

**“All for the Love
of the
Good God:”**

*A Pilgrim's Guide
to the
Sacred Art
of
Saint Theresa Catholic Church
Ashburn, Virginia*

Introduction

“All for the love of the Good God...” With these words, Saint Therese of Lisieux would take her final breath at the tender age of twenty-four years. Her simple life lived in obscurity behind the walls of Carmel would only be discovered some years after her death, when the manuscript written at the request of her superior would become a published work, known to the world as *The Story of A Soul*. Within just a short period of time, Therese Martin – Sister Theresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face – would be canonized and become perhaps the best-loved saint in the history of the Church. While the parish in Ashburn, Virginia, which bears her name was erected in 1991, Saint Theresa Roman Catholic Church was only finally dedicated in November of 2009. Many of the details of the church manifest various aspects of the life of our patroness, including depictions of her favorite saints.

Windows

Upon entering the church through the narthex, the nave suddenly opens up and one's attention is drawn to the immense stained glass window that dominates the back wall of the sanctuary. The window is designed to give one a glimpse into heaven, for it is in the Holy Mass that heaven truly touches earth as bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Roses can be seen showering from heaven: Saint Therese had promised to send a shower of roses from heaven as she said she would “spend” her heaven doing good on earth. The inscription on the window reads, “I will be love in the heart of the Church,” for it was in love that our patroness discovered her true vocation. From heaven, she lovingly intercedes for the Pilgrim Church on earth.

The clerestory windows around the church depict various scenes from Sacred Scripture. It is said that Saint Theresa had a particular devotion to

angels. The scenes portrayed in these windows show how God has employed angels in the work of salvation history. These windows “read” left to right, beginning with the Book of Genesis and concluding with the Book of Revelation.

The first window portrays Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden of Eden after their fall from grace. In Genesis 3.24 we read, “[The Lord] drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

The second window (above the north side entrance) portrays the Guardian Angel leading the Israelites through the Red Sea. Exodus 14.19 states: “The angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.”

The third window portrays the Archangel Raphael assisting in the healing of Tobit upon returning from his travels with young Tobias. In Tobit 11.7-8, we read: “Raphael said, ‘I know Tobias that your father will open his eyes. You therefore must anoint his eyes with the gall; and when they smart he will rub them, and will cause the white films to fall away, and he will see you.’”

The next window in the series portrays the call of the Prophet Isaiah, as he himself describes the event in Isaiah 6.6: “Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar.”

In the fifth window we catch a glimpse of the three young men – Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael – thrown into the white hot furnace by order of King Nebuchadnezzar. In the Book of the Prophet Daniel, (3.26), we read: “The angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace.”

The Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to our Lady can be seen in the sixth window. Saint Luke (1.26-27) writes: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.”

As we move to the choir loft, we turn again to Saint Luke, this time for a description of the Nativity: “Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.” (Luke 2.13)

Saint Matthew (2.13) describes the dream in which an angel instructs Saint Joseph to take the Child and his mother in flight to Egypt: “Behold, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you....’”

Saint Mark (1.13) describes the experience of our Lord in the wilderness prior to starting his public ministry as follows: “He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.”

In Saint John’s Gospel (1.51), we read of our Lord’s words to Nathaniel who declares him to be the very Son of God: “I say to you, you will see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

We return again to the Gospel of Saint Luke (22.43) for a description of our Lord’s Agony in the Garden: “There appeared to [our Lord] an angel from heaven, strengthening him.”

Over the south entrance we find a depiction of the resurrection according to Saint Luke (24.4-5): “Two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them... ‘He is not here, but has risen.’”

The final window portrays Saint Michael’s victory over the evil one (Rev. 12.7-8). “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.”

The windows along the cloister of the church portray various images reflective of the life of Saint Therese. In the Carmel, each Sister had a simple symbol – a sort of shorthand – which would identify her belongings – Saint Therese’s symbol was a simple reed. Saint Therese’s full religious name was Sr. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. One window portrays Veronica’s veil with the miraculous image of the Face of Christ, another the crib (manger) of the infant Christ Child. Saint Therese had a desire to be a missionary (symbolized by the missionary’s cross), a martyr (symbolized by the martyr’s palm), and a priest (symbolized by the priest’s chalice). She would never realize these desires, but she promised to pray for priests, missionaries, and all the Church.

