

Into the deep

ADULT FAITH FORMATION:
DEEPENING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH & IDENTITY



Chair of Peter by Bernini
Location: St. Peter's Basilica

The Story of a Chair

"Upon this rock I will build my Church..." (MT 16:18)

High above the altar, within the apse of St. Peter's Basilica and beneath the Holy Spirit stained-glass window sits Bernini's *Cathedra Petri* (Chair of Peter). But what one finds on display is not the original chair. Pictured below is the first design which The Catholic Encyclopedia describes in this way:



"...the oldest portion is a perfectly plain oaken armchair with four legs connected by cross bars. The wood is much worm-eaten and pieces have been cut from various spots at different times, evidently for relics. To the right and left of the seat four strong iron rings, intended for carrying-poles, are set into the legs..."¹

During the Middle Ages, this chair was displayed annually for viewing by the faithful as well as used for solemn papal installations. Adjustments to repair as well as decorate the chair were made over the centuries, with the most notable being that currently on display as designed by Italian artist and architect Bernini (1598-1680). Following this redesign, Alexander VII (1655-67) had the chair enclosed above the apsidal altar of St. Peter's in a monumental bronze casing supported by the statues of four Doctors of the Church: two from the West - Ambrose and Augustine - and two from the East - Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom.²

This ancient chair, however, is much more than an exquisitely-detailed physical object designed by an Italian master. In his General Audience of February 2006, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the *spiritual* authority that the chair also represents:

"On it, we give thanks to God for the mission He entrusted to the Apostle Peter and his Successors...The See of Rome, after St. Peter's travels, came to be recognized as the See of the Successor of Peter, and its Bishop's cathedra (chair) represented the mission entrusted to him by Christ to tend his entire flock... Celebrating the "Chair" of Peter...means attributing a strong spiritual significance to it and recognizing it as a privileged sign of the love of God, the eternal Good Shepherd, who wanted to gather His whole Church and lead her on the path of salvation..."³

This spiritual significance is reinforced through the scriptural readings for this day; especially in the Gospel of Matthew:

"When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (MT 16:13-19).

On February 22nd, the Church will celebrate the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter. Currently held by Pope Francis, this holy office has served as a source of authority and unity among the followers of Christ Jesus for over 2,000 years.

1 Waal, A. (1908). Chair of Peter. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved February 4, 2020 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03551e.htm>.

2 Akin, Jimmy. 21 February 2013. "9 things you need to know about the "Chair of St. Peter." *National Catholic Register*. 21 Feb. 2013. From the web. Accessed 27 February 2020.

3 Ibid.

The Reality of Candlemas

"...And the lord whom you seek will come suddenly to his temple; The messenger of the covenant whom you desire - see, he is coming! says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:1)

Amidst the dash to store holiday decorations or predict the outcome of Groundhog Day is the often overlooked sacred day that for many marks the official end to the Christmas season: the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, or *Candlemas*, on February 2nd. The story of salvation that came to fruition in the Annunciation and the Nativity now begins to grow with the Presentation in the Temple. The words of the prophet Malachi are fulfilled when Joseph and Mary present their child Jesus to Simeon, for in that moment God entered his Temple. And having waited their entire lives for the coming Messiah, Simeon and Anna now "see the light":

"...and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce..." (LK 2:34-35)

St. Pope John Paul II wrote that Mary heard in Simeon's words a message likened to a second Annunciation for "they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow."¹ While his words affirm Mary's faith in God's promises, they also convey that suffering is to be endured. Indeed, *Candlemas* celebrates the coming of the Light of the World but it is also a moment in salvation history when things begin to "get real."

¹ REDEMPTORIS MATER, John Paul II. 25 March 1987.



Women's Lenten Morning Retreat

Saturday, Feb. 29th, 8:30am – Noon, in Parish Center Main Level
with **Melanie Rigney**, author and Catholic speaker

Join us for a new women's half-day Lenten retreat at Blessed Sacrament parish with author and Catholic speaker, **Melanie Rigney**. Ms. Rigney has resided in Arlington, VA since 2004 and has written numerous faith-based books. She will give two talks based on 21st century women saints and will lead us in reflective discussions designed to help us enter more fully into the Lenten season. This retreat desires to give all women, regardless of age or economic circumstance, an opportunity to participate in a Lenten retreat experience. The event is FREE and a continental breakfast will be provided; however a goodwill offering will be collected at the event. To properly plan for breakfast, **advance registration is required**.

