

East Wall and Altar Rail at St. Francis

Fr. Rogers' influence on St. Francis' parish goes beyond that of a theological and pastoral legacy. His artistry has left its stamp as well. Within this aesthetic heritage are deeply embedded theological truths, such as the design of the nave, which reminds us who we are in relationship to God. Have you noticed that the nave's structure is like an inverted ark? Jesus not only fulfills the old law—he turns it up side down. Christ came to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament but in doing so He gave us a new way of serving God by loving our neighbor. Recall the cave-like nature of the nave intensified by the darkness of the Easter Vigil and you will grasp the depth and finality of the tomb in which our Lord was laid. The Paschal candle brings the Light of Christ into the darkness and spreads it through the congregation before we hear the Old Testament prophecies. It is easy to see that Fr. Rogers intended the materials (rock and gray wood) as well as the proportions of the nave's ceiling to pull us into that setting and raise our sense of awe.

The East Wall with its three triangles provides another example of teaching Christian dogma through visual means. The three segments remind us of the Trinity. God the Son is prominently cast in the middle, yet perfectly balanced by equal panels of rock. Flanking the Son on either side are God the Father and God the Holy Ghost; both are on equal footing with the Second Person of the Trinity.

Furthermore, the two segments of gray rock that reach from floor to ceiling heighten the theological symbolism of the East Wall. In the middle, the blue mosaic triangle reaches down to the altar. This is the backdrop for the Crucifix which is centered in lighter-colored tiles; the white circle radiates warmth and light from the cross reminding us that life has sacrifice and love at its core. The further we go from this central truth, the darker our world becomes. The tiles at the outer edges of the mosaic become a deeper blue, almost black, and so too our lives become dark if we turn our backs on God's light. There is a transitory state—a variety of colors and hues speckled throughout the mosaic which is where most of us live our lives—few of us stay close to our Lord constantly; most of us drift a little further away before we confess, repent, and are restored to His presence. The further we go from God, the darker our world becomes.

And smaller. Step back and look at the proportions of the altar with respect to the East Wall. Our offering to God is so tiny compared to His vast reach toward us. The height of our little nave at St. Francis mimics that of the greatest Gothic cathedrals—man is dwarfed by God and we sense that when we enter this holy space.

Fr. Rogers also wanted the altar rail to teach the Faith. Employing a strong yet open design of wrought iron, he incorporated some of the most basic symbols of Christianity. The gates which are set in the middle of the rail feature a simple

cross. Indeed it is the cross that is the center of our faith. Extending from that central focus, the pattern highlights the Eucharist and God's eternal nature. The chalice and host flank the gate panels because the sacrifice of the Mass is our main act of worship. Then comes an "alpha" and an "omega" in a concentric form; these Greek letters indicate to us that Christ is truly the "beginning" and the "end."

In the next segment, we find four loaves of bread with two fish. Fr. Rogers presents the feeding of the five thousand according to the Gospel of John. There are only four loaves of bread in the design because the fifth loaf is the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. The wrought iron fish represent not only the fish which fed the multitude that day near the Sea of Galilee but also boldly proclaim one of the earliest and most popular symbols of Christianity. Because the first letters of the Greek words for *Jesus Christ Son of God Savior* formed the acrostic "FISH," a fish was a secret sign for believers during the persecutions.

The theme of loaves and fishes, bread and wine, is repeated in the mosaic above the credence table. Fr. Rogers designed and laid the tile in the credence table top. Years later the mosaic was mounted on the wall above the credence table when the original table was replaced by a narrower one. It is a lovely piece of art with such details as deep purple grapes. If you haven't seen it up close, you would do well to spend a quiet moment meditating on its symbolic beauty.

The outer most panel in the altar rail features two more Greek letters. "Chi Rho" came from the first two letters of *Christos*; the Greek word for Christ; Fr. Rogers was always teaching.

The wrought iron sanctuary lamp also warrants our attention. With a very simplistic form (three wings of a bird create a 3-D sculpture) Fr. Rogers designed a *Eucharistic* lamp that evokes the Trinity in general and the Holy Ghost in particular. He intentionally raised it high up suspended by piano wire to increase the illusion of a hovering Holy Ghost, or perhaps it is more accurate to say the lamp shows the reality of the Holy Ghost ever brooding over the Son of Man and our congregation.

All the beautiful metal work in the altar rail and the sanctuary lamp came about because of a connection Fr. Rogers had with the owner of a wrought iron factory. Mr. *Delcambre* shared Padre's *love* of pigeon racing. The two *men* met through a Dallas pigeon racing club and out of their friendship was forged the art here described. Iron is such a fitting medium for our nave—it is enduring; it is both strong and harsh (remember the iron that pierced our Lord's flesh); yet it is malleable when heated and can be forged. So too, can our hearts and wills be molded according to God's purposes when we are on fire for Christ. The symbolism of the wrought iron along with the architecture of the entire nave is nothing short of sacramental in nature. These outward and visible signs of our

Faith reflect the same inward and spiritual truths present at each and every
Mass. *Gloria soli Deo.*