The north stairwell contains two windows: one honors our military; a second, St. Patrick. The south stairwell depicts the pelican feeding her young – an ancient Eucharistic symbol. The crowing cock in the confessional chapel reminds us of Saint Peter’s contrition while the baptistry window depicts the power of the Holy Spirit descending upon the water of Baptism.

A window in the vestry depicts images of a watch and lace. The parents of Saint Therese, Saints Louis and Zelig Martin, were involved in the work of watch-making and the fabrication of Alençon lace. In the sacristy, four windows depict the coats-of-arms of Pope Saint John Paul II, Bishop John Richard Keating, Bishop Paul Stephen Loverde, and Pope Benedict XVI. The parish was founded by Bishop Keating during the pontificate of Saint John Paul the Great, while the church was built during the pontificate of Benedict, when Bishop Loverde was chief shepherd of the Arlington Diocese.

All of the stained glass windows in the church are the work of Lynchburg Stained Glass in Lynchburg, Virginia.

The Fourteen Stations

The traditional fourteen stations of the cross are portrayed around the church. The stations were probably first prayed in the city of Jerusalem, as they are to this day when pilgrims visit the Holy Land. The tradition of portraying the stations in a church dates back to the Middle Ages, though it was not until the eighteenth century that the Church settled on the fourteen as we know them today. The stations take us from the condemnation of Christ by Pilate, through his crucifixion on Calvary, to his ultimate burial. The Stations of the Cross in Saint Theresa Church were procured from a religious antiques dealer, however little is known of their true origin. They appear to have been fabricated in Munich, Germany by the Franz Mayer & Co. perhaps sometime in the early twentieth century. The studio is more widely known for its stained glass work.

Reredos

The reredos, more commonly called the “high altar,” came to Saint Theresa Church from Saint Aloysius Church in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The reredos was brought to Ashburn in small pieces and was painstakingly reconstructed in our church, as if it had been made for the space. In the center of the reredos, right above the tabernacle, we find a statue of our patroness, Saint Theresa of Lisieux. This statue has been a part of the parish since the days when Masses were celebrated in the school gym. The mosaics in the reredos to the right and left of the statue portray six of Saint Theresa’s favorite saints: Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Agnes, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Theophane Venard, and Saint Joan of Arc. The mosaics were commissioned by King Richard’s Liturgical Design and Contracting and fabricated in Italy. The altar, ambo and baptismal font were all crafted in Italy.

Statues

There are a variety of statues around the church, enhancing its beauty and reminding the believer that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses when we gather for Holy Mass. To the right of the altar is a small shrine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The large marble statue was sculpted in Italy. The chapel contains images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Czestochowa. To the left of the altar is a small shrine dedicated to Saint Joseph. Inside this shrine can be found a copy of the image of Divine Mercy.

Looking out from the sanctuary toward the nave, one is able to see a statue of Saint Peter, portrayed holding the symbolic Keys of the Kingdom; and a statue of Saint Paul, portrayed with the sword by which he suffered martyrdom. Portrayed in wood carved statues are Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (Secondary Patroness of the Arlington Diocese), Saint Gerard Majella (Patron Saint of Expectant Parents), Saint John Vianney (Patron of Parish Priests), and Saint Thomas More, (Patron Saint of the Arlington Diocese). (Incidentally, Saint Joseph and Saint Paul were other favorites of our patroness.)

Other Images

Mosaics of the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) can be found above the side entrances to the church. These four gospel writers are portrayed with their individual symbols: Matthew, the angel; Mark, the lion; Luke, the ox; and John, the eagle. A banner portraying Saint Cecelia can be found in the stairwell leading up to the Choir loft. Cecelia is the patron saint of music. (Saint Therese also counted Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Cecelia amongst her favorite saints.)