

A CHURCH REVEALED

HOLY COMFORTER – SAINT CYPRIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WASHINGTON DC

A Study of the Sanctuary Rooted in the Book of Revelation Chapters 4 and 5

The sanctuary of Holy Comforter – Saint Cyprian Church is largely reflective of the heavenly vision of St. John in the Book of Revelation, especially Chapters 4 and 5. The fundamental design of the sanctuary drawn from Revelation 4 and 5 visible in the church includes the throne-like altar, seven tall candles around the throne, the four living creatures in the clerestory windows above the altar. At the center of the altar is the tabernacle wherein dwells the Lamb once slain who lives forever, Jesus. Around the throne (altar) are seated the twenty-four elders symbolized by the 12 wooden pillars on the back sanctuary wall and the 12 stained glass windows of the Apostles in the transept windows. The multitude of angels who surround the throne are symbolized by the blue and gold diamonds on the apse wall. In the following pages we look at these details along with the scripture texts from Revelation.



A throne was there in heaven... (Rev. 4:2)



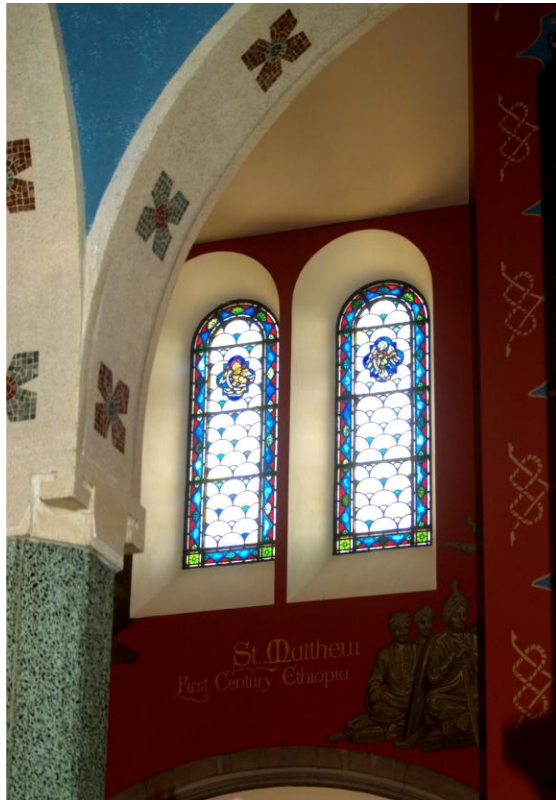
The original high Altar of the Church is under a throne-like canopy or baldachin, and depicts that the throne that John sees in heaven.

Seven flaming torches burned in front of the Throne which are the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 4:5)



On the original high altar are six tall candlesticks. When a bishop celebrates the Mass, a seventh candle is traditionally added. However, in ordinary situations the seventh candle is the tall sanctuary lamp with the red candle to the left of the altar. These seven candles signify the seven flaming torches before the throne in heaven.

And around the Throne were the four living creatures...the first creature resembled a lion, the second was like a calf, the third had a face like that of a man, and the fourth looked like an eagle in flight. (Rev. 4:6-8)



In the clerestory windows above and on either side of the baldachin (throne-like altar), are stained glass representations of the four living creatures which John sees around the throne in heaven. Here too they surround the throne-like altar of this Church from above on the left and right. One has the face of lion, the other a man, another, an ox, and the last, an eagle in flight. These four living creatures have also been traditionally assigned as representatives of the four Gospels. In the stained glass details you see below, each of the four living creatures also has the Gospel to which it refers.



I saw standing in the middle of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders, a lamb that seemed to have been slain....

