

## The Sanctuary of the Virgin of Remei



The Sanctuary in honour of the Virgin of Remei, patron saint of the Pla d'Urgell county, together with the Virgin of Les Sogues, belongs to the Diocese of La Seu d'Urgell and the parish of l'Assumpció de Boldú, which is in charge of the sanctuary's management despite it being privately owned.

With a capacity for more than 200 people, it's used to hold sacramental celebrations and other religious ceremonies.

Another interesting fact is that the northern branch belongs to one of the Camino de Santiago's routes and is visited by numerous pilgrims throughout the year.

Back when Ignasi Girona Targa (1782-1867) still lived, patriarch of the Girona family, the family believed that they owed their prosperity and good fortune to their professed devotion to worshipping the Virgen of Remei. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the tragic explosion of a powder keg destroyed the primitive temple. Later on, Joan Girona Agrafel (1859-1950) founded a new church inside the castle with a chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Remei.

Once, Joan Girona had passed on, and despite there already being a church within the Castell del Remei, Maria and Teresa Escubós Girona, successor heiresses and the only nieces and descendants of the last member of the Girona family, fulfilled their uncle's wishes and commissioned the construction of the sanctuary, which was built by the architect Antoni Fisas Planas (1896-1953).

The temple was blessed and consecrated on June 13, 1954, a date that is reflected on the commemorative plaque that can be found under the three arches of the building's façade. Another interesting fact is that people wanted the text to be written in Catalan due to the Catalan nationalist sentiment of the Girona family. However, due to pressure from the authorities to have it be in Castilian Spanish, it ended up being written in Latin.

The temple, with a Latin cross plan, is a significant example of the Italianate classicism architecture that had been imposed by the Catalan Noucentisme movement. The main nave, covered with a vault of lunettes, has a large cupola on the transept topped by a lantern.



The magnificent mural painting in the interior was done by the famous artist Josep Obiols Palau (1894-1967).

On the altars adjacent to the main nave, on both sides, there are five murals depicting biblical scenes that correspond to the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary: the nativity scene; the presentation of the baby Jesus; the Virgin with her cousin Isabel; boy Jesus in the temple; and the Annunciation.

To the north, there is a side entrance accessing the church that is dedicated to San Juan Bautista, as can be seen in the inscription on the outside.

In the baptistery, there is a sixth mural painting that alludes to the baptism of San Juan Bautista.

The baptismal font should also be admired, which belongs to the Gothic period.

Likewise, the wood work of the marquetry heart is also incredibly remarkable.

The apse above the main altar represents an allegory of the entire Universe praising and praying to Maria.

In the middle of the niche there is the figure of the Virgin of Remei, made out of carved wood by the sculptor Jose Maria Camps Arnau (1879-1968), which is visited by many people as a way of paying tribute to her, who climb the stairs to the left of the image then go down on the other side.

On the sides, the right part of the frescoes show mercy being given to children and adults who suffered from special needs, illnesses and pain, placing their trust in the Virgin Mary to help them.

Then, in the decorative area on the left, there is a depiction of the faithful townspeople offering up their crops to the Virgin. These scenes are representative of the peasantry who were in possession of the fruits of the earth: olive trees (oil), grapes (wine) and wheat (bread), which are tied to the wealth that was provided by the irrigation of the Canal d'Urgell, an infrastructure that was spearheaded by the Girona family. There are also several babies that appear, thus putting the future in the hands of the providence.

The text in Catalan that illustrates the paintings of the temple's dome and the vault of the main altar (which can also be seen outside the temple, in a monument next to the door of the baptistery) is the musical composition of the Prayer to the Virgin of Remei for choirs, which the master Lluís Millet Pagès (1867-1941) was commissioned to create, with lyrics by Esteve Sunyol Gasòliba (1856-1913) and sung to the Orfeó Català choral society in 1900. The singer Marina Rossell also interprets it in her repertoire.

Thus, year after year it is sung by parishioners (among whom are former inhabitants and workers of the estate) for Castell del Remei's main celebration as a way of venerating the image of Our Lady of Remei, on every second Sunday of October.

According to the professor Dr Jaume Mateu Giral (author of the book "El Castell del Remei, terra, aigua i cultura del vi a la plana d'Urgell"), Valeri Serra Boldú (1875-1938), eminent folklorist of the lands of Urgell, alludes to the meaning of the main celebration in honour of the Virgin of Remei in Urgell's Folklore Calendar, explaining that it is celebrated "on the second Sunday of October", a tradition that is still followed by today's current owners.

Numerous artistic and religious manifestations make reference to the Castell del Remei and its celebration and festival. Poems, other literary texts, musical scores, drawings, paintings, photographs, advertisements... are all inspired by this special gem that can be found in our territory.

One example is the sardana dance called "Aplec Castell del Remei" with music by Domènec Cardeñes Barios (1916-1977) and lyrics by Luis Profitós Portella (1923-1999), which is also performed by the couplet during the dance of sardanas that is included in the programme of the castle's annual celebration.

Likewise, another example is the "Goigs a llaor de la Verge del Remei", composed by the writer Agustín Valls Vicens (1860-1920) and the musicologist Francisco Mateu Nicolau (1847-1913).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Salvador Casañas Pagès (1834-1908), bishop of Urgell, granted 40 days of indulgence to devotees who prayed or sang couplets.

The Sanctuary exhibits a copy of the special edition that was made in 1955, as a result of the Sanctuary's inauguration one year earlier.

In this case, the musical arrangement was done by Lluís Maria Millet Millet (1906-1990).

To this end, also in the month of January in 1929, Justin the Bishop of Urgell gave the go-ahead to print the Novena to the Virgin of Remei in Pla d'Urgell, which grants 50 days of indulgence to believers who practiced the written act.

The original document and its transcription dating back to 1954 have also been preserved, granting 100 days of indulgence to those who recite the indicated prayers before the Virgin in the current sanctuary, which at that time had just recently been completed.

The religious side of the Castell del Remei is also reflected in the creation of the Pla Verge del Remei Foundation, with a founding capital that consisted of one million pesetas in cash. In the summer of 1947, the Bishop of d'Urgell, Ramon Iglesias Navarri, approved its creation based on a proposal by Joan Girona Vilanova. The exclusive purpose was to help the poor or destitute people of the Diocese of Urgell, and it was also meant to represent a token of gratitude to the Virgen of Los Remedios, "to whose protection I attribute the prosperity of my companies", as it says in the document.