The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

Saint Paul the Apostle Catholic Church
Nassau Bay, Texas

Dedicated to the Glory of God by His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
August 29, 2009
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My Dear Friends,

At last, we are here.

For 45 years, our parish family has longed for the day to have a permanent worship space that appropriately reflects who we are, where we are, and why we are here. Through your good gifts and the love of our Heavenly Father — whose generosity can never be outdone — the day we all have waited upon is finally here.

From our parish’s earliest days, our focus has been on building a community of believers whose lives are living stones — testaments to God’s infinite love, mercy and grace. With the dedication of this new church, the desires, sacrifices and labors of these living stones have come together to build a permanent house of worship for generations to come.

So much more than simply a gathering space, this church — built on holy ground — is a sign of the Church on earth. Here, art and architecture have united to do the work of the Holy Spirit by helping us prepare our hearts to receive God’s word and enter more fully into communion with Him. Here, the heavens declare the glory of God.

Welcome home.

Sincerely,

Rev. Alberto A. Maullon, Jr.
Pastor
Hundreds of workers, volunteers, artisans, contractors, donors and craftspeople united to take this community's vision and create a beautiful reality from it, a sign of the living Church on earth. It is built to foster a life of prayer and worship for every person who enters our doors. The following pages lead you through the primary liturgical features crafted into each design element. By understanding them more fully, may your experience and understanding of the sacred be ever increasing.

Upon walking into the new building, you first enter the narthex. This gathering space is as large as it is to reflect our parish’s emphasis on building community. It is a space for welcoming hospitality and is purposely positioned to naturally lead to the baptismal font, just inside the church doors. It is no coincidence that our journey to Christ always begins in the form of an encounter with Him in the person of another. We gather in the narthex to journey with one another toward the sacred.

The position, color and shape of the baptismal font are deeply rooted in sacred theology. It is located just inside the main doors to signify the life of a Christian begins at baptism. The exterior red marble is symbolic of Christ’s Passion and the martyrdom of St. Paul while the black galaxy granite interior brings to mind our need to die to Christ and be cleansed of our sins. The font, designed in the shape of a cross, features a bowl for infant baptisms and also is designed to provide for adult immersion baptisms at the Easter vigil. It sits beneath a domed skylight through which those who are being baptized can see the heavens. The amry, where the sacred chrism oils are kept, sits to one side of the font while the Enthronement of the Word cabinet holding the Book of Gospels is on the other side.
Simply put, the altar is the focal point of the entire church because it is here where the most sacred liturgy is celebrated. A reliquary is embedded in the base of the altar containing the relics of seven saints: St. Paul the Apostle, St. Pio, St. Dominic, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Maria Goretti, St. Louis-Marie de Montfort, and St. Simon Stock. The ambo is the table of the Word from which sacred scriptures are proclaimed. Both the altar and the ambo are similar in design and relationship to reflect the intimate link between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The red marble from which they are carved reminds us of the blood Christ shed for our sins and the martyrdom of our patron, St. Paul the Apostle. The intersecting chains represent the imprisonment of St. Paul and also are reflected in other liturgical pieces.
The Crucifix

The eight-foot, hand-carved corpus vividly depicts Christ’s anguish on the cross. Created in the Italo-Byzantine “Suffering Christ” style of the early 13th Century it is a powerful reminder of our belief that suffering, when united with the passion and death of Christ, leads to redemption. The shadows cast on each side of the crucifix represent the two thieves crucified alongside Christ. It was carved by artisans in the Philippines.
The stained glass mural of the Last Supper is placed behind the altar to serve as a tangible reminder of Jesus’ final hours when he took simple bread and wine and made them His flesh and His blood. With His closest companions at His side, we also are reminded of the importance of sharing in the Liturgy of the Eucharist with our community. We are the Body of Christ united at His table, even with those who have gone before us. The windows are made from Lamberts Antique Glass, which is known for its extraordinary structure and brilliance.

The three-foot tabernacle is cast and chased by hand. Gold-plated and double-doored, it is where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The angels who surround the base of the tabernacle hold the six instruments of Christ’s crucifixion: the whip, the veil that Veronica used to wipe Jesus’ face, the crown of thorns, the cross, the spear and sponge, and a nail. A chalice is carved on each of the tabernacle doors while a Bible and sword representing the life of St. Paul are above the doors. It sits on a throne crafted from the same red marble used throughout the rest of the sanctuary and is placed so it is visible from the main body of the church and the chapel.