(Rev. 5:6)



At the center of the altar is the tabernacle wherein dwells Jesus, the Lamb of God. The tabernacle is the place in every Catholic Church where the Eucharist is reserved so as to be taken to the sick, and for adoration. Catholics do not see the Eucharist as merely a symbol of Christ, it IS Jesus Christ: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, truly present in the tabernacle. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Just as John sees the Lamb, Jesus, standing in the center of the throne in heaven, so here in our Church, inspired by the John's heavenly vision, Jesus, is standing at the center of our throne-like altar. He is within the tabernacle, at the center of our Church, present among us. Inside the tabernacle door is also the image of Jesus as the Lamb (seen here below).



I heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the surrounded.

(Rev 5:11)



The Blue and gold diamonds with their shapes like angel wings along with the wheat colored patterns of similar shape remind us of the multitude of angels who surround the throne.

Surrounding the throne I saw twenty-four other thrones on which twenty four elders sat. (Rev. 4:4)

In and around the sanctuary the twenty-four elders are represented in two groups of twelve.

First there are twelve wooden pillars which represent the 12 Patriarchs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. They are on the back wall of the sanctuary in three groups of four. One to the left of the altar. One directly behind the altar. And one to the right of the altar. One of the groups of four is shown in the photo below to the right.

Secondly there are twelve stained glass windows of the Twelve Apostles in the windows of the transept. There is a photo of one of the windows below to the left.

On the next page is shown the layout of the twenty-four elders around the throne.

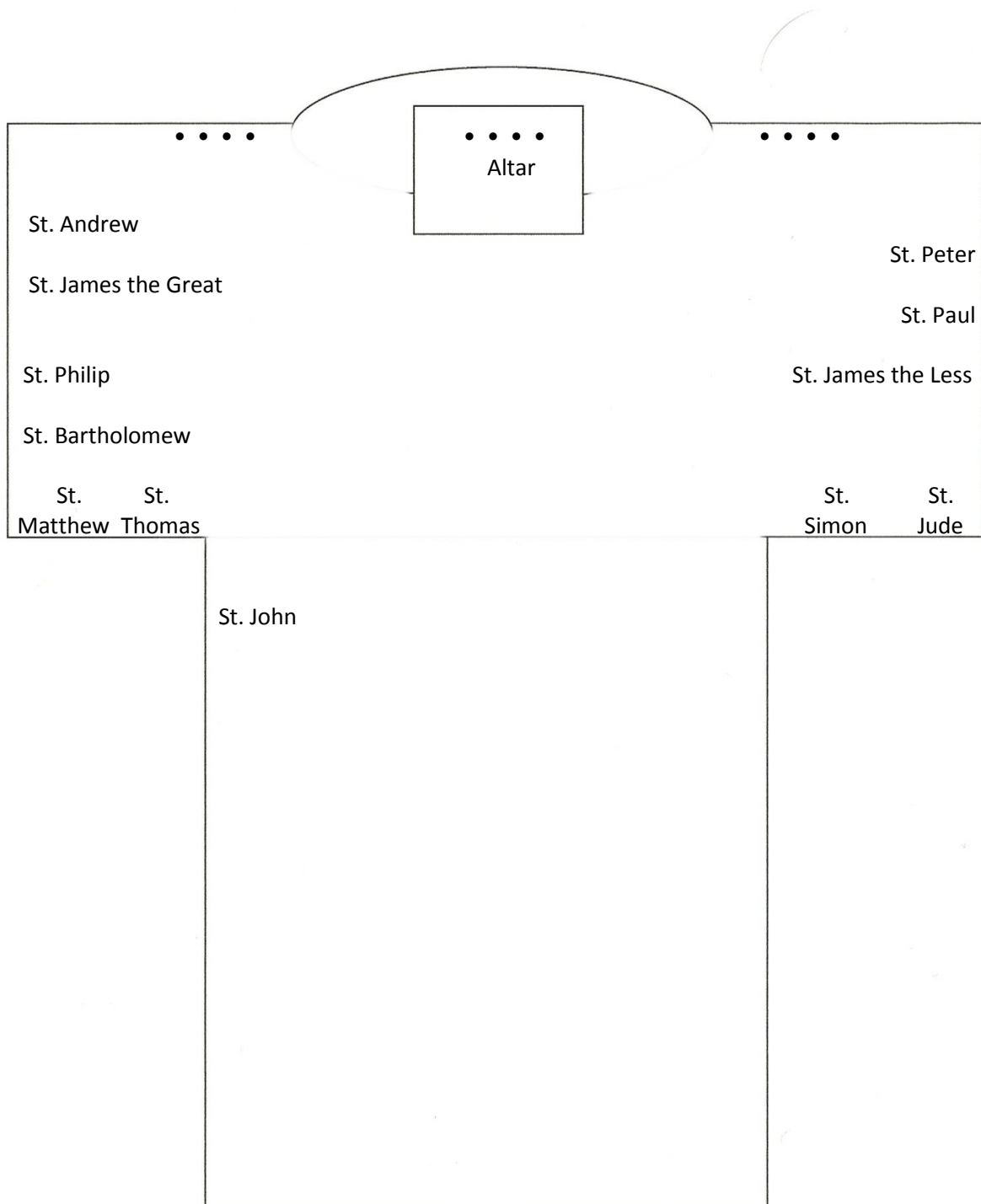
Four of the 12 wooden pillars (at right) representing the 12 patriarchs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. With the other eight pillars, these comprise the first group of the twenty-four elders around the throne.



