The Chapter Church of the Lieutenancy for Belgium

The church of Notre-Dame des Victoires au Sablon in Brussels was built by the Crossbowmen's Guild in the 15th century because pilgrims flocked there after the statue of the Virgin had miraculously arrived by boat from Antwerp.

The procession of the miraculous statue around the church is the origin of the Brussels Ommegang. This is a Dutch word meaning "walk around". Every year, this procession of 1,400 figures in the 16th century costume still leaves the church, surrounding the figures of Charles V and his son, the future King Philip II, on their way to the Grand-Place.

Over the centuries, this pearl of Gothic style has benefited from the generosity of the Habsburg, Thurn and Taxis and Arenberg families.

The Habsburgs were frequent visitors, and Charles V's sister Marie of Hungary was baptized here. Magnificent stained-glass windows were installed at this time, but were unfortunately destroyed by a tornado. It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that stained glass windows with over 300 coats of arms surrounding saints were installed.

The church contains numerous funerary monuments, including the splendid Baroque-style sepulchral chapel where some fifteen Thurn and Taxis Princes are laid to rest in a crypt.

The name "Notre-Dame des Victoires" echoes the dazzling victory of the Christian fleet at Lepanto against the Ottomans on 7 October 1571.

It became the chapter church of the Belgian Lieutenancy of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in 1930.

The canonical installation of the Order's national chapter took place here on Sunday 3 May 1931. As long ago as 1867, Msgr. Valerga, the first Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem in modern times, inaugurated the choir frescoes in the church at Le Sablon, which had been found when the choir stalls were removed.

Two large stained-glass windows, donated by the Belgian Lieutenancy of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, were installed in the choir in 1933. One depicts the knighthood of a Knight by the cardinal of the time, Cardinal Van Roey, while the other depicts the attempt, initiated in 1558 in Hoogstraten by a man from Antwerp, to create an Order of the Holy Sepulchre by bringing together the many Knights who had been knighted in Jerusalem by Father Custos.

King Philip II was offered to lead this group, but refused. Every year, the Lieutenancy for Belgium celebrates here the Mass of the Dead, the Investiture ceremonies and the feast of Our Lady Queen of Palestine. During Holy Week, many members of the Order attend the celebrations.

The church is also the venue for the two Crossbowmen's Guilds, the Ommegang, Masses for Europe, the Confraternity of Saint Yves and other devout brotherhoods.

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