

A PRESENTATION ON SIGNS AND SYMBOLS IN OUR CHURCHES (A LENTEN TALK

@ ST. MARY'S, DURAND ON 03/24/2021)

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church as a faith-based institution has the duty and the responsibility to ensure that all the faithful achieve the goal of salvation and eternal life after our pilgrimage here on earth. The Church communicates and nourishes the deposit of faith through many means and one of such is the use of SIGNS AND SYMBOLS.

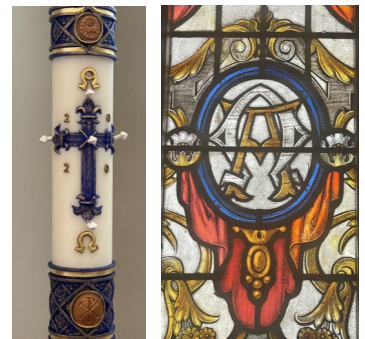
Every sign and symbol we see in our various churches carry messages, point to a mystery, and have meaning making us grow in our faith and relationship with God and the Church. Many of these were used during the heat of the persecution era. Early Christians or Catholics used them for identification with what the Church stood for.

In this presentation I attempt to lead you to pay attention to the signs and symbols you see in our churches, worship and religious practices; to know their significance and meaning in our faith; to solicit your reverence. From the stain glasses in our churches, the decorations or paintings in our churches, to our gestures and postures whenever we assemble to pray together, we experience images, pictures and languages that convey our beliefs and faith ideas. Below are brief explanations of such signs and symbols in our Churches:



1. ALPHA AND OMEGA

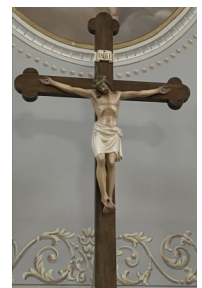
Stands for the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabets. This is used to represent that God is the first and the last; the beginning and the end; He is eternal and infinite; No source. The eternal nature of God the Father and Jesus Christ; the everlasting Kingdom. Read Revelation 22:13.



2. CRUCIFIX

This is a **CROSS** with the **CORPUS** (Body of Christ) on it. A symbol of sacrifice, atonement, redemption and resurrection. It recalls Jesus Christ's passion and death. It is a distinct emblem of the Catholic Church.

Every Catholic is encouraged to have one in their homes, etc. During the time of swearing of oath Catholics use the Crucifix. It is a weapon for protection against Satan and other evil spirits. Read 1Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:4, Hebrew 12:2, Galatians 2:20, etc.



3. CROSS



A universal symbol for Christian religion; a reminder of Jesus' death and resurrection. There are different types of the Cross. As a sign, it recalls Christ Himself and our faith as Christians.

Making the sign of the cross is an expression of an act of faith; a prayer; a dedication; or a benediction. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18, Luke 14:27, Matthew 16:24, Galatians 6:14, Act 5:30, Matthew 28:19.



4. FLEUR-DE-LIS

An age-old symbol for Lilly flower, used to represent the resurrection. It stands for royalty and divinity. Its three petals bound together at the base represent the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. The whiteness and purity are used to represent Mary, Mother of Jesus.



5. FISH

Used as a sign of the Christian faith for the early Christians during the persecution era. The Greek word for fish is "ICHTHUS"; used by the Christians as an acronym to point to Jesus Christ.

<i>I</i> esus	<i>J</i> ESUS
<i>C</i> hristos	<i>C</i> HRIST
<i>T</i> Heou	<i>O</i> F <i>G</i> OD
<i>U</i> ios	<i>S</i> ON
<i>S</i> oter	<i>S</i> AVIOR



So, the sign fish would represent, "**JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, SAVIOR.**" It reminded them about the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes and how Jesus called His disciples to be "fishers of men." Also, used as a symbol of Baptism. An attribute to St. Peter and St. Anthony of Padua. Read Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:16, Matthew 4:19

6. INRI

Latin sign inscriptions hung over Jesus when he was crucified. These represents the Latin phrase:

<i>I</i> esus	<i>J</i> ESUS
<i>N</i> azareus	<i>T</i> HE <i>N</i> AZARENE
<i>R</i> ex	<i>K</i> ING
<i>I</i> udaeorum	<i>O</i> F <i>T</i> HE <i>J</i> EWS



Pontius Pilate nailed this notice over Jesus as he lay down on the cross. Originally, it was written in the Hebrew (Aramaic) language. Read John 19:19-22.

