

Catechism on the Liturgy III, 6

The glass windows are Holy Scripture, which expel the wind and rain (that which is hurtful to the flock), but which let in the light of the sun into the church (which is God, into the hearts of the faithful). These are wider in the inside than on the outside, signifying that the truth of God to the faithful is greater than the defense from what is wrong. The windows have two shafts, which signify the two great precepts of charity, which was accomplished by the sending out of the apostles two by two. 156

The door of the church is Christ; “I am the door.” (Jn 10.9)

The pillars on the inside represent the apostles “...who seemed to be pillars.” Gal 2.9 The bases of the columns are the apostolic bishops, while the capitals are the fathers and the doctors. The ornamentation of the columns are the writings and examples of the saints.

The pavement of the church is the foundation of our faith. But spiritually it is also the poor in Christ – those who are poor in spirit, who humble themselves in all things. It also represents the multitude by whose labors the church is sustained.

The beams which join together the columns are the preachers, who bring the wisdom of the apostles, the doctors and the bishops to the faithful.

The pulpit is elevated not just so people can hear and see better, but that the speech which comes from it should be elevated from common discourse, and because of its root in the preaching of Solomon, “...who made a brazen scaffold, and set it in the midst of the temple, and stood upon it, and stretching forth his hands spake to the people of God.” (3 Kgs 6.13)

The tiles on the roof are soldiers and police, who protect the church from external

and internal enemies.

Circular staircases, which are imitated from Solomon’s temple, represent the hidden knowledge which only those who ascend to celestial things may know. The steps up to the altar represent the knowledge which will be granted in the Beatific Vision.

The sacristy, where the priest and the sacred ministers put on their robes, is the womb of the Blessed Virgin, where Christ put on the robes of humanity. The priest proceeds from the sacristy into the public view as Christ left Mary to be seen in the temple.

The holy lamp represents Christ; “I am the light of the world.”

The candles on the altar are six (Moses ordered seven lights – 6 for the twelve tribes, 1 for the presence of God.). The candlesticks are representative of the Church militant, and also represent the light of good works, which enlighten and inflame others. The seventh candle is not normally used – it was in the center, and represented the presence of God in Israel. But the tabernacle has replaced the seventh candle, as God is no longer represented on the altar, but is truly present. The seventh candle is still used however, for the Mass of a bishop, who is the chief representative of God in a diocese. The seven branch candlestick was always used with the Ark of the Covenant.

The altar has a triumphal cross, raised high, to signify the victory of Christ on the Cross. A triumphal crucifix means one of good quality metal, with or without jewels. It represents many things to us:

Christ Himself, without Whom no gift is acceptable to the Father.

*The body of Christ.
Mortification of the heart, in
which our carnal motions are
consumed by the fire of the Holy
Ghost. This is especially repre-
sented in the consecration of the
altar.*

Each church has an altar, because “Thou shalt offer burnt offerings on mine altar.” (Ex. 9.2) It represents Christ above all. It is also a table: “Thou prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” (Ps. 22.5) It’s not that the church is filled with enemies, but at every Mass one may assume that enemies (betrayers of the Cross) are present. Scripture is especially useful against temptation of the devils. The altar is a clean heart, and the fire that burns near it is charity. “The fire shall always be burning upon Mine altar.” (Lev. 6.9) It reminds us that charity should always burn in our hearts.

The white cloths which cover the altar signify the flesh of the Savior, that is, His humanity. A pure heart is adorned with good works. “And put on white garments, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” (Apoc. 3.18) The nakedness is the lack of good works. “Let thy garments

be always white.” (Eccles 9.8) That is, let our works be clean.

The steps up to the altar represent the sacrifices of the martyrs. The steps also represent the virtues, as we approach Christ through the virtues, “They go from virtue to virtue.” (Ps 84.7) We arrive at Christ by steps in the ordinary way of sanctity.

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

*“The form is neither God nor
man, which here thou dost be-
hold:
He is very God and man, of
whom by that form are told.”
Bp. Montague*