

Self-Guided Tour
of
The Church of
St. Mary of Częstochowa



Welcome to

St Mary of Czestochowa

This church was once part of a village called Czestochowa (after Czestochowa, Poland). This is the second church with this name at this location. The first, built in 1884, burned down when lightning struck the steeple in 1913. The present church was finished by 1915; the entry addition-was completed in 2011.

The church is decorated with various images and symbols. From its very beginning the Catholic Church has used symbols to teach the Faith. A brief tour of the church or St. Mary's of Czestochowa is a great place to begin studying these symbols.

The **entrance stairs** are the result of architectural symbolism. The ground we leave represents the earth; the stairs remind us of the ladder to heaven once seen by Jacob. (Gen 28:10-i 7) The church itself represents heaven where God dwells.

The **angels holding shells of Holy Water** remind us of God's great love and grace. The shell is a symbol of baptism; when we dip our fingers in Holy Water and make the sign of the cross, we recall that we are children of God and must act accordingly.

The name for the "pew-section" of the church is the **Nave**. It comes from the Latin word navis, "ship". Like Noah's ark, Peter's Boat (an ancient nick-name for the Church) saves the faithful from a world drowning in sin and suffering, and sails them to the port of eternal salvation. The nave is "held up" by 16 pillars. **Pillars**, whether found in groups of 12 or not, represent the Apostles, who, because of their witness in 'word and blood, hold up the Church. (Gal 2:9) (Rev 21 :14)

The Windows ~ Left Side (starting at the back)

The **chalice and host** are symbols of our Eucharistic Lord. This particular symbol of the Eucharist is one of the more modern symbols, appearing less than a thousand years ago.

The **keys** are a symbol dating back over two millennia. They were a universal sign of the steward or prime minister. When a king or a lord went on a journey, he would hand over his keys to his steward. By this, the steward was endowed with the rights and duties of his lord. When the king returned, the steward would give an account to the king, and then return the keys (and power) to the king. In the Catholic Church the keys are associated with Christ's vicar or steward, now commonly called "the pope". The keys in this window are labeled "**Swiety Piotr**" [Saint Peter], clarifying this to be the symbol of Peter, the first vicar. (Mt 16:19)

Both the **cross and crown of thorns** are signs of the sufferings of Christ. Together, they form the symbol for Good Friday, the day Christ died on the Cross. **INRI** is the abbreviation of *Iesus Nazarenus Rex iudaeorum* [Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews]. These words were written above Christ at the Crucifixion in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, the local and universal languages of the day, prefiguring the Gospel being preached to all nations.

The Polish word **Wiara** [Faith] adorns the cross. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb 11:1)

Milosc [love or charity] "is a Divine virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God." (Baltimore Catechism)

Mary's Altar

In this statue, Mary is dressed in a white garment and wrapped in a blue cloak. The white symbolizes holiness; blue is the official color of Mary, Queen of Heaven. Mary's right hand points to the faithful below. Her left arm holds her son who gazes where his mother gestures, spreading his arms to embrace the faithful. Although not part of the original statue, two important Catholic devotions are represented here.

In the **rosary**, held by Mary, we ask Mary to plead with her son on our behalf.

The **scapular** which the Christ Child holds is worn by many Catholics. It reminds its wearer to stay in the state of grace, to hold and follow the teachings of the Church, and to ask Our Lady for aid.

Below Mary is an altar. **Side altars**, with their own tabernacles, were originally built because, from the medieval period to the Second Vatican Council, priests could not concelebrate Mass (offer with another priest). This meant that every priest had to offer his own Mass at his own altar. Today, these side altars are not necessary, so their tabernacles stand empty, as this one is. These areas are now used by the faithful as devotional areas or shrines.

The **IHS** on the tabernacle door is one of the most common symbols in the Catholic Church. Sometimes seen IHC, this symbol originally served as an abbreviation of the Greek ΙΗΣΟΥΣ [Jesus], but, later, also of the Latin Iesus Hominium Salvator [Jesus, the Savior of Mankind]. Here it marks the (former) dwelling place of Christ.

On the front of Mary's altar is a **Lamb lying on a red book** bound with seven seals (Rev 5-8) and holding a pendant. This image is a combination of two symbols: the Sacrificial Lamb and the Lamb of Resurrection, both of which can be found elsewhere in the church. The diamond ensemble of rays signifies power and glory.

The **Grain with Grapes** is present on all the altars in St Mary's. This ancient symbol of the Eucharist has been seen since the earliest days of the church. From grain and grapes comes bread and wine. These are turned into "the living bread which came down from heaven": Christ's body and blood. (John 6)

The Sanctuary

The **Sanctuary** is the part of the church containing the altar.

The Ⲡ symbol (pronounced ki-row) on the ambo or lectern comes from the Greek title ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ [Christ], To mark something with Ⲡ is to brand it: "This belongs to Christ".

The **red Sanctuary lamp** fulfills a practical and symbolic purpose. Practically, a lighted lamp tells the faithful that Christ is present; an extinguished lamp means that the tabernacle is empty. Symbolically, the lamp is the Holy Spirit hovering near the tabernacle.