7. XP (CHI-RHO)

These letters are written overlayed on top of each other. They are the first two Greek letters found in the Greek word "CHRISTOS", meaning CHRIST. It is the oldest of the Christograms (signs used to represent Christ). It was used by Emperor Constantine I in 312 A.D to represent "CHRIST CONQUERS" in his battles and wars.





8. IHS

First three letters for the Greek spelling of “IHSUS”, JESUS. These are sometimes written overlayed on top of each other. Also, used as an acronym for the Latin expression, “Iesus Hominum Salvator,” meaning, “Jesus Savior of Men.”



9. DOVE & OLIVE BRANCH

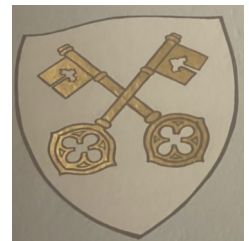
These are symbols and signs of peace or victory. The Dove with the olive branch on the peak portrays the act of baptism. In the New Testament it is used to represent the Holy Spirit.

Read Luke 3:22 (Holy Spirit), Matthew 3:16 (Baptism of Jesus), Genesis 8:6-12 (Noah’s Ark). It also symbolizes God’s grace. Seven doves are used to represent the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit.



10. CROSSED KEYS

A pair of keys that overlap and interlock, creating “X.” It represents the metaphorical keys that Jesus Christ promised to St. Peter, empowering him to take to lead the Church. It symbolizes the Papal authority. Read Matthew 16:19.



11. LAMB

Used to describe Christ, the Lamb of God (In Latin: “Agnus Dei”). The whiteness of the Lamb signifies innocence and purity. Also, associated with sacrifice. Christ, a sacrificial Lamb, died for our sins. It symbolizes subservience to God, the Father.

When portrayed with a flag, it is symbolic of Christ’s victory/triumph over death in His resurrection. When seated on a book with seven seals, it represents the final judgement when Christ returns in glory. Read John 1:29, John 1:35-36, Revelation 5:6-14 and Isaiah 53:7.



12. CROWN AND SCEPTER

They both symbolize royalty, power, sovereignty. Kings use them as an authority of their positions. Used to represent the Kingship of Jesus Christ. The crown symbolizes the thorn used to crown Him. Read Hebrew 1:8, Psalm 45:6, Matthew 27:29

13. ANCHOR

It is used to represent Christ as a symbol of Hope and Safety, as Christ is the unfailing hope of all who believe in Him. It recalls strength and security. It also symbolizes that one is dedicated or anchored in relation to God, steadfastness. Read Hebrew 6:19-20.





14. STAR

Five-pointed star represents the five wounds of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Used to symbolize protection; distance Divine force or energy; something good and positive.

Symbolically, it is used to represent Jesus Christ as the light that shines in the darkness. It embodies spiritual revelation. A symbol of truth, spirit and hope. Read John 1:9 John 8:12, John 12:46, Matthew 5:16, Job 38:7, Matthew 2:2, Philippians 2:15.

15. ALL-SEEING EYE IN A TRIANGLE

This represents the all-seeing eye of the Omnipotent God, who sees all things irrespective of the direction simultaneously. Also known as the “Eye of Providence.” It is divine watchfulness of the Supreme Being taking care of the entire universe.

The triangle symbolizes the Holy Trinity. The single eye in the triangle is surrounded by clouds or burst of light; a symbolism of Omniscience and Omnipresence of one God and His powerful, preserving and guarding character. Read Psalm 33:18.



16. PELICAN

The symbol of mother pelican feeding her little baby pelicans is used to represent Christ Jesus, our Lord’s sacrifice on the cross, because of His love for all humanity. As a redeemer who gave up His life for our redemption and the atonement He made through His passion and death.

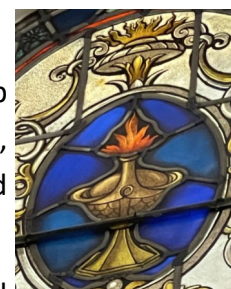
It also symbolizes Jesus feeding us with His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist to save us from spiritual starvation and give us new life. It is a symbol of charity, referred to as, “Christ Our Pelican.” Read Psalm 101:7, Zephaniah 2:14, Psalm 102:6.



17. FIRE

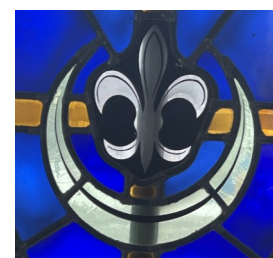
It signifies the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit’s action. It burns up impurities and produces purity. It symbolizes passion, rebirth, resurrection, eternity, hope, purification, etc. It is a sign of the guiding presence of God amongst His people.