Here at left is one of the twelve windows of the Apostles. This is the Andrew window. With the other eleven windows in the transept, it comprises the second group of the twenty-four elders.

Details of all Twelve windows are shown in the final pages of this document.

The Arrangement of the Twenty-Four Elders Around the Throne (Altar)



The wooden Pillars that represent the 12 Patriarchs are depicted here as black dots on the back of the sanctuary.

The Apostles Seated Around the Throne
Depicted in the Transept Windows
Of Holy Comforter – St. Cyprian Parish



St. Peter - St. Peter is depicted by the Crossed Keys and the upside down cross. The Crossed keys remind us of the Lord's words to Peter: *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven* (Matt 16:19). The upside-down cross is based on a legend that when Peter was martyred he was taken to be crucified. He indicated that he was not worthy to die as the Lord Jesus had and asked to be crucified upside-down. This is how he died.

St. Paul – St. Paul is depicted here by crossed swords. These swords indicate two things. First, the nature of his martyrdom. As a Roman Citizen, Paul was killed by beheading and the sword reminds us of this. Secondly, Paul spoke of the Word of God as the “Sword of the Spirit.” He does this in Ephesians 6:17 - *And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* His symbol is also, at times, depicted by a sword over a book with the words, “*Spiritus Gladius*” (sword of the Spirit). That symbol can be seen in the wall painting of Paul and Barnabas at the front of the Church to the right of the altar.



St. James the Less – St. James the Less is depicted by the saw for, according to some legends he was sawed in half at his martyrdom. The usual tradition associated with his death is that he was thrown off the wall of the Temple Mount and then sawed in half. James is usually numbered as a brother (cousin) of the Lord. He is the likely writer of the Epistle of James and became the Bishop of Jerusalem. He is called James the Less to distinguish him from James the Great, the brother of John.

St. Jude – St. Jude is depicted by the ship for it reminds us of his missionary journeys. He is said to have traveled a great deal by ship during his missionary journeys. Thus a small ship at full sail is placed in his shield. He is also known as Thaddeus in Mark's Gospel. He was the brother of James the Less and thus also a cousin of the Lord. Tradition says that after Pentecost he journeyed with Simon the Zealot and evangelized widely. He was martyred in Persia by being clubbed to death.



