



TALLERES de ARTE .S.A.
director

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PARISH CHURCH of ST. THOMAS of CANTERBURY

Avilés, Asturias

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1911

MAIN ALTAR



The mensa is supported by three winged figures worked in bronze, holding shields which display the attributes of the Theological Virtues. The statues are identical, differentiated only in the movement of their arms, for the three virtues are the same in

essence. Besides, the metaphor of charity carried through the entire architectural composition requires it. In the spaces between these figures are bas-reliefs in marble, representing the sacrifice of Abraham¹ and of Melchizedek², allegories from the Old Testament expressing the double aspect of the Holy Eucharist as Sacrifice and as Sacrament.



The tabernacle door shows the Lamb of God surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists. On the sides of the tabernacle are representations of the pure soul³ that comes to Christ, and the perverse soul that devours. The tabernacle is composed of two figures holding an ark; the figures are Mechizedek, priest of the natural law, and Aaron, priest of the written law. The corners of the ark⁴ are adorned with statues that represent the four Evangelists, cornerstones of the Church that shows on its façades the Triune God, the Wedding at Cana⁵ and the Last Supper. One of the façades opens to reveal a monstrance for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Behind the tabernacle, above a high base formed by the stalls at the bottom of the apse surrounding the altar, five paintings are prominently displayed. In the center painting, Mary sits on a high throne with her Son in her arms, and the founders of the Order of Mercy at her feet. St. Peter Nolasco presents a captive to Mary; King James I, wearing the characteristic helmet that someone baselessly attributed to him, offers prompt material support to the enterprise. In the middle of the painting, St. Raymond of Peñafort appears, by his attitude, to offer advice. At the base of the composition, a tapestry in the mediæval style represents Christ as prisoner and Christ as judge; it is found on the ground amid a great scattering of roses, indicating that the foundation of this Order was an offspring of Charity.



Two of the lateral compositions complement and amplify this first one. In one, St. Peter Nolasco and two other men receive from the hands of a bishop the habits of the order. The King and St. Raymond are present. In the other, a group of captives are released at the foot of the saint coming to rescue them, accompanied by a richly dressed Moor holding a purse in his hand, a common artistic expression for the ransom. The scene takes place in a courtyard, which by its decoration appears to belong to a pre-Christian era.



The other two paintings are devoted to St. Thomas of Canterbury. In one of them, the saint defends himself before the King against his enemies' accusations. In the other, the nobles assassinate him before the altar.

ALTAR OF ST. JOSEPH

The altar is divided into two spaces by three groups of columns, that support the mensa. In these are found, embossed in iron, the escutcheons of the Marquess of Teverga and the city of Avilés.

The reredos is composed of two parts surrounded by a border of leaves and divided into squares by a wide cornice, which rests on two brackets. In the main part are presented three subjects separated by pilasters decorated with columns, statues and canopies. The central is an ornamental motif representing the genealogy of St. Joseph.



To the right is found Joseph of Egypt, at the feet of the Pharaoh, who places a chain of gold about his neck and appoints him second in his kingdom⁶; surrounding the Pharaoh are the dignitaries of his court, and in the background the people witness the scene. Represented to the left are the hungry people of Egypt asking for bread; Pharaoh commands them to go to Joseph.

In the second part, standing on a ledge in the center is the statue of St. Joseph with the infant Jesus in his arms. To the sides of the statue are two passages of the New testament; that on the right represents the paternity of St. Joseph confessed by Mary, in those words spoken to Jesus in the temple. BEHOLD THY FATHER AND I HAVE SOUGHT THEE SORROWING (Luke 2.48). That on the right represents the angel's apparition in the dream of St. Joseph, revealing the mystery of the incarnation.

ALTAR OF THE MOTHER OF FAIR LOVE

The frontal of this altar is formed by a sheet of iron with images worked in repoussage of peacocks coming to quench their thirst at the fountain of the Savior; this expresses in allegory that those who drink this water shall have eternal life (John 4.17), for the peacock is a symbol of immortality (See, among other ecclesiastical authors, St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 21.7).

The reredos is composed of two stories divided into three spaces by columns, each divided into squares by a large molding of carved wood. In the lateral spaces of the first story are two panels; the one on the right represents the love of Mary for men. The Virgin places her dolours in the sight of those who suffer, as if saying to them: COME, LET US GO UP TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD, AND THERE, AT THE FEET OF CHRIST, SEE IF THERE BE ANY SORROW LIKE TO MY SORROW. *Venite ascendamus ad montem Domine* (Micah 4.2), *et videte, si est dolor sicut dolor meus* (Lamentations 1.12).



