

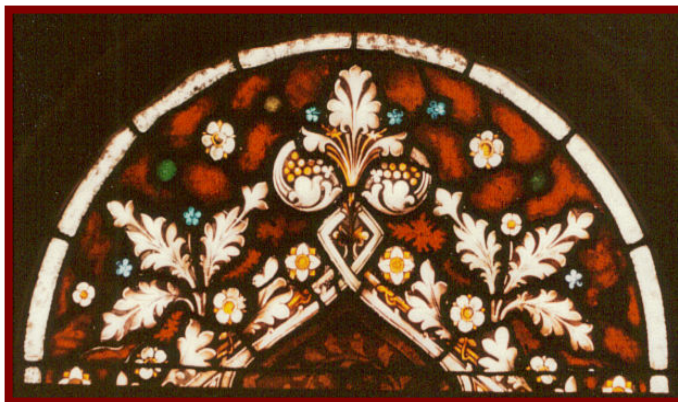
Pictorial Glass, Transparent Stories

A Glimpse through the Colorful Window of History.

Stained glass is an ancient, fascinating and beautiful art, first practiced in ancient times as an attribute of luxurious living. It wasn't for the common citizen. The magnificent tinted glassware of ancient Egypt or the small glass windows of Rome didn't show up in the average person's environment, but in palaces, tombs and homes of the rich. However, when Constantine, in 313 A.D., first allowed Christians to worship openly, the newly freed group began to build churches, and the wonder of glass in splendid color began to be used for the community, where anyone could experience its delights.

At first, the glass was not pictorial but shapes and bands of magnificent color infusing the light that streamed through it with ethereal, seemingly supernatural beauty. It was in the arrival of Gothic architecture in the 13th century, presenting walls pierced with immense window spaces, that stained glass became the amazing art that we associate with the term. By the 15th century the windows had become less an atmosphere of mysterious, brilliant colored light and more of a picture and, by the 16th, colored glass was more universally used (again the rich had a head start) for private chapels and display. Before the general public could read, the windows taught those who contemplated them the stories of Scripture, the history of the saints and heroes of faith, and the lessons taught by chivalry.

During the Renaissance the windows began to be painted, and the translucent beauty of the glass lost out in favor to plain white glass heavily painted. Gradually the techniques of mixing the basic materials of glass to produce the splendid colors of antiquity were lost and, for 300 years, painting glass panels in the style of the canvas, wood and the norm. It was 1800s, when rediscovered techniques that glass such as Louis Comfort Tiffany arose to that possessed a wide range of visual effects without painting. Once again the original glowing radiance and vibrancy of stained glass shone out in colored light.



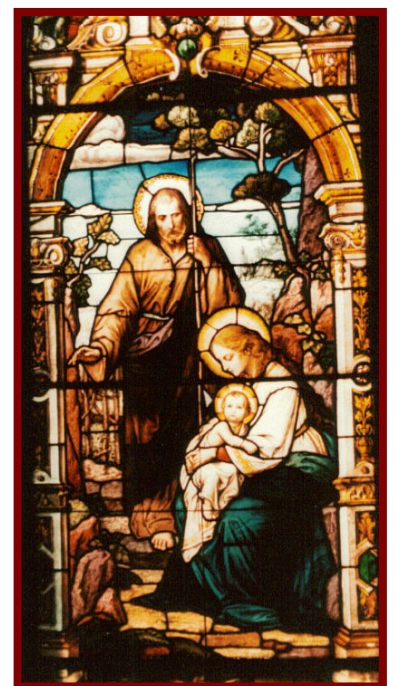


Spirituality shines like the sun

The living quarters of convents and monasteries are generally plain and simple, in keeping with a vow of poverty, but chapels are seen as the jewel of the community, the central pivot of physical space around which the vowed lives of religious men and women are lived. The important events of those lives -- Mass, receptions, professions, renewal of vows, daily communal prayer, funerals and private devotion -- all took place in the chapel. Even today, the best materials and decorative objects used by religious orders are usually in that sacred space. Orders often incorporated stained glass windows into the construction of their house chapels. Those windows portray, with striking color and light, the spiritual values that permeate particular communities. For instance, a religious group with a long and rich history such as the Dominicans or Franciscans, would often have windows of their canonized members adorning the space. Franciscans might also show Scriptural stories that illustrate their great dedication to poverty and charity, while the Dominican windows might reflect their reverence for learning and preaching the Word of God. The spiritual interests and devotions of the Sisters of the Holy Family are also manifested in the subject matter chosen for illustration in the windows of their chapels.

