



**Theology of Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel
St. John the Evangelist Catholic Parish
Loveland, Colorado**

The chapel's design follows a system of symbols inspired by the Scriptures as well as by the Church's identity in its world mission. Reading parts of the book of Exodus (below) will enable the adorer to understand the theology underlying the construction of the adoration chapel. The chapel was blessed by Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila, Archbishop of Denver, on December 22, 2013.

INTERIOR

As the adorer enters the foyer of the chapel, to the right stands the holy water font made of copper and engraved with symbols of our faith and our baptism into the death and life of Christ Jesus: water; dove; fish; flames of fire; the cross. One cannot help but meditate on the beautiful etched glass of the door with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the castilian roses surrounding her, representing the seven sacraments instituted by Christ. Above the door and Mary's image is the ocular window representing the descent of the Holy Spirit; the moment of the Incarnation—the Annunciation, the Word made Flesh Who made His dwelling among us [cf. John 1:14]. The chapel opened its doors to the people of God for perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, March 25, 2014. The hovering of the Holy Spirit over Mary at the Annunciation reminds us of our own spiritual life as Christians, especially of our own baptism which is the “entrance door” to the Church as children of God. The Holy Spirit was sent to Mary that she would conceive in her womb the Word of God and so mankind could have access to God in Christ Jesus. Mary's “fiat” or “yes” to God's Spirit has caused many of the Fathers of the Church to consider Mary “as the door” to this reality for all mankind.

For this reason the door to the chapel also has the image of Mary represented in the virgin of Guadalupe as the patroness of all the Americas. Her etched representation on glass leaves several transparent and translucent areas allowing a glimpse of Jesus Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance on the altar of exposition. The faithful have received knowledge of Christ Jesus through Mary and the mystery of the Incarnation. The door's handle is symbolic of the "tree of life" Who is Christ Jesus, for He is the vine and we are the branches. [cf. John 15:5]

The panes of glass on the east wall of the foyer represent the gentle rain descending from heaven; water again is present as a symbol of our baptism. Against this background are series of castillian roses. As one opens the door to the chapel, the tilma worn by St. Juan Diego enveloping Mary is symbolically juxtaposed with the panes of glass. Just as the castillian roses fell from the tilma that Juan Diego carried and presented to the doubting Spanish Archbishop of Mexico City, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, so too, do the castillian roses "*fall from heaven*" to the earth in a flowing motion from right to left.

The Ark of the Covenant is the principle theme of the chapel's interior. Defining the interior as an "ark", the interior space reminds the adorer that in the Old Testament the manna was kept in the Ark of the Covenant together with the tablets of the Law. Now the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ allows the adorer to contemplate the bread of life, the true manna from heaven. This reality makes the adoration chapel in the world a re-presentation of the Ark of the New Covenant. [cf. Exodus 16, 25, 26, 27, 35, 37, 38, and 40]

Upon entering the chapel, not only does the adorer enter a sacred space where one contemplates the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist, the adorer also enters a tabernacle—a most precious and intimate place as it was in its days of Moses when the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the meeting tent and later on in the Temple in Jerusalem for the people of Israel. [cf. Exodus 33, 34:27-35 and 40:34-38]

Faithful to Sacred Scripture in the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the chapel interior uses the prescribed elements of wood and precious metal. The wood creates a sense of warmth throughout, leaving an open strip down the nave recessed in gold. The golden axis traversing the spine of the nave connects the tabernacle with the entrance to the chapel. The symbolism of this golden axis represents the Trinitarian God's refulgence and His eternal presence manifested in the glorified flesh of Jesus housed in the monstrance on the altar.

God the Father is symbolically represented in the tabernacle's golden background running down the corridor to the ocular window symbolizing the descent of the Holy Spirit. This axis is symbolic in two ways: on the one hand it represents God's energy, His light and eternity; on the other hand it unifies the person of the Trinity: Jesus Christ present in the monstrance, God Father symbolically represented in the Tabernacle golden background, and the Holy Spirit represented in the ocular window above the chapel's entrance Marian door.