Surrounding the Virgin are men and women of all classes and ages, showing to her their infirmities of soul and body. On the other panel, saints and virgins prostrate at the feet of the Mother of Fair Love; roses and lilies cover the ground; around Mary are born chaste love and ardent charity. Mary calls her chosen ones with these words: *Veni electa mea et ponam in te thronum meum*.

In the central space are three escutcheons: that of Mary, of the province, and of the city.

In the second story, above three ledges are placed a sculpture of the Mother of Fair Love and two angels, one carrying lilies and the other carrying roses. In the lateral panels the love of Mary for God is represented in a dual concept of Mother and Daughter: as a girl, at her Presentation in the Temple; and as a mother, at the Adoration of the Magi.

ALTAR OF OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL

This altar shows on its frontal two deer⁷ that quench their thirst at a fountain flowing in five streams from the monogram of Christ, and bears this inscription: *Ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus* (Psalm 41.2). It is an expression of the alacrity and vehement love with which we should approach the Holy Eucharist.

In the center of the reredos, on a ledge, stands the statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel with the infant Jesus in her arms, flanked by Isaiah, who in one of his prophecies foretold the birth of the Savior to the world, and by Elijah.

An openwork canopy covers the three figures, terminating in the Carmelite coat of arms, supported by two angels. A molding with carved wood on a silver background forms the frame of the altarpiece. In the remaining spaces to the side of the canopy are the escutcheons of the Marquess of Avilés and the Marquess of Pinar del Río.



PULPIT

From the most ancient times, the ambos (pulpits) were especially decorated with mosaics or bas-reliefs, as evidenced by two at Ravenna, in which fish and other Christian symbols were carved⁸.

A thick column of walnut wood, sitting upon a limestone socle, supports the rostrum. The lower part of the rostrum, where it joins to the column, is ornamented with fantastic

animals⁹, linked to each other by their wings and forming the capital of the column with their entwined tails.

The parapet, decorated with columns at its corners and supporting a wide molding, holds four panels, in which the emblems of the evangelists are displayed in bronze repoussage.

A tablet of carved walnut wood with an ornamental border forms the frontal of the lectern. In its center is the likeness of the Cross of Victory. The canopy over the rostrum is supported by two widely projecting modillions of carved wood. The canopy is decorated with gothic arches, and on the spire atop the canopy are represented, in the forms of fantastic animals, the wisdom of Christ driving away vices and errors. On the sounding board is a dove, symbol of the Holy Ghost.

Crowning the spire is a griffin¹⁰ in a defensive posture, holding in one of its arms a shield with the word PUGNAVIT written on a silver background. On the sides of the spire, winged monsters tumble.

(1) The sacrifice of Abraham is an image of the sacrifice of Christ. The revered monuments of greatest antiquity prove this well. Antonio Bosio, Louis Perret and Bothan, describe and copy numerous frescoes found in the catacombs. Bothan has published an engraving of a notable fresco found in the Cemetery of Ss. Marcellinus and Peter. The representation of Abraham and Isaac in prayerful attitude while the sacrifice occurs, although rare, is found in some frescoes of the catacombs. Giovanni Caetano Bottari has described such a work.

St. Gregory of Nyssa said that he could not consider this scene, which was frequently painted on church walls, without shedding tears (*Acts of the Second Nicene Council*, session 4).

(2) Melchizedek's offering is one of the most obvious prefigurements of the Eucharistic sacrifice in the Bible. In a sixth century mosaic in St. Vitalis Church in Ravenna, Melchizedek is depicted making the sacrifice of bread and wine to God, accompanied by Abel. In the canon of the Mass it is said: *et quod tibi obtulit summus sacerdos tuus Melchissidech sanctum sacrificium immaculatam hostiam*.

(3) In Christian symbolism, the dove is always the emblem of purity and holiness, and the wolf of perversity and malice. The pure soul is the dove that picks grapes, and the perverse the wolf that eats up the lamb and tramples the grain. These scenes are placed in visible positions and contain inscriptions from the holy books, so that when we approach to the altar we remember the lesson that comes from them: IT IS NOT GOOD TO TAKE THE BREAD OF THE CHILDREN, AND TO CAST IT TO THE DOGS (Matthew 15.26), said Christ to the Canaanite woman. The sequence of the Mass of Corpus Christi says:

*Ecce panis Angelorum
Factus cibus viatorum
Vere panis filiorum
Non mittendus canibus.*

“The call of the soul by the Divine Spouse”, said Rev. Joseph-Alexander Martigny, “appears to be expressed in the Song of Songs, 2.10: *Surge, propera amica mea, mea columba, mea formosa, et veni.*” (*Dictionnaire des Antiquités Chrétiennes*)

Alphonse de Boissieu described two doves that had in their beaks a grain of wheat, which symbolize the happy soul feeding at the heavenly dish (*Inscriptions Antiques de Lyon*).

