

Cemetery Church of All Saints with the OSSUARY

Dear visitors,

you are at a memorial site, a final resting place of 60,000 people. On behalf of the Roman Catholic parish - an administrator of the site, we thank you for keeping the reverence and respect in the area of the cemetery.

Cemetery Church was a part of the oldest Cistercian monastery in Bohemia founded in 1142. Also a unique **Cathedral of the Assumption of Our Lady and St. John the Baptist** near by (a UNESCO-listed site since 1995) and a **former baroque convent** (a seat of a tobacco factory since 1812) were preserved.

Church of All Saints was built in the late 14th century and is an important monument of the High Gothic style. Architecturally it is a Gothic **charnel house** with an upper chapel and an underground Ossuary.

According to the legend, one of the local abbots was sent by the Czech king to Jerusalem around the year 1278. The Abbot brought a handful of soil from Golgotha and scattered it over the Sedlec cemetery. The soil from the Holy Land was used for consecrating and healing. Also people from Europe desired to be buried in Sedlec. (Similar Holy fields were also in e. g. Rome, Pisa or Paris).

The cemetery was considerably extended during great epidemics in 14th century - 30,000 deceased were buried there.

In the spring of 1421 the **Hussite troops** captured Kutná Hora. They also attacked Sedlec, plundered and burnt the cathedral and the monastery. The cemetery Church of All Saints was also devastated. There were about 10,000 dead buried in Sedlec during Hussite wars.

At the end of the 15 century the cemetery – area of 35 000 m² – was partially reduced and bones from abolished graves were moved into the Ossuary. *The legend of a half-blind monk who arranged the bones and skulls to the pyramids comes probably from this time. After this work he got his eyesight back.*

The bones were already decoratively arranged in the 16th century, according to the chronicler Š. E. Kapihorský (+1630).

Between 1661-1663 the church finally received repairs including rearranging of the bones. An original Gothic star-shaped vault of the upper chapel was replaced.

A major reconstruction of the monastery began in the Baroque period in the early 18th century. The reconstruction was entrusted to **Jan Blažej Santini – Aichel**, who rebuilt the Cathedral of the Assumption and the Church of All Saints with the Ossuary in **Baroque Gothic style**.

Santini is also considered to be an author of the basic concepts of skeletal decorations according to the Baroque piety and principles of the Baroque aesthetics. There are liturgical symbols of **cups and monstrances** in the niches, **garlands** of bones remind Baroque angelic heads, the **pinnacles-shaped candleholders** from 1742 symbolize the eternal light.

The Sedlec monastery was abolished by Joseph II. in 1783. The property of the abbey was purchased by the **Schwarzenberg family from Orlick**. Thanks to their patronage the Sedlec Ossuary was maintained. The Baroque bone decoration was renewed and extended by **František Rint** from Česká Skalice in 1870. The bones used by Rint were disinfected and bleached with chlorinated lime and placed in original patterns – **a chandelier** in the middle of the chapel and **a coat of arms of the Schwarzenbergs**. There is a Rint's signature made of bones at the bottom of the staircase.

MEMENTO MORI – „Remember the death“ – associated with the Christian Hope of Resurrection remains a valid message for each visitor of this unique place and helps us to understand the symbolism of the place and its decoration. It is not a celebration of death, but it symbolizes the equality of people in front of the throne of God.

The crucified Christ (Calvary) on the high altar with the east window backlight is an expression of the Hope, the **wooden carved crowns** on the tops of the bone-pyramids represent the Jesus Christ's Triumph.

Currently the Sedlec cemetery and the Church of All Saints with the Ossuary are associated with the preparation of extensive restoration work involving many branches.

Thank you for your visit. When paying the entrance fee you contribute towards the reconstruction costs of this unique place. The Ossuary is going to be open to the public during the reconstruction within the realms of possibility.