



Shining Armor

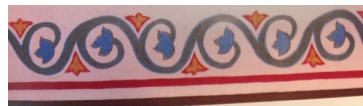
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Did you know?

Brother Knights, are you aware of the symbolism, metaphor, and spiritual significance of the design, architecture, and painting of the interior of Saint Clare Catholic Church? Brother SK Renato Nicolai did extensive research on these features of our church and described his findings in a booklet titled *Welcome to the Spiritual Beauty and Architectural Grandeur of Saint Clare Catholic Church*, which was published in 2017 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our parish. According to brother Renato, it is important to understand the architectural and artistic design of both the interior and exterior of our church building because it will assist us in appreciating both its structural grandeur and spiritual significance. Join me now in exploring his findings.

Did you know that our church was designed in a Spanish Colonial mission style? The interior captures the spirit of Spanish baroque architecture that was popular during the late 17th century and reflects the contribution of native American art as seen in the painted designs on the interior walls, creating the effect of the time when California missions were built.



As you approach the church, notice the peaked roof of the central part of the building, the nave, and the flowing roof-line on both sides of the nave. The distinct design is indicative of Spanish baroque architecture reminiscent of the great churches in Spain, dating to the 16th and 17th centuries.



Notice the cross above the entrance to the building. It is an artistic rendition of a monstrance which was held by Saint Clare as she prayed for deliverance from an army intent upon attacking the city of Assisi, and is a special reminder for us to pray for Saint Clare's intercession as needed in our lives.



As you continue to approach the church, focus on the doors. They were designed for strength and security from solid oak, and are symbolic of heaven itself. Once inside, you feel safe and welcomed.



Once you enter the building, you are inside the narthex, a large inviting room for parishioners to gather before proceeding into the sanctuary of the church.



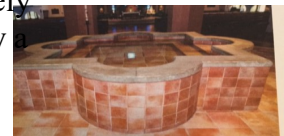
Inside the narthex to the right of the main entrance doors is a recessed space decorated in solemn manner called the catafalque, a temporary resting place for a casket containing the body of a deceased member of the community prior to it being brought into the church for a funeral Mass.



Above the doors leading into the sanctuary of the church, you will see the Holy Bricks from the four Papal Basilicas in Rome: Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Saint Paul Papal Basilica Outside the Walls; Saint John Lateran Basilica; and the papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major.



Entering the church proper through the middle doors, you are immediately aware of the Baptismal and Holy Water Font. This font is surrounded by a colonnade composed of four pillars constructed in the shape of a crown, signifying the Kingdom of God. The Baptismal Font under the crown indicates that those freed from original sin through the Sacrament of Baptism are purified and filled with God's life as members of His church. It contains continuously flowing water, a symbol of the "living water" of divine life received at Baptism. Now look up above the font and you will see a star-studded blue sky. In religious art, this painting of stars on a blue sky symbolically represents a halo of life-giving, spiritual life and purity.



Before leaving the Baptismal and Holy Water Font, notice the ambry, a small niche in one side of the first pillar on the right as you face the altar. The three holy oils used in various liturgies are housed here. They are the oil of Baptism (Birth), Confirmation (Life), and Anointing of the sick (death).



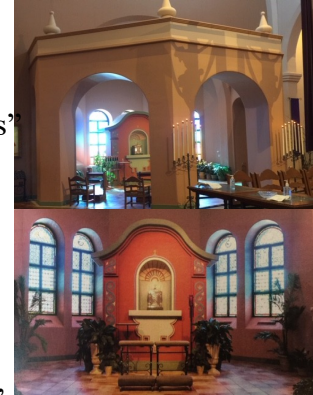
Did you notice after passing the font that the entire floor slopes downward toward the altar and how the pews are arranged in a semicircle? Did you know that parishioners seated in the pews are no more than seventy feet from the altar, and that the altar is slightly elevated near the center of the building, allowing for good visibility for the congregation?



Continuing down the center aisle, you see the stately altar situated on a platform raised three steps above the floor as a sign of honor to the celebrations offered there. In the past, altars were built on high or raised places as a sign of approaching God in Heaven. The altar is the focal point of the church where the faithful celebrate the Mass in thanksgiving for the Father's love and blessings through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. The altar is constructed of solid oak inlaid with granite tiles, a union of two elements of nature, wood and stone, as used in the altars of early patriarchs. The whole structure is in keeping with Spanish Colonial décor.



Behind the altar is the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and Reredos. The chapel is enclosed by the same colonnade structure surrounding the baptistery and is also in the shape of a crown. In this case, the crown signifies that within it is contained the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” under the appearance of consecrated bread, the symbol of the staff of life. The tiled floor and well decorated walls of the chapel supply the proper setting for the richly adorned Reredos, an altar-like assembly near the center of the chapel which houses the tabernacle.