A Theophanic symbol of God’s power, holiness and protection over His people. Read Numbers 11:1, Psalm 89:46, Revelation,1:14, Deuteronomy 5:24, Matthew 3:11-12, Act 2:3-4.



18. CRESCENT MOON

The Luna or half-moon or sickle of the moon is a sign of birth cycles and fertility, related to life and death. In the 15th century it is used as symbol to represent Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception. Read Revelation 12:1





19. STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Also, known as “WAY OF THE CROSS” is a series of 14 pictures or carvings portraying events in the Passion and Death of Christ. This begins from His condemnation by Pontius Pilate to His entombment.

The images are usually mounted on the side walls of the church or chapels. They can also be found erected in places like the cemeteries, corridors of hospitals, religious houses or mountainsides. It is a devotional practice of meditating on the Passion of Christ.



This depicts the “VIA DELOROSA”, the actual events and route in Jerusalem, from Pilate’s house to Calvary. This practice takes place during Lent (particularly on Fridays because of Good Friday).



20. CIRCLE

The use of circle or ring represents eternity and never-ending existence of God. It symbolizes Heaven due to its perfect symmetry and its unvarying balance. It suggests the everlasting and the perfection of God. It is a sign of Divinity. Read Isaiah 40:22, Proverbs 8:27, Joshua 6:11.

21. ANGELS

Used to signify the presence of God. Their presence symbolizes devotion, hope, trust, faith and love. Through them humans get to know God; a heart that believes in God. They are benevolent celestial intermediaries between God (Heaven) and humanity.

They are servants of God, and protectors and guides for humans. According to Catholic traditions there are 9 angels within three major groups known as Choirs.

In the order of hierarchy, they include: Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominions/Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim. Read Luke 15:10, Hebrew 1:14, Colossians 1:16, Revelation 4:8, Matthew 22:30.



22. EAGLE

This symbolism is derived from the belief that the bird was capable of staring into the sun and that Christians were similarly able to gaze unflinchingly at the revelation of the Divine Word.



It represents the Resurrection of Christ, because the sight of an eagle rising in flight is a powerful one. It is used as a symbol of strength, freedom, immortality, honesty, power, majesty, truth, wisdom and courage.

It is also used to represent the new life begun at the baptismal font and the Christian soul strengthened by grace. It again symbolizes those who are just; or stands for the virtues of courage, faith, and contemplation.

It is an attribute of St. John the Evangelist, in his gospel soared upwards in his contemplation of the Divine nature of the Savior. The eagle became the inspiration of the Gospels, (Eagle lectern). Read Ezekiel 1:5,10, Exodus 19:4, Isaiah 40:31, Obadiah 1:4, revelation 12:14, Psalm 103:2-5.



23. LION

A symbol of Kingly power and might representing majesty, strength, courage, justice and might. Used to represent Jesus Christ our LORD of life and the victory of the resurrection.

An attribute of Evangelist St. Mark, because his gospel dwells most fully upon the Resurrection of Christ and proclaims with great emphasis the royal dignity of Christ. Read Ezekiel 1:5,10, Proverbs 30:29-30, Proverbs 28:1, Revelation 5:5-6.



24. OX

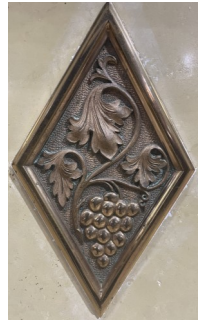
Used as the symbol of Christ, the true sacrifice. It represents those who bear their yoke while laboring in silence for the good of others. Used together with the Ass, they symbolize the Nativity.

It is a sign of patience, strength, service, endurance, and sacrifice. The winged ox is an attribute of St. Luke because of his emphasis upon the sacrificial aspects of our Lord's atonement as well as upon the Divine priesthood. Read Ezekiel 1:5,10, Proverbs 15:17, Luke 14:5, 1Timothy 5:18.

25. GRAPEVINE

Used to represent the faith required to expand and prosper. The vine portrays the Israelites that is lovingly tended by God, the vinedresser and produces a bountiful crop. It symbolizes God's providential care and steadfast love toward His people. Jesus as the true vine invites us to stay connected to Him by faith.

A deep and growing relationship with Him will result in peace in all circumstances, hope in trials, strength in adversity, and joy that cannot be taken from you. It is used as a symbol of Christ and His Body. It is a sign of blessing, strength, determination, endurance, survival and progress. Read John 15:5.



CONCLUSION

I believe your curiosity about some of these images has been satisfied to a certain level. Due to the meanings assigned to them you are going to see them as sacred and reverent. I hope your faith has been upgraded to a new level. Thanks.