

### 3 The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption

Located outside the walls on the left bank of the Roudoule, the church is progressively integrated into the fortifications of the town forming part of the ramparts. The semi-circular apse dating from the mid 13th century rises up in a meticulous construction, animated by three windows of equal size (one of which is currently hidden by the 19th century Presbytery) and by a frieze of notched teeth. On the north wall the trace of a monumental lateral door can be seen, adjacent, no doubt to the ramparts against its left flank which no longer exist. In the 15th Century the facade was modified with a gable roof. The new door flanked by small columns is surmounted by a plain tympanum. In the 18th century, following a fire in the timber framework, a lowered vault was created and poly-lobed windows were opened on the south facade. After the earthquake of 1887, the church was decorated with frescoes by the Ticino, Adami dedicated to Saint Nicloas of Tolentino, patron saint of Puget Théniers.

The church houses two major works from the first quarter of the 16th century, originating from the ancient convent of the Augustins, (see no.10 p.18) : the altarpiece of The Passion, to the left of the entrance and the altarpiece of Our Lady of Succor behind the main altar.

The **Altarpiece of The Passion** is generally attributed to Mathew of Anvers who left traces of his visits to Villars-sur-Var ( the statue of Saint John the Baptist) and Colmars-les-Alpes between 1524 and 1530.

This exceptional group of nordic influence conforms to the representations of the period. **Its monumental and dramatic characteristics invite the faithful to an almost living representation of Christ's passion**, even more so as the linden wood was no doubt originally polychrome .

**The Crucifixion** : Christ is flanked by the two thieves ( Dimas the good on his right and Gestas the bad), nailed by pieces of wood, their legs deeply cut.

**The Entombment** : Nicodemus and Joseph of Aramathea (who gives up his tomb) are members of The Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish Council. Richly attired, they carry, in a shroud, the body of the mutilated victim. Standing in the background, John, Mary and female Saints show their emotion. The woman on the right bears two attributes of the passion : the nails and the crown of thorns. Completely to the left, Mary Madeleine, bare-headed, is probably not in her original position.

**The Resurrection** : Christ's divine filiation is manifest in his ressucitation from the dead despite the soldiers in charge of guarding the tomb, these are often shown in terror but are seen slumbering here. Note their weapons, typical of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The **altarpiece of Our Lady of Succor**, dated the 29th July 1525, is attributed to **Antoine Ronzen known as the Venetian**, creator of the Crucifix altarpiece in the Royal basilica of Saint Maximin (Var).This painter of Flemish origin married Honorade, the daughter of the Pugétois painter Ludovic Luca.

This erudite representation evokes “**intercession or succor**” that is to say the possibility of **addressing God through Mary's meditation**. Thus we can see, in a rising movement, the gazes which follow each other to Christ's hand which is pointing to his Father: this is the path of prayer emanating from what appears to be **a man of law, who is probably the donor of the painting**. The city is, in effect, the heart of a 16th century administrative and legal constituency (la viguerie) which shelters a local dignitary who upholds the power of justice in the name of the Duke of Savoy. The attitudes of the Virgin “*advocate of sinners*” and of Christ agonising, surrounded by the instruments of the Passion, are explained by the text at the foot of the Cross, taken from Abbey Arnaud of Chartres (CX11):

*“You have certain access to God when you have the Son before the Mother and the Mother before the Son. The Son shows his wounds and his side, the Mother shows her breast, no request can be refused when there is so much love in the heart”*

To the left (so to the right of Christ), Saint Nicolas of Tolentino, doctor of the order of the Augustins, holds an open book with the inscription : *“I have observed all the commandments of my Father Augustin”* To the right Saint Jacques the Major, dressed as a pilgrim, wears a hat decorated with a shell, a staff (walking and defensive stick) and Saint Peter's keys. These insignia allude to the two main pilgrimages after Jerusalem: Compostelle and Rome. Visible in the upper section on the left, Saint Martin, patron saint of the town before he was replaced by Saint Nicolas of Tolentino in 1710 and on the right the Franciscan monk, Bernardin of Sienna who renounced becoming a bishop three times as shown by the mitres next to him.

### **The patron saint festivities in Puget-Théniers**

Notice in the side chapel, to the left, the statue of Saint Nicolas of Tolentino still carried during the procession on the saint's feast day in early September which lasts several days. On this occasion small bread rolls are blessed and distributed in reference to the bread he shared with the poor.

*Walk around the church to observe the apse and stop near the boundary marker stone.*

### **The Protectorships**

In the Middle Ages Our Lady of Rodoline depends on the Abbey of Lérins which owns several agricultural domains in the vicinity of Puget Théniers. The Parish church has the status of a « priory ». Later it reverts to the Diocese of Glandèves (Entrevaux) even though the border between the States of Savoy and Provence separate them. (see no.4, p.10).