Liturgical Moments

St. Joseph Parish

Fall 2024

WEEK 1: October 26/27

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself). Our Liturgical Moments series is returning this fall with four weeks of brief reflections on our faith and our beautiful church building.

As many of you remember, the Liturgical Moments came from a request by our Vision Committee that the parish provide some opportunities for all of us to better understand what we do when we gather for mass. Last year, our fall Liturgical Moments series focused on our church building from the Great Crucifix to the baptismal font and the many visual reminders of the parish's Benedictine heritage. Several people provided feedback after that series asking for more information about the beautiful windows in our church, so they will be our focus this fall.

For over one thousand years, Catholic churches have been adorned with colorful stained-glass windows. Stained glass windows not only flood the worship space with stunning multi-colored light but also help to educate us about our faith. The widespread use of stained-glass windows during the Middle Ages helped the church to teach people what we believe as Catholics at a time when most of the faithful did not know how to read. Even if you could not read the Bible yourself, you could go into a church and learn about Jesus and Mary and Joseph by looking at the pictures in the windows.

Our stained-glass windows were made by Hiemer and Company Stained Glass Studio, a fourth-generation, family business located in Clifton, NJ which is still in business! The style of the windows is called "modern traditional" and the scenes of the life of St. Joseph are traditional liturgical portrayals.

The windows that surround our NAVE – the main part of our church gathering space, tell the story of the life of Saint Joseph as contained in the gospels of the New Testament. His story begins with the front most window on the choir side of the church

and continues in clockwise direction around the nave. We start with an image of Joseph and Mary's betrothal – or marriage, the very first mention of St. Joseph from Matthew's gospel. Next comes Joseph's dream where the angel tells him that Mary's child will be the Savior, then we see their arrival in Bethlehem where there was no room at the inn, followed by a depiction of the birth of Jesus and visit of the Three Kings and finally ending with the flight into Egypt.

Continuing the clockwise movement, we move to the left side of the nave in the rear of the church. The first three windows on the south side of the church portray Joseph as an engaged father during the childhood of Jesus. The second window portrays the "finding in the temple," where Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem explaining scripture to the religious leaders. Next we see Joseph teaching Jesus carpentry, while Mary weaves cloth on a loom to their side. Up until this point, each window has illustrated Scriptural text found in specific lines in either Matthew or Luke's gospels. The window portraying the death of St. Joseph is the only window based on tradition rather than scripture because there is no mention of the death of St. Joseph in the New Testament. And the last window portrays St. Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church, a title he was given by Pope Pius IX in 1870. This window also depicts the first leader or pope of the church, St. Peter, and Pope Paul VI, who was head of the church when our church was built in 1969.

Saint Joseph was proclaimed the Patron or Protector of the Universal Church because he was the one who protected Jesus while he was growing up, as a dutiful father, watching over a child as "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor," as Luke's gospel reads. Note how Joseph is never portrayed in these windows all alone; he is always present as a member of the Holy Family alongside both Mary and Jesus.

Saint Joseph has been honored by many different titles throughout church history, including, Pillar of Families, Hope of the Sick, Patron of the Dying, Head of the Holy Family, and Model of Artisans. There are small stained-glass windows with all of these

titles for St. Joseph in many places in our church building, not just in our worship space. Some places, like the stairs up to the old choir loft are inaccessible, but you can find others more easily. The next time you exit one of the side doors – look for the stained-glass window in honor of St. Joseph and see which title is in the stained glass there!

Thank you for your kind attention.

WEEK 2: November 2/3

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself). Our Liturgical Moments series is returning this fall with four weeks of very brief reflections on our church building and our beautiful stained-glass windows.

Our focus last week was on the windows in the main body of the church, also called the Nave – which portray the life of St. Joseph as recorded in the New Testament, starting with the window closest to the organ and going in clockwise direction around the whole main body of the church. This week, we will focus on images of Mary in our church windows and on some of the other images of the Mother of God found in our church.

First, though, let's talk about Mary, the Mother of Jesus. One criticism of Catholics, by people unfamiliar with Catholicism is that we "worship" Mary but we do not do so. The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes clear that only God can be worshiped. Mary and many saints are, instead, "venerated or honored." When we pray to Mary or a saint, we are seeking their intercession, their prayers for us. In fact, our most common prayer to Mary is the Hail Mary and it clearly states: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

Most of the images of Mary in our church are found in the stained-glass windows of the Nave that portray the life of St. Joseph. In fact, St. Joseph is never portrayed in these windows without Mary. Notice how Mary is portrayed in the stained glass as equal partner to Joseph. In the first window of their betrothal, Mary is as tall as Joseph, and they clearly face each other as equals. In the windows on the other, south side of the church, Mary is portrayed as working alongside St. Joseph and Jesus. While Joseph teaches Jesus carpentry skills, in the third window, Mary is herself engaged in weaving – making cloth – contributing to the family's economy and well-being just as Joseph and Jesus are. Far from passive, Mary is portrayed as active, engaged and productive.