A day to day spirituality of serving in simplicity

When taking stock of the windows chosen to embellish a chapel in homes of Holy Family Sisters, one can easily see the consistency of subject matter. Two images are almost universally present: The Holy Family (Jesus, Mary and Joseph preside in pride of place in the oldest and most recent windows made for the Community), and Christ with children. Other popular images included the Guardian Angel, the Good Shepherd, the Sacred Heart and various scenes from the Rosary. In the Fremont chapel, 15 major windows are devoted to the mysteries of the Rosary. Occasionally particular saints will appear. In the San Francisco windows, three of the feminine saints named in the canon of the Mass appear in



a single window with their symbols of martyrdom -- Agnes, Lucy and Agatha. Another important scene depicted in that original Motherhouse chapel is Christ in the home of Martha and Mary, as well as St. Margaret Mary in the window of the Sacred Heart. St. Elizabeth of Hungary and Teresa of Avila also appear, women saints who were the patrons of the women who are founders of the Community -- Lizzie Armer and Teresa O'Connor. The messages that seem to be proclaimed by the Sisters' holy treasury of stained glass is: As many holy Christian women before you have done, live your vowed lives in imitation of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Contemplate the mysteries of the lives of the Holy Family, and learn from them how to serve and surround your lives with prayer so that you may pursue your duties of every day, especially in your work with children, in simplicity, devotion and love.

The Annunciation: A radiant story for March



The two windows illustrated here were fashioned 43 years apart. The first was created in 1917 for the community in San Jose, CA, the first house established outside the city of San Francisco. The artist of that window is unknown, but painted a charming picture of Mary at the visit of the Angel Gabriel. The angel holds his greeting to Mary (written in the ecclesiastical Latin of the day), "Hail Mary, full of grace." The Holy Spirit hovers above the young woman, a ray of light coming down upon her, representing the conception of Jesus at her brave "Yes." The drape folded back behind the kneeler, at which Mary is praying, tells us that the scene is depicted in a house, and the lilies are a symbol of Mary's purity. The architectural framing of the picture is a copy of the frames that surround each stained glass window in San Francisco.

In the 1917 chapel of San Jose there were four windows. When the community moved to a new residence the old windows were taken along, and a stained glass artist created four companion pieces to accompany the old windows in a new chapel. It gave him time to study the earlier windows as he designed, made and installed his new art works opposite the original four. He liked the composition of the Annunciation window.



In 1960 that same German born artist, Carl Huneke, whose art graces more than 70 churches in California, was commissioned to create the Fremont chapel windows. They were given as a gift by Sr. Casimir Donovan SHF and her family to the community. The novitiate chapel was only two years old when the windows, representations of the mysteries of the Rosary, were installed by Mr. Huneke. He said one day, while looking up at the four windows he had just installed:

"It's too bad that they are going in like this, a little at a time. One should be surrounded by the light and color all at once, from everywhere."

One can see here that the more modern interpretation of the Annunciation is patterned on the San Jose window. The poses of the figures are the same. The symbols are consistent with the San Jose depiction. However, there is less painting on the glass so that the colors appear fresher, clearer; the light that pierces the window throws more vibrant color on the walls and pale carpets of the chapel.

In this month of the Annunciation, it is fitting that we enjoy the beauty of the glass work of two stained glass artists, one known and one anonymous, who understood the meaning of light breathing living color into sacred spaces.

More Holy Family Sisters stained glass windows can be viewed at:

http://holyfamilysisters.org/157/Stained_Glass_Windows.html

Notable stained glass in the Bay Area

St. Peter's Chapel Mare Island. Tiffany windows. www.mareislandhpf.org

<http://www.circlepix.com/tour.htm?id=262821&refurl=>

Remembered Light. Peace Windows Project. The McDonald windows at the Presidio of San Francisco <http://www.interfaith-presidio.org/mcdonald/>

Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, San Francisco. Modern representations of earth, air, fire, and water which unite at the apex of the cathedral in the cross of the resurrection.

<http://www.stmarycathedralsf.org/window-wall.html>

<http://www.stmarycathedralsf.org/>

Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, CA

http://www.gracecathedral.org/church/tour/tour_6.shtml

Stained Glass window repair:

<http://www.gracecathedral.org/church/new/detail.php?eid=230>



Mission Dolores Basilica, San Francisco, CA: Gloria Angels, 21 California Missions.

St. Patrick's Church, San Francisco, CA. The windows represent the patron saints of each county in Ireland.