The celestial windows depict “The Heavens Declare the Glory of God,” the especially meaningful capital campaign theme given our church’s proximity to the Johnson Space Center. Featured in the windows is a breathtaking likeness of the Orion and Omega/Swan Nebulae taken from the Hubble Telescope — images that, until recently, we could only dream of. The angels in these windows feature amazing detail and represent both genders of different ages and nationalities to remind us of our diversity and that each of us is made in God’s image. The tongues of fire surrounding the Holy Spirit remind us of Confirmation, when we are gifted with a special strength from the Holy Spirit.
Creation Window

The artwork featured in the creation window was inspired by a photograph taken during the Apollo 8 mission, when former parishioner and astronaut William Anders took this picture, the first-ever snapshot of our planet Earth. The particular image used in this window shows our actual home, the Texas Gulf Coast. For these reasons, the creation window is especially meaningful as it enables us to see the heavens in ways that we only dreamed of prior to the inception of the space program. The theme of the capital campaign from Psalm 19, “The Heavens Declare the Glory of God,” is featured in the top right hand corner.
St. Paul Statue and Mural

St. Paul the Apostle is considered the most influential writer of the New Testament and most often is portrayed holding a Bible and a sword to represent both his influence as a writer and the manner in which he was martyred. With this statue, the Bible is opened outward for all to see the Word and his second letter to Timothy is quoted: “This is the Gospel I preach, in preaching it I suffer as a criminal even to the point of being thrown into chains. But there is no chaining the Word of God.” The statue is displayed prominently in its own niche within the church and behind it is a mural portraying his conversion, the route of his final journey to Damascus, and the impact his preaching had on untold numbers of converts to the faith.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

The statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe portrays her just as St. Juan Diego saw her — wrapped in stars and standing on the moon to represent the universe. The patron saint of the Americas, she also is portrayed with an angel at her feet declaring her presence in Heaven with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
St. Joseph

St. Joseph is honored as the beloved spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the foster father of Jesus. Long revered as the patron of workers, St. Joseph was declared patron saint and protector of the universal Church by Pope Pius IX in 1870. In this beautiful image his craft as a carpenter is portrayed with the carved model of the new church he is holding in his hands. As with Our Lady of Guadalupe, the angel at his feet also declares his presence in Heaven.

Chapel Doors

The doors to the two reconciliation chapels feature etched glass pictures of the two most widely known stories of forgiveness in the New Testament — those of the woman at the well and the prodigal son. They serve to remind us of the Father’s forgiveness and our yearning to be free from sin.

Blessed Mother Shrine

As the mother of Jesus, Mary represents for us the ark of the New Covenant. An icon of the Church and disciple of our Lord, she is the patroness of the United States and holds a special place in the hearts of Catholics. In this statue, created by artisans in The Philippines, she gazes down lovingly on her precious child, who is reaching out to us, the people He has been sent to save. We are her children and it is through her son that we become family. The stained glass windows behind her portray the most significant moments in her life, as represented in the mysteries of the Holy Rosary: the annunciation, the birth of Jesus, the wedding at Cana, the death of Jesus and the assumption.

THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD
St. Paul The Apostle Catholic Church was established by Fr. George Beck at the direction of Bishop John Morkovsky on June 20, 1964. The first Catholic church in the area, St. Paul's was built to meet the needs of families moving here to work at the Johnson Space Center and has always had close ties with NASA.

The first parishioners celebrated Sunday Mass in the Webster Intermediate School Auditorium and daily Mass in the rectory garage until a more permanent structure was built. Construction of that building — meant only to be a temporary worship space — began on January 15, 1967.

Fr. Anton Sheltz replaced Fr. Beck as pastor in 1982, and his nurturing spirit helped the faith community continue to grow. Three years later, ground was broken on an 11,000 square foot multi-purpose building.

In 1994, Fr. Dominic Pistone was named pastor, and it was under his direction that the parish began studying the long-range needs of the growing community as it entered the new millennium. More than 30 years after the construction of the temporary church, momentum finally was building to begin plans for a new, permanent worship space.

Before progress could be made, however, another clergy change took place, and Fr. Alberto Maullon, Jr. was named pastor in August 2002. Under his direction a building committee was established and community members shared their ideas for the new church by responding to a parish-wide survey. He and Archbishop Daniel DiNardo broke ground for the new church and administrative wing on September 2, 2007.

Throughout its history, the St. Paul community has grown to include more than 1,900 families. The emphasis which clergy, staff and volunteers have put on creating rich liturgy, broad community outreach and strong catechetical programs for children, teens and adults have helped St. Paul's continue to flourish.

Finally, 45 years after it was first established, St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church has its permanent worship space.
With tremendous gratitude we acknowledge those whose art, craft and skill contributed to the design and building of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church.

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