WINDOWS

The windows in the chapel are derived from other symbolic elements of biblical inspiration. In the Old Testament we read how the prayers of the faithful are as "aromas of soft fragrance that rise up to God's presence". In the New Testament we read how expensive and exquisite ointments (e.g., aromatic nard) were kept in alabaster bottles. One of these ointments was used by the grateful woman breaking her alabaster bottle of perfume to anoint Jesus' feet in Bethany with the exquisite perfume; anointing Jesus' body in preparation for His burial. Continuing on this theme, the chapel windows are made from Spanish alabaster symbolizing the prayers of the faithful going up to heaven as exquisite aromatic perfume for God.

The texture of alabaster is of great beauty and its intrinsic property of translucency makes it especially useful in the construction of chapels, churches and monasteries. The alabaster's translucency diffuses light and softens the interior. The "eternal light" shines through the alabaster so that regardless of the time during daylight hours, rays of light stream through the alabaster in a consistent and harmonious manner. The translucent texture of the alabaster also provides privacy and less distraction whether one is in the interior or exterior of the chapel. This privacy is sought as an aid for prayer and as another clear allegory to Jesus Christ' advice: *"When you pray don't behave as the hypocrite, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father in knows what you need before you ask him. [Mt. 6:5-7]*

THE SHRINE

An essential element of the chapel's interior is the Shrine. The Shrine's composition is very simple: it is formed by a central wall and two inclined side panels covered by two large marble panels forming a triptych. The white color of the marble is an allegory to God's purity and its luminosity makes the Shrine the major focal point of light. The central wall of the Shrine serves as the background for the monstrance. Its golden color and the rugged texture represent fire as a symbol of God Father. No one has seen God the Father, however, the Lord manifested (theophany) His presence to Moses on Mt. Horeb (Sinai) as a burning bramble of non-consuming fire.

The central wall vertically disappears as a sign of union between Heaven and earth—just as it occurs in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass wherein heaven is wedded to earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. The wall is illuminated by an upper "*lucernario*" invisible from the interior. The two side panels of white marble are engraved with two angels guarding the monstrance just as they did in their day guarding the manna in the Ark of the Covenant. The angels, as spiritual beings, blur into the marble so as not to distract the adorer's attention to the Blessed Sacrament reposed in the monstrance. The abbreviations, "IC XC" on the host they are holding are the names for Jesus Christ in both Greek and Slavonic. If you look carefully, when a Byzantine Catholic or Orthodox priest gives a blessing (if they are doing it correctly), with the fingers of the right hand they will form the letters IC XC; therefore, they always bless with the sign of the Cross and in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Tabernacle is a trapezoidal base formed by three large triangular pieces also made from white marble symbolizing the Trinity of the divine persons united in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Upon the center of the Tabernacle is the altar supporting the Eucharistic monstrance. Its two gold pillars symbolize the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Both pillars are made of bronze and are finished with an exterior texture as of tree bark, a metaphor of Jesus Christ as the new tree of Jesse; the tree of eternal life. Jesus said "*I am the vine, you are the branches.*" [John 15:5] This relation of union with Jesus is symbolically shown through a handle placed on the door accessing the chapel. The door's handle in the form of a branch in golden bronze reminds every visitor the need to be one of those branches clung to Jesus Christ as the Vine through which we receive God's life. The monstrance rests upon a tabor. The tabor symbolically represents the mountain on the northeast extremity of the plain of Jezreel where tradition has it that Jesus was transfigured.

The faithful recall the passage from the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus that: “*Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.*” [Mark 9:8] The adorer purposefully finds his or herself gazing straight on with no one but Jesus in adoration.

EXTERIOR

The exterior of the chapel is located on the parish grounds’ quiet and beautiful garden area which in the future promises to become another “Garden of Gethsemane”: a prayer park, where the faithful can gather to recite the Stations of the Cross or sit quietly praying the Rosary, reading Sacred Scripture or simply meditating on the Lord and His goodness. The chapel can be accessed through the southwest doors of the church sanctuary, from St. John’s Hall or from the sanctuary proper. The chapel rises on this garden as a pavilion formed by pillars on each side of its lateral façades. The pavilion evokes the sacredness of the building as this slender sanctuary vertically rises toward the heights of heaven.

The materials used for the chapels’ exterior is of chalky stone in two different finishes: polished pillars in the front and rough texture in other parts of the walls. The contrast in textures gives a special dignity to the beauty of the building. The alabaster windows reinforce the monolithic continuity of the stone as it is also a stone material—rock on which the Church is built upon. The polished pillars represent the seven pillars of Catholic spirituality (daily prayer, confession, holy Mass, the bible, fasting, the holy rosary, and alms). The seven pillars also represent the seven sacraments, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven virtues. The rugged walls remind us that the church builds itself with the contribution of all its members as living stones united to Jesus Christ.

