The Interior of St. Leonard’s Church in Lipnica Murowana

St. Leonard’s church is characterized by the simplicity of form and abundance of polychromes, that is wall paintings. The oldest fragments of polychromes come from the 15th century, and the youngest ones from the 18th century. Their dull shades and the archaic way of imaging determine for the most part the unique character of this monument, constituting its one-off charm.

The interior of the church is divided into two parts, each around 9 meters long.  The nave, is the part with benches for the faithful, while the chancel is the part with the main altar, where a priest celebrates the Mass.

The walls and the vault are made of timber. The floor is lined with plates of beige sandstone. The vault is flat and made of planks. It is about 7 meters high. Along the side walls of the nave, the vault lowers by 50 cm. The lowered part is one meter wide.  It resembles a case attached under a vault, hence the name of this element: *zaskrzynienie*, which may be rendered as incasement. Each plank is decorated with   
a floral ornament.  There are branches sprinkled with leaves winding all over the vault. Flowers are blooming. Their petals are arranged in rhombuses and circles. Red, blue and green are the dominant colours.

Today, the church is usually entered from the south. In this wall, the only one with no polychrome, there are two rectangular windows. Five baroque paintings featuring the images of saints hang on it. On the western wall, perpendicular to the previous one, there is a small gallery called matroneum. The walls and balustrades are decorated with polychromies. They illustrate the Ten Commandments and the Dance of Death. The northern wall, opposite the entrance, is covered with a polychrome depicting the Way of the Cross, as well as flowers, leaves, and rows of trees. Halfway along the wall, there is a pulpit. At the end of the nave are side altars. Wooden triptychs lie on stone tables, that is altar stones. They present scenes from the lives of saints and the Adoration of Baby Jesus. On the floor, there is a wooden threshold separating the chancel from the nave. Above it, at about 3.5 meters, there is a so-called rood beam with the figures of Christ, Mary and St. John. The chancel is slightly narrower than the nave. Simple chairs and benches stand along the walls. The northern wall is decorated with a depiction of the Last Judgement. The eastern wall features the Crucifixion and the southern one presents the Last Supper and an image of Mary and St. Simon of Lipnica. There are two rectangular windows in this wall lighting the chancel. Against the eastern wall, there is a stone altar. A wooden triptych with scenes from the life of the church’s patron, St. Leonard, stands on it. The main painting in the triptych depicts St. Leonard in a black habit and handcuffs. This is because he was famous for freeing prisoners.  Behind the altar, there are several priceless chasubles hanging on the wall. Some of them are dated back to the 18th century. They are covered with fine embroidery.

The regular decorative pattern on the vaults was painted with the use of templates cut out of leather, so-called stencils. Hence the name of this type of ornament: stencil paintings.  The paintings, presenting scenes from the Bible or symbolizing religious terms, had an educational function. Thanks to them simple illiterate people could have learned the articles of faith.

According to the local tradition, the current church of St. Leonard is supposed to have been erected on the site of a previous pagan temple, which is evidenced by the pillar supporting the triptych on the main altar, considered to be a depiction of Światowid.