In the great window over the choir loft, Mary is portrayed centrally as Queen of Heaven. You may remember from last fall that all the saints in that window are related to the Benedictines, the religious order that served our parish when this building was built. From left to right you will see depictions of Benedictine saints. In the center however are Mary Queen of Heaven and Christ the King (whose celebration comes in just a few weeks). They are the two central figures holding everyone else together. Mary is portrayed there as Queen of Heaven, or in Latin, *Regina Caeli*, a title formally promoted by Pope Pius XII in 1954, but which had been used by the church for Mary since the earliest centuries. As early as the year 431, The Council of Ephesus proclaimed Mary as the Mother of God, in Greek the *Theotokos*, literally God-bearer. Since that time, devotion to Mary has been a mark of Catholic spirituality.

Catholic devotion to Mary is so intense and personal that many cultures throughout history have envisioned or experienced Mary as one of their own. For example, among the icons of Saints in the Holy Family chapel - to my right - you will see the Virgin of Guadeloupe, and directly across from that you will find a statue of Mary from Fatima, in Portugal. Behind the altar there are icons of Mary and Joseph both completed in the style of Eastern Orthodox iconography.

In our proudly diverse and welcoming parish it makes sense for us to have various images of Mary and Joseph. Our Marian icons reflect some of the many cultures and ethnicities that unite here, in service and love, to form the parish family of St. Joseph's Church.

Thank you for listening.

WEEK 3: Nov. 9/10

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself). If you've been here the past two weeks, you'll know that Liturgical Moments has returned this fall with reflections on the beautiful stained-glass windows in our church.

After exploring the images in the windows depicting the life of St. Joseph in the main worship space of our church building, this week and next we will turn to the two large sets of windows in the TRANSEPTS of the church. We spoke last year about the shape of our church building, being in the form of a cross – also called a CRUCIFORM shape. The long arm runs east/west, and the two shorter arms of the cross shape are called Transepts – the side with the organ is the NORTH Transept, and the one to my right, over the Holy Family Chapel, is called the SOUTH Transept.

Each transept has three large stained-glass windows, similar to a TRYPTIC painting – with a large center piece and two smaller windows that function in relation to the center one. The large window over the organ, in the north Transept, has a quote from the Bible of Jesus saying, "Let the little children come to me." This is from the tenth chapter of the gospel of Mark, which we read as our gospel reading just a few weeks ago. In this chapter from Mark's gospel, Jesus is deeply engaged in his ministry and very busy, answering questions from friends and foes alike, healing people, teaching the disciples. But when people started bringing their children to Jesus, the disciples tried to shoo them away, but Jesus stopped the disciples from doing so by saying, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs." That is precisely the scene in the center window in this north transept.

Actually we have heard many stories from the tenth chapter of Mark's gospel in the past month, from the story of the religious leaders questioning Jesus about divorce, to the story of the rich man wanting to know how to get into heaven, and more recently the story of James and John asking to be on Jesus's right and left hand. Mark, chapter 10, has

many references to Jesus speaking with his disciples, but there are only 3 disciples mentioned by name: Peter, James and John.

If you look at the window on the left of the tryptic, you will see three holy figures – we know they are saints because each of the figures has a halo, also called a NIMBUS, around their head. In fact they are the disciples mentioned by name in Mark's tenth chapter: Peter, James and John. So, the tenth chapter of the gospel of Mark unites these three windows.

The last story told in Mark 10 is a healing story where the man born blind asks Jesus to restore his sight, and Jesus does so, telling him, "your faith has saved you." Although many of you can't see this window from your pews, please come take a look after mass at the third window in this tryptic, on the right of the center window. In this window you will see regular people, two adults and three children, – we know they are not saints because they do not have halos, but all are portrayed as walking upward, toward Jesus. You should also note that two of the five people portrayed in the stained-glass are people using crutches, so people with disabilities. Like the man born blind at the end of Mark's tenth chapter, all of these people, including those with disabilities, feel welcomed to approach Jesus.

So, if you have ever looked at the three stained glass windows over the organ and wondered how they are related, now you know. All three are rooted in chapter 10 of the Gospel of Mark. And the largest, the center window, is especially appropriate for our parish community where children are always welcomed and cherished.

Thank you for your attention this week.

