

The Images

The images (stained glass, the Stations, statues) around the church are the Scriptures of the unlearned. We do not adore these pictures, but as St. Gregory the Great says, by them we learn what to adore.

Our Lord is represented in many ways, but good art has a care not to confuse images. For example, St. John the Baptist called Our Lord the Lamb of God, and Our Lord was crucified for our sakes, but we do not place a lamb on the Cross. There is no problem depicting a lamb at the foot of the Cross, or a lamb with blood coming from his side—even into a chalice—and putting that image into a nativity scene. But we do not put a lamb into the crib. Neither do we confuse mysteries, by putting the resurrected body of Christ on the Cross. The triumph of the Cross in the Resurrection is depicted by an ornate cross; one that is of precious or semiprecious metal and may be with or without a corpus.

Artists depict angels as being very young, almost like babies, since they cannot age due to their incorporeal nature.

The four evangelists are presented as a man (St. Matthew), a lion (St. Mark), an ox (St. Luke), and an eagle (St. John). These were the four creatures in the vision of Ezekiel.

St. John the Baptist is presented as a hermit; martyrs are pictured with instruments of torture, such as St. Bartholomew with the flaying knife and St. Lawrence with the gridiron. Sometimes the saints are portrayed with palms: “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree” (Ps. 92:13), because the palm tree grows best under adversity (very hot weather) from outside, when well watered below by grace. Confessors are shown with the signs of their office, abbots with their cowls, bishops with



This painting commissioned especially for Ss. Peter and Paul Chapel at OLGS is rich in Catholic symbolism.

miters, some saints with lilies, which denote chastity. Doctors have a book in their hands, and virgins have lamps (cf. Mt. 25:1). St. Paul is shown with a book and a sword; the sword is his zeal, and the book depicts his conversion and that he is the first Doctor of the Church. Flowers and trees are often used to portray the fruit of good works.

Gold, the most precious of metals, is used especially to symbolize charity, which is the most precious of virtues.

All the sacred images are veiled during Passiontide, since Our Lord’s divinity was concealed as He gave Himself up to be betrayed and scourged. “But Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple” (Jn. 8:59). The virtue of His divinity is hidden. The veiling of the images also symbolizes that the understanding of Scripture before the Passion was veiled, hidden, and obscure. Many of the

Fathers also see this lack of understanding as the sword that prevented man from returning to Paradise.

On Holy Saturday, the veils are removed, because at Our Lord’s death, the curtain or veil of the temple was rent, and His Resurrection made it possible for us to enter heaven and also to understand the mysteries.

The church is adorned gloriously within, but not without. There are practical reasons for this, of course, but the theological reason is the indwelling of God. “Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). †

This series features excerpts from the yet to be printed book on the symbolism of Mass, *Nothing Superfluous* by Fr. James Jackson, F.S.S.P. Saints and liturgists have attributed various symbolism to the different aspects of the liturgy, and these articles present some of them.

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