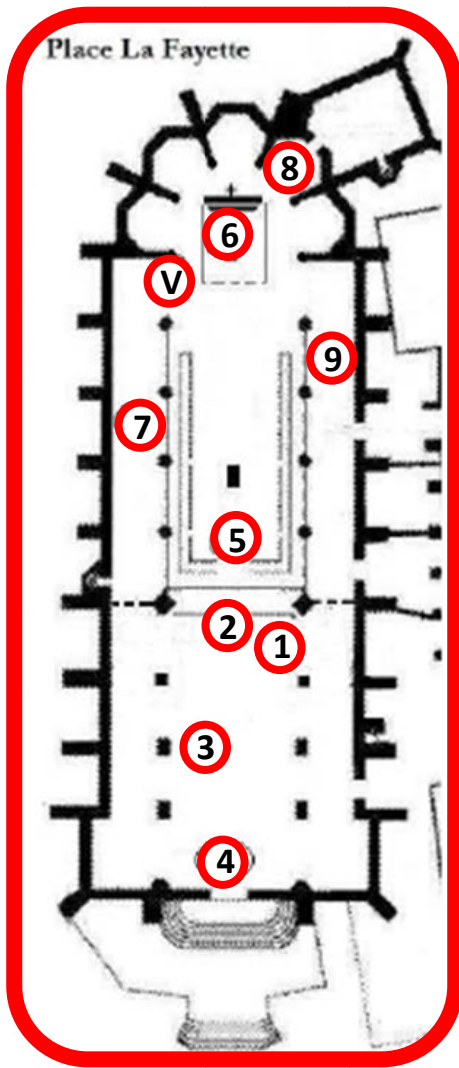
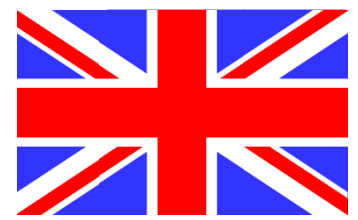


THE ABBEY OF LA CHAISE-DIEU



To help your visit

You are standing in the church of an abbey – une *église abbatiale* or *Abbatiale*. The abbey was created by **Robert de Turlande** who came to this Livradois plateau, above 3,000 feet high, in 1043 to be a hermit. As he attracted a lot of young people, despite himself he ended up founding a monastery according to **the Rule of Saint Benedict** whose motto is *Ora et Labora*, or *Pray and Work*. He called this place the *Casa Dei* or *the House of God*, in French La Chaise-Dieu, whose monks and inhabitants are called *casadéens* from the Latin name. On his death in 1067 there were 50 churches and priories dependent on the abbey; which later grew to 300, some in other countries. In 1640, the congregation was attached to Saint-Maur, *encouraging a revival*. At the French Revolution the monks were thrown out of the abbey. This great church was the result of **the decision of an ex-monk of La Chaise-Dieu, Pierre Roger de Beaufort, who became Pope Clement VI** in 1342 who wished to be buried *in his old monastery as he was in exile in Avignon*.

- ① **Tomb and altar of Saint Robert of Turland:** in front of the altar, the tomb of the saint is marked with a cross. It is also the entrance to the original Romanesque abbey where by humility Saint-Robert wished to be buried. A hole allowed veneration of his relics. Above this, the painting recalls *his confidence* in the Virgin Mary.
- ② **The Rood-Screen (15th century):** on its balcony the deacon read the gospel during the mass to the faithful below in the nave. In French the screen is called the Jubé, because prior to the gospel reading a blessing was invoked "*Jube me benedicere ...*" The screen separates the choir, which was reserved for the monks, from the nave which was open to the pilgrims and the congregation generally.

A large, beautiful crucifix (early 17th century) stands on the Rood Screen; to the left a Virgin Mary suffering greatly expressing her *compassion* and, to the right, the apostle Saint John. The left arm of the cross is shortened to make it fit flat on the balcony of the Rood Screen so that during the French Revolution, the people of La Chaise-Dieu could hide it there to protect it from the mob.

- ③ **Images of the Tapestry (Flanders 16th century, currently being restored at Colombes, until 2017)**

The Annunciation:

Centre: The angel announcing to Mary she is to be the mother of the Saviour, fulfilling the prophecy (Saint Luke 11, 26).

On the Left: God promising a Saviour to Eve (Genesis 3, 15). Note that Eve and Mary have the same face.

On the right: Gideon receiving the sign of his victory: dew falling miraculously on a fleece (Judges 6, 38), prefiguring the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ, the Saviour from Heaven.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Centre: Jesus standing, leaving the tomb, giving a blessing with his right hand.

Left: Samson carrying the doors of his 'prison' in the same way as Jesus is to lead people to Paradise.

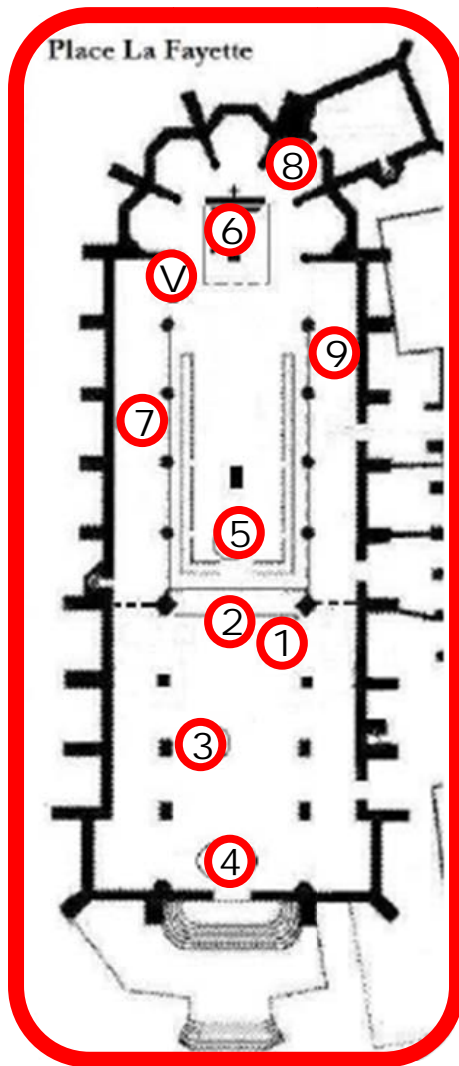
Right: Jonah, alive, leaving the stomach of the whale, in the same way as Jesus, immortal, was to leave the tomb.