St. Simon the Zealot - The depiction of Simon Zelotes shows a fish lying on a book. This refers to his ability as a great fisher of men, through the power of the Gospel. There is also the tradition that he had been a fisherman who became a fisher of men. He is listed among the Apostles in the Gospel but nothing is said of him specifically. He is called the "Canaanite" in Matthew and Mark and the "Zealot" in Luke and Acts. The title, Zealot may denote his membership in a radical Jewish political party that sought to end Roman Rule. He is reported to have ministered in Egypt and later joined Jude in Persia and was Martyred there likely being slain by the sword.

St. John – St. John is depicted here by the Eagle. The eagle represents John because of his lofty and "soaring" gospel (it is much more theological in nature than the other three). There is also the Long tradition of identifying the Four Gospels with the four living Creatures in Ezekiel and also in Revelation. John is identified with the eagle, Luke with the ox, Matthew the man, and Mark the lion. After Pentecost, John ministered first with Peter in and around Jerusalem. Later he is found in Ephesus. He was the only Apostle not to endure martyrdom but he did suffer imprisonment.





St. Thomas - The window of Thomas shows a vertical spear and a carpenter's square. The square refers to him as a builder or carpenter. The spear refers to his martyr's death in India from a pagan priest's spear. Thomas is often called the doubter, not only because of his doubt of the resurrection but also because he often wondered aloud as to what the Lord was saying (e.g. John 14:1-6 and John 11:16). There is a strong tradition that St. Thomas became a missionary in India and may have worked there with Bartholomew. It is said he built churches with his own hand and that he may even have built a palace for the Indian King.

St. Matthias (& or Matthew) – The spear and stones are most frequently associated with Matthias. However a more common image of Matthias is the Axe over a book. St. Matthew is sometimes depicted with a spear however more commonly with three money bags due to his former status as a tax collector . Since Mathias and Matthew are often confused in ancient legends (due to their similar names) it is possible that this window represents them both. The later life of them and their manner of death is quite variable and confused in legends and hence little can be said with certainty. Allow this window to represent them both.



There are various traditions about Matthew. He may have evangelized in Ethiopia or in Persia. He is said to have been killed with a spear. Mathias was elected to replace Judas (Acts 1:15ff). After Pentecost he is said to have ministered in Judea and later in Eastern Europe around the Caspian Sea (in far Southeastern Russia and northern Iran). He is said to have been martyred by beheading though some legends say he was stoned.



St. Bartholomew – Is depicted in this window by the fig tree. For the Lord Jesus, when calling him said he saw him under the fig tree (Jn 1:48). He is also called Nathaniel in the Bible. There are no reliable stories about Bartholomew after Pentecost though the most common stories have him in India and Armenia. Tradition says he was flayed alive. Another common symbol for him are flaying knives.

St. Philip – St. Philip is depicted here with a basket which reminds of his role in the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus turned to Philip and asked how they were going to feed them. Philip replied that eight month's wages would not be enough to feed the crowd (John 6:7). The Red tau cross reminds us that one legend of his death was that he was crucified. Little of a reliable nature is known of him after Pentecost. The most common stories are that he evangelized in Phrygia (modern day Turkey).



St. James the Elder – St. James is depicted by three shells. Saint James is said to have traveled a great deal in order to preach the Gospel to many people. The scallop shell is a symbol for the traveler because he used this shell to scoop water to drink on his travels. He was the brother of John and both of them were fishermen along with their father, Zebedee. James was the first Apostle to suffer martyrdom when Herod Agrippa (grandson of Herod the Great) unleashed a persecution. The scriptures say that Herod had James beheaded (Acts 12:1-3). There are some traditions that James preached in Spain, though this seems unlikely given his early martyrdom.

St. Andrew – St. Andrew is depicted here by an X-shaped cross because tradition says he was crucified on such a cross. He is said to have preached to the crowds as he died. Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist. He was the brother of Simon Peter and his partner in their fishing business. Andrew was the first disciple to be called and he introduced Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-42). There are many legends related to Andrews preaching after Pentecost. It seems he worked mainly in Greece. He was condemned to death by the Roman Governor of that region.