WEEK 4: Nov. 16/17

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself). This fall, our Liturgical Moments have focused on our beautiful stained-glass windows, and today, our last week, we will take a closer look at the window to my right, over the Holy Family chapel in the south Transept. (5:00 mass only – I am so sad to have to read this in the dark when you can't really see the window, but I want to remind you that the church is open every day, and I encourage you to drop by during the daylight and look at our windows.) There is a lot going on in these windows, so I want to remind you that you can read all of these Liturgical Moments on the parish website – just look for the link on the home page that reads: MEDIA RESOURCES, and you will find them.

This three-paneled set of windows, again, called a Tryptic, has at its center an image of the Second Coming of Christ. This window is a reference to a core tenet of our faith that we say at mass each week when we recite the Nicene Creed. We profess our belief that Christ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end." But we have to turn to the Bible to flesh out that faith claim, and in this window we will find many different references to scripture.

The scripture cited in the center window is chapter 25, verse 31 from the Gospel of Matthew which begins, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory." In this image you will see that Jesus is seated on a throne, wearing a crown, and holding a scepter in his right hand, and an orb and cross, called a globus crucifor in Latin, in his left hand. All of these symbols point to the authority of Christ over heaven and earth. These symbols underscore the image of Christ the King, whose feast we will celebrate next week.

On either side of Christ, we can see images of two Greek letters, the ALPHA and the OMEGA, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They reference a line from the Book of Revelation, where Jesus says of himself, "I am the Alpha and the

Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." The angels on the sides of the main panel have trumpets, referring to St. Paul's description of the Second Coming of Christ from his first letter to the Corinthians where he tells us that "the trumpets shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." (We're close enough to Halloween that it might be important to stress that St. Paul is NOT talking about Zombies here, but rather, transformed human beings alive forever in union with Christ.)

The rainbow under the throne represents God's promise to Noah that never again would God allow the earth to be destroyed by flood, as well as to the unity in diversity of all living things.

Given the range of scriptural references in this window it should come as no surprise that at the bottom of the window we can see the icons used to represent the four writers of the Gospels. You can see an image of a man that represents St. Matthew, a lion for St. Mark, an ox for St. Luke and an eagle for St. John.

If the center image of the Second Coming of Christ can be understood to show us our future, in fact, the future of all creation in union with Christ, then the side panels might be best understood as explaining on the left, our past, and on the right, our present.

On the left of the Christ image, we see several patriarchs from the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament. The first image is of Abraham with Isaac. Abraham holds a position of unique importance to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike; in fact, all three of these monotheistic faiths are often referred to as the Abrahamic traditions. Next we see King David who is pictured with his harp because King David was a musician and many of the Psalms – which are sung prayers – are traditionally attributed to King David. The third panel has Moses pictured with the burning bush in front and holding the tablet with the Ten Commandments. Taken together, these three panels remind us that Christianity is indeed rooted in the beliefs and practice of our Jewish forebearers in faith.

In the panels on the right of the main image, we see three saints, who symbolize our present and tell us how to prepare ourselves for Christ's return in glory. The first is St. Paul, and the phrase "Spiritus gladius" is in the foreground on the window referencing a line from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which reads, "The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God." So the Word of God is crucial for us as we prepare for Christ's Second Coming.

The next Saint is labeled St. Gertrude, and while historically there were three notable Gertrude's – all Benedictines in fact – this is most likely the image of St. Gertrude of Hackeborn because she holds a Bishop's staff or CROZIER, which is a symbol of ecclesiastical authority. Gertrude of Hackeborn was a medieval Abbess of a prominent Benedictine monastery in thirteenth century Germany who gained fame by bringing together many varied strains of Christian spirituality, including asceticism and mysticism and the study of sacred texts. St. Gertrude's' window reminds us of the importance of spiritual and devotional practices as another way we prepare ourselves for the Second Coming of Christ.

In the third panel you will see Saint Pope Pius the tenth. Pius is pictured here with a chalice and a host because he is sometimes called "the pope of the Eucharist." He called for frequent reception of the Eucharist which he said was "the shortest and safest way to get to heaven." He also deeply loved children, and as bishop carried candies in his pockets to give to any children he encountered. He issued the decree lowering the age of First Eucharist from age twelve to seven, believing it not fair to keep the great gift of the Eucharist from the children that Jesus – and he – loved so very much.

So these three panels on the right point to how we are to prepare ourselves in the present for the Second Coming. We prepare by grounding ourselves in the scriptures, engaging in the spiritual practices of our faith, and through frequent reception of the Eucharist, which as Pope Francis has said, provides for us "a foretaste of heaven."

Taken all together, this Tryptic tells us – on the left our past, on the right, our present and in the middle the future – the Second Coming of Christ, that we are all preparing for.

Thank you for your kind attention during our Liturgical Moments. If you have topics you would like to see addressed, especially if you have any questions about the Mass or about Lent - when the Liturgical Moments will return – please let us know by filling out one of the FEEDBACK forms in the back of church.

Thank you!