

Hermitage. Prayer Enclave in Suchedniów.

The Project refers to spiritual recluse retreats consisting in a 12-day solitude period, when the participants will pray and contemplate the Ten Commandments and the Love Commandment. The Hermitage is located in an abandoned redstone quarry in Świętokrzyskie Voivodship. Retreat in isolation is not associated with social activity. However, the fact that at the same time it takes a dozen people, can promote various forms of such activity. The character of a reclusive life means - first of all - being alone, where as spiritual exercises are traditionally conducted in groups. The aim of the Project was to combine the two ways of spiritual renewal, which resulted in 12 individual retreat cells, a common chapel and a monastery.

The chapel is situated inside a flooded excavation site. Access to the chapel is by means of paths leading along the rock walls beneath the level of the water and separated from it with insulated gabions, which contain locally quarried stone. The building is designed on the south-north axis, it is a cube-shaped monumental structure with an altar in the centre, facing east. The chapel is surrounded by an area that will provide a place for the Stations of the Cross.

The Monastery is the service building, constituting the eastern part of the whole complex. Inside, there are common study rooms, a kitchen with a refectory, cells belonging to the monks that look after the Hermitage and ancillary rooms. The cube-shaped concrete structure with a patio is inspired by the design of traditional monasteries.

The individual retreat cells are designed on the Latin cross plan and refer to the Ten Commandments respectively. Every day the hermits move on to the next cell, where they sleep and contemplate. Apart from a bedroom and a toilet, in most of the cells there are meditation niches. The architectural form of each retreat cell ambiguously refers to the contents of the Ten Commandments, thus allowing the hermits their own interpretation of Faith.

- Cell I - *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* (Exodus 20:2-3)
- Cell II - *You shall have no other gods before Me.* (Exodus 20:4-5)
- Cell III - *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.* (Exodus 20: 7)
- Cell IV - *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* (Exodus 20: 8-11)
- Cell V - *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.* (Exodus 20: 12)
- Cell VI - *You shall not murder.* (Exodus 20: 13)
- Cell VII - *You shall not commit adultery.* (Exodus 20: 14)
- Cell VIII - *You shall not steal.* (Exodus 20: 15)
- Cell IX - *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.* (Exodus 20: 16)
- Cell X - *You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.* (Deuteronomy 5: 21)
- Cell XI - *Or anything that belongs to your neighbor.* (Deuteronomy 5: 21)
- Cell XII - *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matthew 20: 37-40)

Concrete is the main construction and fascia material used for building the complex. In the buildings, the internal thermal insulation is used in order to bring out the monolithic facades. Because of the cleavage of the rocky ground, the buildings are designed on a foundation plate. The walls and the structural ceilings are made of reinforced concrete. The interiors of each structure follow the principle of monumental minimalism. The ascetic nature of the rooms is enhanced by concrete finishes and simple solid furniture.

The form of the project results from reflections on creating a uniform complex of religious buildings and sites on the basis of Christian symbols and in a way that makes man respect God and His Commandments. As a result, the idea of locating the individual retreat cells on the Latin cross plan was born, with the 12 structures referring to the 12 apostles. The Decalogue became the key symbol of the Hermitage and the basis on which the exterior shell of the retreat cells is designed. Starting from the cells, the chapel and the monastery follow the design. The unadorned architecture only provides a background for meditation. The simple form and structure of the buildings set them nicely in the rocky landscape without impairing it. Thanks to numerous steps, elongated paths and hidden entrances, it was possible to express man's search and journey through life. In each and every place in the Hermitage, man must be aware of the fact that his or her existence is a continuous pursuit of excellence. The geometry of the project puts the chaotic layout of the ledges in order and permits the good display of the buildings. The project is an enclave of silence among buildings that are in harmony with the rocky surroundings, where architecture becomes a turning point in man's search for God and Self.