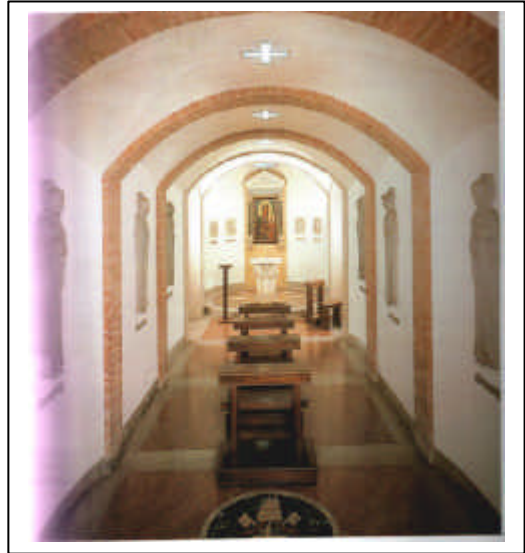


## ENLARGEMENT OF THE CHAPEL DEDICATED TO OUR LADY OF CZESTOCHOWA IN THE HOLY GROTTOS

The Polish chapel was built in 1958 in order to comply with the wish of the Polish people to «erect an altar of the Blessed Virgin at the sepulcher of St. Peter [...] so that the spiritual bonds with which the Polish people and their nation have been tied to the Holy Mother Church for approximately a millennium would be reinforced and strengthened, despite the oppositions [...] and they would show devotion to the Vicar of Christ on earth.» This was finally realized by Mons. Alfonso A. Skoniecki, an American prelate of Polish origin, parish priest of the Polish community in Three Rivers, Massachusetts, as a sign of gratitude to the Virgin for an amazing recovery from a serious illness.



With time the small rectangular hall of the chapel became insufficient to hold the growing stream of pilgrims; it then became necessary to create a larger space, that was realized with

the generous financial support of the Knights of Columbus in 1982, the year in which the 6<sup>th</sup> centennial (1382-1982) of the Marian Sanctuary of Jasna Gora was celebrated.

The Polish chapel was designed by the engineer Francesco Vacchini, then director of the Technical Office of the Fabbrica di San Pietro; its enlargement instead was carried out by architect Giuseppe Zander.

The pre-existing architectural portion was preserved and the space was extended to include the transept and the oval-shaped presbyterial area, with a "telescope" design in a trapezoidal shape, with the smaller base on the side of the entrance and the larger base corresponding to the arch in front of the presbytery. The marble floor in the hall, on a slight incline, bears the coat of arms of Pope John Paul II and commemorates the year

of the chapel's enlargement, while in the presbytery the polychromatic marble of the floor forms a large eight-point star, under the "*coram populo*" altar composed of two capitals with acanthus leaves and topped by a table which belonged to the altar of the Blessed Pius X (Sarto, 1903-1914).



The altar holds the relics of the eight Polish patron saints: the two bishop martyr Sts. Adalberto and Stanislao and the six saint confessors Stanislao Kostka, Edvige, Giovanni Kantio, Casimiro, Giacinto and Andrea Bobola martyr, whose images, sculpted in 1957 by Michele Paszyn, are arranged along the side walls of the chapel.

The apsidal wall is decorated with four 15<sup>th</sup> century bas-reliefs portraying the Evangelists, originally from the tabernacle of Innocence VIII (Cibo 1484-1492). At the center of the apse is a niche with the image of the Madonna of

Czestochowa painted by the Polish artist Anna Torwirtowa, later reproduced in

mosaic.

Two bas-reliefs were more recently added to the first two spans, portraying St. Massimiliano Kolbe to the right, created in 1987 by Pierino Di Pasqua and, in front, St. Alberto Chmiejowski, executed in 1993 by the Polish sculptor Stefano Duonsa.

At the entrance gate of the chapel adorned by two crowned bronze eagles, the symbol of Poland, there are two memorial epigraphs, the first for the inauguration of the chapel in 1958 and the second for its enlargement in 1982:

IOANNES PAULO II PONT. MAX. BEATAE MARIAE VIRGINIS  
CZESTOCHOVIENSIS AMATISSIMUS CULTOR  
HANC OFFERENS LIGNEAM IMAGINEM  
AEDIFICATI TEMPLI DOMINAE NOSTRAE IN LOCO JASNA GORA SESENTESIMO  
REVOLUTO ANNIVERSARIO DIE DICATUM

EIDEM VIRGINI IN CRYPTIS VATICANIS SACELLUS

IUSSIT AMPLIFICARI AFFABREQUE DECORARI

EQUITES A COLUMBO HONORI SIBI DUCENTES AD HOC OPUS  
PERFICIENDUM SE RELIGIOSE SUMPTUM SUPPEDITARE D.D.D.