The exterior form of the chapel is rich in other symbols that refer to Sacred Scripture as well as to the Church’s mission; this is the reason why the shape of the chapel’s is like that of a ship. The idea of the chapel as a sailing vessel is enhanced with the pointed form closed with the figure of the patron saint and protector of the parish, Saint John the Evangelist, figurehead of the ship’s prow that navigates on the world with the incarnate Word of Jesus Christ. The frieze along the top of the building picks up that Light with John’s words in his famous gospel prologue; words that refer to the reality that the faithful experience in the interior of the chapel: “*The Word was made flesh and lived among us and we have seen His glory.*” [John 1:14]

Exterior access into the chapel from the chapel's entrance square of pressed and colored cement is formed by a glass façade that separates the chapel from the church whose interior forms a hall or foyer. This access becomes pronounced by the large cross on the glassed background. The glass has engraved passages of the New Testament announcing the road to salvation through Jesus Christ's death on the Cross and His Resurrection [Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 2:5-11] In order to enter the chapel which houses the glorified and risen flesh of the Savior, the faithful must walk under the cross going through the mystery of salvation. For the Christian, there can be no resurrection without the cross. In order to receive the fullness of this mystery, the faithful should stand at a short distance from the etched verses of Sacred Scripture on the glass to contemplate the cross in its totality. It is then when the biblical passages can be clearly read and fully incorporated into one's heart. In this manner, the Word of God and the symbol of the Cross complement each other synthesized into one image of salvation.

As mentioned earlier, the entrance foyer also has a glass façade opposite the chapel's entrance. This glassed entrance is presided by the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In it are engraved a series of roses symbolizing those selected by the Virgin and representing the seven sacraments, virtues, gifts of the Holy Spirit and pillars of the Catholic faith. These roses are a reminder and proof of Mary's desire to build a temple which would expose her glorified Son to the faithful who will come to adore Him. These roses are also proof that the Virgin has shown her desire to have this chapel built in Saint John's Parish.

Another hidden symbol related to the mission of the Church is made apparent with the onset of dusk. The chapel is of perpetual adoration, and that is why its interior is lighted throughout the night. In the darkness, the alabaster projects the interior light over the exterior darkness of the world. The chapel transforms itself in the symbolic lamp illuminating the world's darkness with the great light of Christ Jesus.

In conclusion, it seems fitting to mention the numerological aspects and symbolism used in the construction of the chapel. The chapel has seven pillars and eight windows along the lateral sides of the building. The number seven represents perfection in Sacred Scripture. Following this symbolism the chapel's pillars represent Jesus Christ's perfection as God present in Eucharistic form of the Blessed Sacrament housed in the monstrance inside the chapel. The number eight symbolizes superabundance, and makes clear reference to the Church because it is born of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that has overcome death through His resurrection. This victory over death happened on the eighth day of the week: the beginning of a new creation and that is why the Eucharist is celebrated on Sunday because is the eighth day.

The number eight (being one more than seven) signifies super-abundance; hence it has been associated with the Resurrection; the beginning of a new order; eight were saved after the devastating flood and Noah was the eighth person who stepped out on the new earth; circumcision was to be performed on the eighth day; the first born was to be given to God on the eighth day [cf. Ex 22:29-30]; the great Feast of the Tabernacles lasted eight days; the Transfiguration of Christ took place on the eighth day after the announcement of Christ's sufferings which would take place; the resurrection of the dead is signified by the number eight; there were eight miracles performed by Elijah (sixteen, a double portion given to Elisha); etc.

Through the Eucharist, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is united to Christ Jesus and receives the super-abundance of God's grace. Having received this grace, the Church fulfills its mission of being the light of the world. The number of windows represents the call and mission of the Church to spread the light of Christ throughout each generation.

[Original Spanish by Reverend José María Quera. English translation by Yolanda Noda and Reverend Francisco J. García, March 25, 2014]



Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate; despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

For more information, please visit archden.org or the *Denver Catholic Register* and perform an archive search for the January 8, 2014 issue that features an article on the Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Loveland, Colorado.