(4) The Ark has always been regarded as a symbol of the Church. In crypts and above tombs, the Ark was represented to indicate that the people buried below died within the Church, that time's equivalent to what is represented by our formula *In pace*.

St. Ambrose had it painted in his basilica as a symbol of the Church. St. Hippolytus says that “the many images on the monuments are intended to remind the faithful of the love that God has manifested to those whom He has called to the faith“ (*Homily on the Theophany*).

(5) The changing of water into wine at the wedding of Cana, according to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, is a figure of the changing of wine into the blood of the Savior (*Catechism* 22.11). Bottari and Rev. Giuseppe Marchi saw an image of transubstantiation in the depictions of this wonder in the ancient monuments.

A painting in an Alexandrian catacomb represents the Wedding at Cana, the multiplication of loaves and fishes, and a group of figures sitting in the shade of some trees; a Greek inscription above them reads: THOSE WHO EAT THE BENEDICTIONS (*eulogios*) OF CHRIST. The Eucharist was described by the most ancient ecclesiastical writers with the word *eulogio*, beginning with St. Paul: *calix benedictionis* (1 Corinthians 10.16).

St. Cyril of Alexandria used this vernacular term to indicate the consecrated bread and wine consecrated. The same could be demonstrated in numerous writings of the Greek Fathers.

(6) The Church, in the first nocturn of Matins for the office of St. Joseph, puts in our sight Joseph the son of Jacob, second in Pharaoh's kingdom, who uses his power to give succor to the needs of the Egyptians.

(7) Martigny, speaking about the many Christian monuments with carved or painted deer on the, said that “there is no doubt that the deer has a Eucharistic significance”.

St. Ambrose (*De Virginibus*, book 11), speaking of St. Tecla, said that “she crushed with her feet the ancient serpent and ran like a deer to quench her thirst at the fountain of the Savior”.

(8) See Giovanni Battista de Rossi.

(9) The lion, since Jewish antiquity, has been an emblem of vigilance and strength; Solomon wrought lions for the Temple of the Lord; the arms of his throne were in the form of winged lions and lions stood on its six steps (3 Kings 10.19-20).

Christians, from the time of their most primitive temples, understood this well, and so the lion defends their doors; in some ancient churches of Rome, these have been preserved, as at St. Lawrence outside the Walls, the Twelve Apostles, Ss. John and Paul on the Cælian Hill, St. Sabina on the Aventine Hill, &c. (See Giovanni Giustino Ciampini, *Vetera monimenta in quibus praecipua* 1.2)

The fifth emblem says:

Est leo, sed custos, oculis quia dormit apertis. Templum id circo ponitur ante fores.

The arms of episcopal cathedræ are adorned with winged lions, imitating the throne of Solomon, to indicate that the prelate needs to keep watch with fortitude and vigilance.

The dog is the symbol of vigilance and fidelity, as is seen in a mosaic at St. Mary Major, and on the chair of a statue of St. Hippolytus in the Lateran Museum.

The rooster is the symbol of vigilance and opportunity. Accordingly, St. Eugene, interpreting a passage in Job, *quis dedit gallo intelligencia*, spoke of the intelligence that a preacher must have, seeking opportunities to make heard his voice, in imitation of the rooster. St. Gregory the Great is of the same opinion (*Moralia in Iob*, book 3)

The ram symbolizes the courage to fight the enemy of our salvation. St. Ambrose, in his commentary on Psalm 42, *in te inimicos nostros ventilabimus cornu*, said that we must become rams and reject or destroy our common enemy through the faith and virtue of Jesus Christ, who is represented by the horn spoken of in this psalm. Likewise, rams represent the courage to reject our spiritual enemies in certain baptismal monuments: annular stones, &c.

Thus, the preacher must be strong in his exposition of doctrine; in other words, he must have the strength that learning gives; the courage that virtue gives; the vigilance that fervor gives; and fidelity in the exposition of doctrine.

(10) In pagan antiquity, the griffin represented the wisdom of Apollo. It was the fantastic animal on whose back this god rode to his beloved sanctuary at Delphi, from the Hyperborean islands where he spent his winters. Christians found in the griffin, half eagle and half lion, a symbol of the hypostatic union of Christ.