The window of Saint Hyacinth (male figure): *Polish name: Jacek Odrowaz; Lived: 1185-1257; Special Patronage: those drowning.* Born into a noble Polish family, Hyacinth became a Dominican friar and traveled throughout northern Europe, founding monasteries and preaching. He spent much time in Poland, where he was greatly loved. It is said that the Polish were particularly fond of his sermons, which did much good among them. He is accounted with many miracles, particularly of healing. He is most famous, however, for the legend depicted in this window. One day when Hyacinth was offering Mass, the city was attacked. Hyacinth calmly finished Mass, then gathered up the Sacred Hosts to take them to a safe spot. When he heard a voice say, "Hyacinth, you have taken my Son, but are you leaving me?" he picked up the Statue of the Blessed Mother (much larger than pictured here) and proceeded to flee the attackers. When he reached a river, Hyacinth kept going forward and the river parted for him. The attackers fled in terror.

Angels on the altar. These angels hold censors, which are vessels for burning incense; smoke from burning incense is a symbol of prayer rising before God.

In this **statue of the Sacred Heart**, Christ reveals his human heart, symbolic of the great love He bears for souls. The heart is surrounded by thorns as a reminder of the great sufferings that Christ endured out of love for us.

The Painting of Our Lady of Czestochowa is based on icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Several centuries ago, heretics destroyed Our Lady's chapel in Poland. One of them began to viciously cut the original icon. Before he could administer the third stroke he died in agony. To this day, images of Our Lady of Czestochowa bear these marks. The hand on Mary's chest may represent either her love for Christ or the fact he fed at her breast. Many miracles have taken place through images of Our Lady of Czestochowa. She is loved by the Polish people, who call her the Queen of Poland.

The **statue of St Peter**, our first pope, holds a scroll which may represent either his preaching of the Gospel or the two epistles he wrote.

Because our Eucharistic Lord has always been the Church's center, the food that sustains her life (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324), in the center of the high altar is the **golden door of the tabernacle**. The tabernacle provides a worthy place to reserve the consecrated hosts so that the Blessed Sacrament can be taken to the sick and dying. The **chalice and host** on the door reminds us that we are called to adore Our Lord's Sacramental Presence.

The Window of St Hedwig (female figure) *Polish name: Jadwiga Slaska; Lived: 1174-1243; Special Patronage: Poland, brides, widows, difficult marriages, orphans, victims of jealousy, the death of children;* Hedwig and her husband Duke Henry of Silesia (now southern Poland/ northern Czech Republic) strived to lead their family and the dukedom in holiness. They used their financial prowess to help and educate the poor, and to build convents and monasteries.

In addition to caring for her seven children, only one of which outlived her, Hedwig personally cared for the sick and poor, including lepers. When Henry died in 1238, Hedwig left the ruling of the dukedom to her son and went to live in a convent. There she lived with the nuns, separated from worldly distractions, until her death. The church that Hedwig holds represents the convent she funded and the fortune she gave to the church.

Joseph's Altar

Statue of St Joseph: St Joseph holds the Christ child. In His divinity, Christ knew all things; in His humanity, He humbled Himself to learn and grow as a human boy. It was Joseph who taught Christ by words and example. It was under Joseph's guidance that "the child grew and became strong, [and] filled with wisdom". (Luke 2:40) For this reason St Joseph is considered the Patron of Fathers.

The **staff of lilies** which St Joseph carries are a symbol of chastity and/or virginity. St Joseph is considered a role model for men and those struggling to achieve chastity.

The color **brown** may allude to the fact that Saint Joseph is the Patron of Workers. While commonly called a carpenter, Joseph's original title can also be translated 'mason', 'sculptor', or 'metalworker'. In any case, Joseph was obviously a man who worked with his hands to provide for his family.

The **blue ball** held by the Christ Child is a symbol of the world. The fact that Christ holds it in his hand like a toy is a testimony to God's power over the world and to the Child's divinity.

The **Lamb on the Tabernacle Door** is the Sacrificial Lamb spoken of in Revelation: "I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain ... worthy ... to take the scroll and to open its seals" (Rev 5)

In ancient times, the **pelican** was thought to feed its young its own flesh during time of famine. Consequently, this bird became a symbol of the Eucharist because Christ feeds the Church's sons and daughters his own flesh,

The Windows ~ Right Side **(starting at the front)**

Because the faithful wanted to adore our Lord 'face-to-face' and not only when veiled by the tabernacle, the monstrance was invented. The monstrance enthrones the Sacred Host in gold or silver and other kingly materials.

Wiar and **Milos** [Faith and Love] are represented on other windows as well. The anchor, a symbol of **Nadzieja** [hope], forms a cross with its vertical shaft and transverse beam (here pictured of wood). Hope, or trusting in the Lord, is "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul". (Heb 6:18)

The Immaculate Heart of Mary. The sorrow which inflicted Mary during her son's passion was prophesied by Simeon. (Luke 2) The sword symbolizes that suffering. The fire symbolizes her great love. The lilies show her purity. The white roses reveal her innocence and allude to her virginity.

The altar upon which the **Sacrificial Lamb** lays reminds us that our sins required a sacrifice of reparation. St John the Baptist identified Christ with the words "Ecce Agnus Dei" [Behold the Lamb of God]. This lamb alone can open the book with seven seals (beneath him), bringing about the fall of the world (sinful things) and the glory of those who have washed themselves in his blood by Baptism, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the Eucharist.

The **lamb (Christ) holding a victory banner** marked with a red cross is an ancient symbol for Christ's resurrection.

Why is the church pink and blue?

These are not the original colors of the Church. It is unknown whether the present colors are meant to invoke the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Pink/Red) and the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Blue) or if the colors are merely the result of an artistic decision made when repainting the Church in 1984.

This booklet is our gift to you.

If you do not wish to keep it as a memento of your visit, please return it to where you found it.

Donations to help us preserve this church are appreciated and may be placed either in the collection at Mass or in the donation boxes under the votive candles.

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