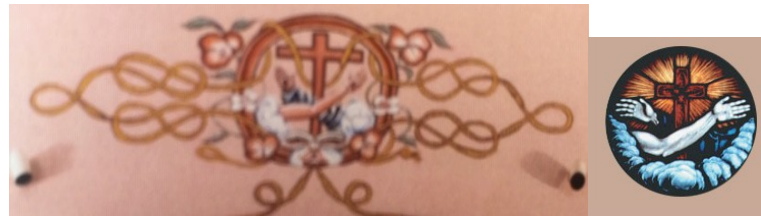
The four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are memorialized on the pillars with an “s” representing the Spanish word for saint (santo), the first letter of each saint’s Spanish name (“M” for Mateo, “M” for Marcos, “L” for Lucas, and “J” for Juan), and the last letter of each saint’s Spanish name (“o”, “s”, “s”, and “n” respectively).



As you stand in front of the altar, let your eyes focus on the exquisite painting of the two hearts on the flat part of the arch above you. This art work is typically Spanish Colonial design and depicts the Sacred Heart of Jesus encircled with a crown of thorns, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary pierced with a sword of sorrow. Jesus’ Heart reminds us of His sacrificial love for us as redeemer. The Immaculate Heart of Mary reminds us of her suffering when she sees Jesus on the cross of crucifixion and represents her love for her divine son. The rope design throughout the painting is representative of the cincture worn around the waist of the Franciscan habit. It is an example of how Spanish Colonial design of the church interior is melded with the Franciscan mission period in California history. The same rope design is also present around the outer edges of the altar, ambo, and most of the wrought iron light fixtures, candle holders, and railings throughout our beautiful church.

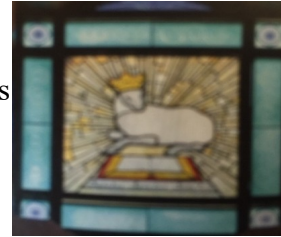


Now, turn around and look at the painting on the flat part of the arch above the Baptismal Font. What you see is a symbolic design of the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. The cincture is again pictured throughout the painting, indicating his devotion to a life of poverty and service. The two arms possess very intense spiritual significance. The arm in the front of the cross is symbolic of Jesus’ arm with the palm of His hand bleeding because of the puncture wounds sustained during the crucifixion. The arm in back of the cross with a Franciscan habit covering it is symbolic of Saint Francis’ arm and shows clearly that his hand is also bleeding with the stigmata, which he exhibited throughout his life as a gift from God.

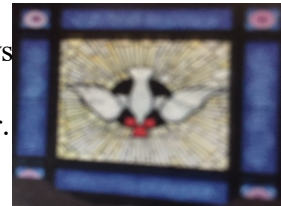


The two arms combined represent the passion of Christ, and the entire painting depicts typical Spanish baroque artistic techniques.

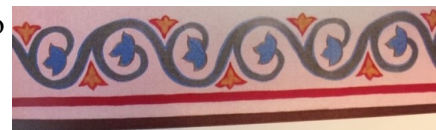
Turn around again and check out the window above the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. This window pictures the lamb of God with a crown on his head, lying next to the open bible. The bible is open to a passage in the Book of Revelations (5:6-13), describing the traditional Passover Lamb that was slaughtered according to mosaic law and offered in the Passover meal.



The window above the painting of the arms of Jesus and Francis portrays the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, descending upon the Apostles at the first Pentecost as He did on Jesus at His Baptism in the Jordan River.



On the walls of the church and both sides of the Reredos, native American painted designs add even more color and decorum to an already beautiful interior.

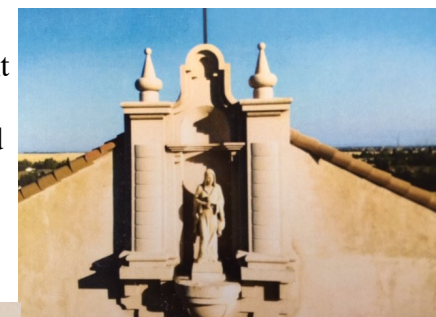


The Stations of the Cross are located in the ambulatory, the aisles along the far wall on both sides of the church. They are rather small as were those of the Spanish Colonial churches and constructed of silver over wood. They memorialize events in the journey Jesus took towards Calvary on the day He died.



The spiritual beauty and architectural grandeur of Saint Clare Catholic church are a unique and complementary melding of Spanish Colonial mission-style art Spanish baroque architecture of the 17th century, and native American California mission art. We should all appreciate and cherish the significance and meaning as well as the symbolism and metaphor of our majestic church as we view its art, architecture, paintings, and structures with informed eyes. As parishioners we are truly blessed with the privilege and opportunity of worshipping in this magnificent building.

Finally, you are encouraged to take a short walk outside of our church and look up just beneath the peak of the façade facing Junction Boulevard and Baseline Road to view a statue of Saint Clare located between two columns. She continues to protect us as we worship in the church named and dedicated to her and her saintly legacy.



What I have written here is a short synopsis of the content of Brother Renato's booklet.

