

THE CHAPEL OF SAINT JOHN NEPOMUK

Many legends and symbols accompany the figure of Saint John of Nepomuk; the patron saint of confessors and honest confession, and a spiritual guardian of this chapel. The presbyter, born in 1350 in Czech Nepomuk, near Pilzno, was a canon in the Cathedrals of Saint Vitus, Wenceslaus and Adalbert (in the Prague Hradcany district) and a confessor of Queen Sophia of Bavaria. However, he fell into disgrace of her husband, King Vaclav IV. According to sources, it was due to his disobedience towards the king - who suspected his wife of adultery, and wanted the confessor to betray the secrets of her confession.

The fact is that in 1393 John Nepomuk was imprisoned, tortured, and then thrown off the Charles Bridge to Vltava. Legends say that his body was found due to the stars that had appeared around his body, on the surface of the water. These stars are now used to symbolize the Saint. He was buried in a Holy Cross church in Prague, and later was moved to a tomb under the cathedral in Hradcany.

According to Catholics, Nepomuk is supposed to protect not only against rough water and floods, but also against drought. This is why many of his figures, called nepomuks are placed near water, bridges, fields, crossroads as well as on public and church squares. The baroque figure of the saint stands among others on the cathedral square, near the parish building.

Nepomuks can be easily recognized by noticing several unique features within these figures: the Saint's head are surrounded by stars; the Saint has his finger placed on his lips; he is holding a crucifix, a martyr's palm, or a closed book and padlock symbolizing silence. The saint is a patron of priests, raftmen, bridge builders, millers, and people falsely judged or backbitten.

The cult of Nepomuk began in the XVth century, after the death of King Vaclav. However, Nepomuk was beatified as late as in 1721 by Pope Innocent XIII, and canonized on March 19, 1729 by Benedict XIII. His liturgy memorial is celebrated annually on May 21st. In the Opole cathedral, he is a patron of the confession chapel which, has been recently renovated as a part of a Polish-Czech project by the cathedral parish of Opole Diocese, and Roman Catholic Diocese of Ostrava-Opava.

Not that long ago, standing here there was a historic baptismal font with the oldest coat of arms of Opole. During maintenance work it was moved to the left nave of the church; at this time an interesting discovery was made in the chapel. In the basement, under the floor, a brick octagonal building shut with bricks from the top was discovered. Look carefully under your feet. To commemorate the finding, an octagonal shape has been marked here. It could have been a baptismal font, a well or a tomb. We will probably never know... The research during the renovation was given up due to the restorers' concerns.

But that's not the end! During the renovation, an old handmade brick with original finger traces from the first half of the XIIIth century was discovered. This layout of bricks bears signs of Roman origin, where two longer bricks were interlaced with a shorter one. The finials of the originally lower walls, as well as the vaults of the chapel from the later period were left under a layer of plaster to show the contrast and mark the height of the original Roman walls.

The discoveries have an enormous historical value since they prove that centuries ago, there was a Roman temple in the place of the Opole Cathedral. However, there is a hypothesis that the oldest fragment of the cathedral, dating back to the XIIIth century could have just been a part of the city defense system.