



WHERE WE WORSHIP

The Art and Architecture of Saint Paul the Apostle Church in Los Angeles

ALTAR MOSAIC



Photo by Michael Hong

The altar mosaic shows the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God. He holds a white banner with a red cross, the banner of victory, as a sign of his triumph over death. Around him twines a grapevine heavy with bunches of grapes, reminding us that Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches." (Jn 15:5)

The oak Reredos behind the altar is ornamented with stylized stalks of wheat. The wheat, together with the grapes in the mosaic, recalls to us the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

The altar is made of white Arabian Travertine. The mosaic was designed by the artists Jean and Arthur Ames of Claremont, California. They sometimes worked with Millard Sheets — best known in Southern California for his Home Savings and Loan mosaics.

Like Sheets, they liked to work with Byzantine tesserae or tiles, especially the gold-glass tesserae that glow in this mosaic.

Jean Goodwin Ames studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. She earned her B.E. from UCLA in 1931 and an M.F. A. from the University of Southern California in 1937. She met Arthur in a ceramics class at USC. They married in 1941 and worked together and individually on many local commissions, including churches and synagogues.

Jean taught at Scripps College and the Claremont Graduate School. Arthur, who studied at the California School of Fine Art in San Francisco, taught at Otis Art Institute.



Photos by John Newman



CONVERSION OF PAUL

One of the most striking aspects of the church facade is the dramatic figure of Paul at the moment of his conversion. He has fallen to his knees. He seems to be shielding his eyes from the light that has blinded him, and cupping his ear to hear the voice of Jesus. Lying across his body is a sword, an object with many associations.

The sword may remind us that Paul is en route to Damascus, famous for its steel, to punish the followers of Jesus. A sword can also symbolize martyrdom, and tradition has it that Paul died by the sword. Or perhaps the sword makes us think of Paul the preacher and the word of God, “sharper than any two-edged sword.” (Heb 4:12)

Local sculptor Stephen Zakian created the image of Paul. Zakian earned his M.F.A. from the University of Southern California in 1952, and later became a professor of fine arts at USC.



TABERNACLE



A pair of angels dominate the doors of the tabernacle. One carries a crown; the other holds an object that might be a chalice or the calyx of a large flower. Stars twinkle above them and small flowers are scattered at their feet.

Four symbols appear on the side panels: a pomegranate, a dove, a hand reaching up from the heavens, and a butterfly. Both the pomegranate and the butterfly symbolize resurrection and eternal life. The dove represents the Holy Spirit, while the hand recalls God the Father speaking at the Baptism of Jesus.

The tabernacle is of satin brass, with enameled doors and side panels. The artists Jean and Arthur Ames of Claremont, California created the art work. Master Metal Works of Los Angeles crafted the tabernacle.

Originally the tabernacle was behind the altar. After Vatican II, the presider turned to face the assembly. That would have put his back to the tabernacle. Thus the tabernacle and sanctuary lamp were moved to the side altar.

Photo by Michael Hong

ITALIAN MOSAICS



Mosaics of the 12 Apostles grace the walls of the narthex — the lobby area just inside the church doors.

Many of the Apostles are shown with books and scrolls, signs of their teaching and writings. Paul also holds the sword, symbol of his martyrdom and the truths he preached. The X-shaped cross associated with Andrew is cleverly incorporated into his clothing. Peter holds a key, traditional sign of his authority as pope.

Above the Apostles, in Latin and in English, appear the words “I will go in to the altar of God.” These were the opening words of the Latin Mass in use when the church was dedicated. Even now, the entry procession for the Mass begins in this area.

At this point the only thing we know about these mosaics is that they are Italian. We don't know the name of the artist or the studio where the mosaic was assembled. The mosaics are in Roman (as opposed to Byzantine) style, using solid ceramic tesserae (tiles) rather than the glass tiles used on the altar. We do know that the C.F. Horan Company installed these mosaics and those inside the nave.

In June 2018 Brian Worley cleaned and restored all the mosaics at St. Paul's.



Contrast this rendering of the Lamb of God with the image on the front of the altar.

STAINED GLASS



Photo by Michael Hong

At the time the church was dedicated, only three of the 12 individuals depicted in stained glass were saints: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Saint Pope Pius X, and the patron of lawyers, Saint Thomas More. Since that time, four more of the holy men and women pictured have been canonized:

- Martin de Porres (1962)
- Elizabeth Ann Seton (1975)
- Junipero Serra (2015)
- John Henry Cardinal Newman (2019)

Paulist founder Isaac Thomas Hecker is now designated a Servant of God, the first step on the road to canonization.

The bishops and cardinals in the remaining four windows are important to the history of Catholicism. Bishop John Carroll, S. J. was the first U.S. bishop; notice the Jesuit emblem, IHS, above his head. Bishop Francisco Garcia Diego y Moreno was the first California bishop; his window includes Mission Santa Barbara, where he is buried. The influential Baltimore bishop James Cardinal Gibbons helped to persuade Pope Leo XIII to support the rights of labor. Pope Leo's window shows him handing his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, to a kneeling man wearing overalls.

Rudi Schilling of Trier, Germany designed the windows; his design was executed by the Karl Hackert Company of Chicago.



Isaac Thomas Hecker



Elizabeth Ann Seton

Photos: Tito Deveyra of TAD Photography