The principle being illustrated is that the New Testament of the Bible fulfils what was announced in the Old Testament as prophecy or prefiguration, thus Christ fulfils what was written in the scriptures.

- ④ **The 17th century organ front** stretches across the back of the nave, seemingly held up by huge carved figures. To the right, in the centre of the curved balustrade, King David with crowned head bends over the lyre [harp] upon which he is playing psalms he composed himself; to the left in the centre of the other curved balustrade is Saint Cecilia with her organ; two angels crown the group; the whole is carved from the heart of pine and signed Cox (Flamand?), with the coat of arms of Hyacinthe Serroni, the abbot commendataire of La Chaise-Dieu (1672-1687). Restored in 1976 thanks to Georgy Cziffra and to the Chaise-Dieu Festival, after 180 years of silence it plays again, notably for masses on a Sunday. It is to be noted that the exile of Cardinal de Rohan here in 1786, is to be thanked for having protected the casadéens from a fire in the town.

PLEASE LEAVE THIS SHEET FOR FUTURE VISITORS TO USE

THE ABBEY OF LA CHAISE-DIEU



⑤ The monastic choir

When you enter the choir, look up at the roof of the church 18 metres above, notice the Gothic style arches end in a flattened roof and the pillars have no capitals, this style is known as Languedocian: the arches leave the pillars immediately like branches of a palm tree and the fineness of the octagonal pillars give a lightness to the structure; notice also the narrowness of the windows. This part was built in only eight years. The architect Hugues Morel of the Papal Palace in Avignon completed the work rapidly, and in 1352 on the death of Pope Clement VI, the body could be placed in the mausoleum in the centre of the choir where it still rests today.

The oak stalls (14th century), 144 in all, furnish the choir on three sides and have misericords, those little half-seats on the edge of the main seat, so that when the seat is up the monks chanting the service standing can half-sit if they are tired. In this way it provides mercy or misericord, and they can continue to pray.

Seven times a day (cf. Psalms 118 & 164), when the bell rang, the Benedictine brothers came to chant the office which was composed of *150 psalms of the Bible spread over the week*, about six hours each day. At the French Revolution, after about 750 years of praising God, the Benedictine, monastic prayers ceased.

In 1984 at the request of the Bishop of Le Puy, a religious community, the Community of Saint John (in grey habits) came and for about half the year chant the office again in the abbey church.

It is worth noticing that above and behind each choir seat on the second tier arches are carved, in the middle of each **a half-length pillaris represented which ends in a small carving**, each one is different; each one represents avice or a virtue.

Above the stalls used to be the tapestries, embellished copies of the Bible of the Poor representing 26 scenes from the life of Jesus Christ framed by scenes from the Old Testament, according the principle,

the Old Testament is the New one hidden, the New Testament is the Old one unveiled. (A chapel is in the course of arrangement to receive them in the wing of the Echo chamber, to be opened in 2018.)

The Mausoleum of Pope Clement VI. Placed in the middle of the choir of the monks is the recumbent figure of the Pope with his triple-crown tiare (hat), recalling the triple authority, spiritual, temporal and expertise in “humanity” (cf. Speech by the Pope to the United Nations in New York in 1965). The happy contrast between the white Carrara marble of the recumbent figure and the black, underlying stone surface both remain in good condition despite the things done to them over time. His love for monastic life and the wish for the prayers of his brothers made him want to be placed there, he seemingly taking part in the services.

⑥ Notice **the main altar** in gilded wood of the late 17th century and the back of the apse lit by three bays expressly recalling the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The keystone of the arch has the coat of arms of Pope Clement VI (6 red roses) and the altar those of the abbey. The church is aligned to the east, Christ being called the “*rising sun*” come to illuminate man (Luke 1,78).

Ⓥ **The Virgin in Majesty** (14th century) in wood, in a red dress covered by a blue cloak. Typical of the Romanesque Virgins of the Auvergne, she was fixed to the pillar only in 1995. With a solemn face, seated on a throne, she has the Infant Jesus on her knees held by her large hands: she *seems to be presenting* the Infant-God *to the faithful and wishing to give Him to them*. He is making *the gesture of blessing or benediction*.

⑦ In the northern aisle: the **Dance of Death**, a fresco of 15th century, see the separate information sheet.

⑧ **The taking of the habit of Saint Maur above an altar** (17th century) (the black habit of the Benedictines)

It is a romantic representation of the taking of the habit by one of the first disciples of Saint Benedict in the 6th century. This chapel gives access to the Clement Tower, the ground floor of which is today the sacristy of the abbey.

⑨ In the southern aisle: **the tomb of Renaud de Montclar, abbot of La Chaise-Dieu** (died 1478). This tomb is decorated with many joyful, musical angels each playing a different musical instrument. This joy evokes the pleasure of Heaven. On high, in the middle, a little child on a sheet carried by two angels symbolises the soul of the dead carried to Paradise by angels.

[22.06.16]

PLEASE LEAVE THIS SHEET FOR FUTURE VISITORS TO USE