Register online at www.blessedsacramentdc.org/adult-faith-formation. Registration forms may also be found in the Church. Questions? Phone: (202) 449-3974 or email: TFlippo@blessedsacramentdc.org. Thank you for joining us!

Catechesis of Sacred Art

“The Sistine Chapel is a work of evangelization and catechesis of God's mercy.” Pope Francis

Did you know that the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) addresses the sacred arts? Article 8: The Eighth Commandment, Section VI: “Truth, Beauty and Sacred Art” is little known but of prime importance in faith formation. The last four popes emphasized the sacred arts throughout their papacy. For example, Pope Paul VI closed the Second Vatican Council with an address specifically to artists. John Paul II was a poet and actor involved in theatre before entering the priesthood. When introducing the new Compendium (of the Catechism), Benedict XVI pointed to the catechetical significance of sacred art saying, “*Sacred images proclaim the same Gospel message that the Sacred Scriptures transmit through words and they help reawaken and nourish the faith of believers.*”¹ Pope Francis firmly believes that sacred art can play a role in evangelization, social change and spiritual transformation. Thus, in anticipation of the upcoming **Sacred Arts Forum** starting **February 4th** (see far right), excerpts from the CCC on the Sacred Arts follow.

2500 The practice of goodness is accompanied by spontaneous spiritual joy and moral beauty. Likewise, truth carries with it the joy and splendor of spiritual beauty. Truth is beautiful in itself. Truth in words, the rational expression of the

knowledge of created and uncreated reality, is necessary to man, who is endowed with intellect. But truth can also find other complementary forms of human expression, above all, when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God. Even before revealing himself to man in words of truth, God reveals himself to him through the universal language of creation... “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of the Creator,” “for the author of beauty created them.”²

2501 Created “in the image of God,” man also expresses the truth of his relationship with God the Creator by the beauty of his artistic works. Indeed, art is a distinctively human form of expression ... art is a freely given superabundance of the human being's inner riches. Arising from talent given by the Creator and from man's own effort, art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill, to give form to the truth of reality in a language accessible to sight or hearing... art bears a certain likeness to God's activity in what he has created...²

2502 ...Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier.²

1 PRESENTATION OF THE COMPENDIUM OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI. Tuesday, 28 June 2005.

2 Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Ed. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Upcoming Adult Faith Events

Sacred Arts Forum Tuesdays, February 2020

6:30pm Reception, 7:00pm Presentation
In PC Main Level (except Feb 11, in lower level)

February 4: Sacred Space

Gothic Revival Church Architecture
Speaker: parishioner Milton Grenfell,
Grenfell Architecture

February 11: Sacred Light

The Art of Stained Glass
Speaker: Daniel Wolkoff,
Adams Morgan Stained Glass

February 18: Sacred Story

The Story of God, Nat'l Geographic film
Speaker: Dr. Julio Bermudez, PhD,
Director, Cultural Studies & Sacred
Space, School of Architecture, CUA

February 25: Sacred Presence

Icons and their Spiritual Significance
Speaker: Colette Kalvesmaki, Director
Center for Byzantine Material Arts

Women's Lenten Morning Retreat Saturday, Feb 29th, 8:30am-Noon Parish Center Main Level

Married Couples Lenten Retreat
**Holy Moments in Married Life:
Experiencing Jesus' Resurrection**
Saturday, March 28th, 9:00a-5:00p
Details and registration at:
www.blessedsacramentdc.org/couples-retreat

Ongoing Opportunities for All Adults

Tuesdays

8:45-10:30am Tue Morning Bible Study, PCML
8:45-11:00am Walking w/Purpose, PCLL
7:30-9:30pm Walking w/Purpose, school library

Wednesdays

8:45-11:00am BBB Bible Study, PCML
7:00-9:00pm Wed Evening Bible Stdy, auditorium

Thursdays

8:45-10:30am Thur Morning Study, PCLL
6:30-7:30pm *The Eucharist*, through Feb. 13th.

Saturdays

6:30-8:00am That Man Is You, BSS gym

Lenten Meditations with Fulton Sheen

Small group reflections and faith sharing.
Thursday evenings in March. Watch for details.