxical disagreement of the desire and reality, perceivable especially in late-night and early-morning hours, was indeed of great advantage. Whenever will languished and body got out of control, the place itself was praying for the brothers.

The meaning of all the choir prayers is so strong that it cannot be stopped even by the natural limits of the walls. The words are spinning round the circular space, including the rear part of the Triumphal Arch, so one does not get the entire message unless standing in the middle and turning his head around. Thus, in the choir benches, where the field of vision is somewhat narrowed, the words of prayer only become fully visible through the collective view of a community sitting in them. As a result, it is only through different angles of vision that a picture is seen in its totality.

It is not unlike with either of the paintings that dominate the space. Their size is justified, considering the fact that they introduce and conclude a number of images from the Virgin Mary's life decorating the walls of the nave. On the left-hand side, there is a painting of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Joy. Clad in a white shroud, she is standing on a golden crescent in the middle of the painting, holding little Jesus in her arm and pointing to His heart. The Beuron style makes her appear like an Egyptian queen with a fine air and benignant face. She is surrounded by a choir of six angels, playing lutes and zithers and signing lyrics written on

long sheets of paper. The mandorla in which the Madonna is shrouded is dyed with azure blue. On the inside, it is beaded with sixteen golden stars, and on the outside, it vibrates with a threefold wave. This evokes the flow of life-giving water or the breath of life, and somehow reminds of the way in which St. Hildegard of Bingen tried to represent greatness of the Holy Spirit.

On the wall to the right, there is a painting of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Sorrows. She is sitting and holding the dead body of Jesus on her wide lap, in which she had borne Him, out of which she had delivered Him and on which she had cuddled Him. Hence, she becomes the throne of sorrow. The body is large, heavy and real, while the expression on Mary's face and her hand gestures show an internal contradiction. With one hand, Mary is embracing and holding the pain, fighting it back with the other one, just as people find it difficult to deal with the inevitable having become reality. Mary is an example of the person who does not resist sorrow but rather lays it on her lap to take it on and turn it into a genuine life value.

Both paintings complement each other, one lending value and sense to the other. For the awareness of sorrow deepens joy and the hope for joy to come helps withstand sorrow. Mary is a woman who accepts the front and reverse sides of life and transforms them into meaningful values.

In terms of art decoration, all themes of the human history and the present world are exhausted on the face of the last arch. Beyond it, no motifs from either the Old or the New Testaments are found. Here, the time of all the temple artwork ends, and we are only tempted by the angels to step further ahead. Singing *ALELLUJA* from both sides, they fill up the arch area as an invisible gate. They invite us to the place where the builder of this temple tried to capture what the human eye had never seen or what the human ear had never heard and where sight, hearing, smelling and touch are urged to cross the line of perception.

Two lamps with eternal light will draw our attention to God's presence, so one is not left in doubt that he has reached the end. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (*ECCE TABERNACULUM DEI CUM HOMINIBUS*) is announced in golden letters on the outer side of the canopy, according to the Book of Revelation, and followed by the verse "and they shall be his people" (*ET IPSI POPULUS EIUS ERUNT*) to the left, as well as the words "and he will dwell with them" (*ET HABITABIT CUM EIS*, Rv 21,3) to the right. Under the canopy, one faces the main altar with a tabernacle, where the most precious treasure of Christian faith is stored – the Eucharist – which the Christians celebrate in the temple and which rests there after each service. Consequently, it can be brought to people who are not able to take part in the common celebration due to their illness or old age.

On the altar painting in the background, there is Mary with the Child in a golden circle of sun, hovering on a cloud, with St. Dominic (+ 1221) and St. Catherine of Sien (+ 1380) kneeling at the her feet. They are handing them a rosary which interlinks them all, regardless of whether the times are calm or rough. On both sides of the tabernacle, there are steps looking like stairs, but they cannot be followed any further. The only way is the one leading back.

Opening now before us is the nave viewed from a different angle. And it is because of that angle that we realise we have not reached the end of the path, for the path still leads back. One finds himself in the middle of an aisle leading from the street, the profane space, into the temple, the sacred space, and *vice versa*. These two perspectives do not exclude, but rather complement each other. Thus, the first suddenly becomes the last, and the casual becomes the special, in the light of a new quality one may have been touched with inside the sacred space. The most remarkable feature which has so far escaped our eyes is the mass of a wooden loft bearing the organ cabinet. The three pillars supporting the loft are, at the same time, the stems of three palm trees, the interlacing branches of which make up the face of the loft and bear

strange fruit. It is the fruit of life of twenty-two people somehow connected with the history of the Czech lands and worshipped as saints by Christians.

Afterwards, it remains to finish our journey by passing back through the nave, along the corridor, and through the entrance gate to stand on the same sidewalk of the same street in which cars and people flow as one big river of life that does not fall calm until shortly before morning. On one of its shores, there is a house which does not overtop or outgrow any of the other ones, and yet it conceals a treasure. It is a treasure of art which, through its perfect form, succeeded in expressing the perfection of the One whom Christians call their God. Behold, a tabernacle of God with men...

Přeložil Radim Sova