

Santa Maria de Solius Cistercian monastery

The Santa Maria de Solius Cistercian monastery in the Baix Empordà area, diocese of Girona, was founded on 21st January 1967, on the day of St Agnes, who is the patron saint of the neighbouring parish, establishing a group of four monks there who came from the founding monastery of Poblet. They were accepted in the dioceses by the bishop Narcís Jubany Arnau, later archbishop of Barcelona and cardinal, a short while after closed the Vatican Council II.

The Solius Monastery forms part of the Aragon Crown Cistercian Congregation (founded in 1616), along with the Poblet abbey and the convents in Vallbona de les Monges, Casbas (Huesca), Cadins (Gironés) and Valldonzella

(Barcelona).

The slender steeple of Solius is visible from nearly the whole Vall d'Aro . It sits on the remains of a former Romanic church dating from between the 10th and 11th century, and was probably very small. It was extended later and finally towards the 18th century, having been opened up in the centre, they built the current steeple which is much more spacious making the most of the ruins of the former steeple.

The base of the steeple remained intact, including the Romanic walled picture windows, to raise the whole new part between 1829 and 1830. The stone was cut in the Romanyà mountain.

The current church building, which was started in 1773, has a central nave with four lateral chapels which have neoclassical altarpieces paid for by the people. The Virgin of the Rosario and San Isidro must be highlighted. Inside the church there are sepulchral tombstones for some rectors of the parish.

The most important change within the parish of Solius is the fact that in 1967, a group of Cistercian monks established themselves there to found the new monastery. With their lives of prayer and work they continue to maintain a centre of peace, silence and spirituality in this place and in these times.

It is a very interesting place to visit. Its church, gardens and even some crib scenes which can be visited all year round. The collection started in 1970, with the Birth scene, made by Brother Gilbert Galceran, a Solius monk, who had already exhibited crib scenes in Rome, in the General House of the Cistercian Order, and in Hauterive abbey, Switzerland.

The Cistercian order originated from the monastery of Cîteaux (1098), in Bourgogne, and it was founded by its first three abbots; St Robert, also abbot of Molesme, St Alberic and St Esteban Harding, motivated by the wish by the Rules of St Benedict (7th century). Without a doubt, the most famous figure of the Cistercian order is St Bernard (1090-1153), abbot of Clairvaux and doctor of the Church. Since 1995, the General Abbot of the Cistercian Order (Cist. O) has been Maur Esteva, who was chosen when he was abbot of Poblet.

