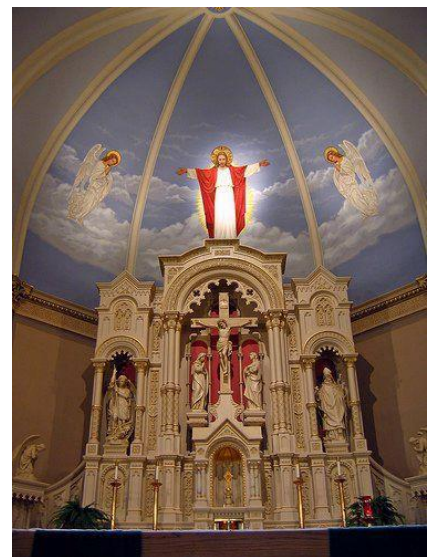
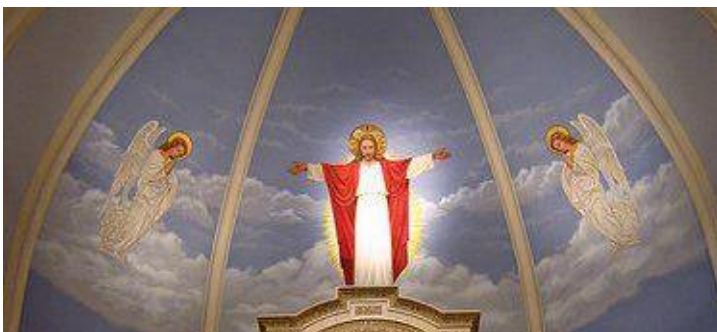


The Sanctuary

The sanctuary or area of religious rites is crowned with a ribbed dome which architects call the aspe. The apse has the shape of a half dome which represents the dome of Heaven. The sanctuary makes the faithful aware of the presence of God in three ways. God's presence in heaven is shown in the mural which spreads across three panels in the apse.



The mural shows Christ ascended among the clouds. He is flanked by two members of the angelic hosts, shown in the flower of youth, for they never grow old.





A figure of Christ, his arms outstretched, stands in the firmament, his gaze is toward earth and his people. He prepares to descend to earth stepping from cloud to cloud. The mural carries the promise of his second coming. Christ is shown with hands extended to embrace his faithful family. His expression is magisterial but kind. It is a representation of sacred art known as Christos Philanthropis, or Christ Lover of Mankind, or those of Slavic heritage would say, Kristos Chelovikoljubets. God wants to make himself present to man. “He found Jacob in a desert land and in the howling waste of the wilderness. He encircled him. He cared for him. He kept him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up his nest, that flutters over his young, spreading out his wings, catching him, bearing them on his pinions (Deuteronomy 32:10-11).



At the very top of the chancel arch is a representation of the Holy Spirit as a dove.

God is present, secondly in the Eucharist. He is present at the altar in the celebration of the Eucharist. The altar around which the Church is gathered represents two aspects of the same mystery: the altar of the sacrifice and the table of the Lord. This is all the more so since the Christian altar is the symbol of Christ himself, the risen Christ who broke bread with his disciples after the Resurrection (Luke 24:13-35). The altar, at the same time, is the altar of sacrifice and the table of the Lord. The Christian altar is the symbol of Christ himself, present in the midst of the assembly of His faithful, both as the victim offered for our reconciliation and as food from heaven who is giving Himself to us (Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1383).



At St. Michael's this altar is made of wood and supported by carved wooden columns. The lower section was in fact part of an original communion rail which separated the sanctuary from the pews. Leo Klava, one of St. Michael's parishioners, constructed the altar. St. Michael's altar of sacrifice has, therefore always had a Eucharistic function – even before the Vatican II reforms which recommended that the altar face the congregation, allowing everyone to more fully participate in the Eucharistic celebrations. In the restoration project of 1984, the altar was enhanced with gold leaf ornamentation. The trend has sometimes been to make altars of sacrifice rather simple and spare. But the liturgist, Louis Bouyer, has noted, “But it can never mean that of all things in the church, the altar could ever be something less worthy than the furniture we use in our homes. By its situation, its shape, and its proportions, its material and working, the altar should always be the most beautiful object in the church.”

As Bouyer also notes, “The altar is a table but not just any kind of table, just as the Eucharist is a meal but not any kind of meal. It is a festive table and the table of a sacrificial meal.” The altar is not to be a support for any kind of secondary objects except

those necessary for consecration and communion (so it is not to be a table for floral offerings). The candles that are lit for the celebration of the mass are in candlesticks that stand to the side of the altar.

The altar stands in the middle of the sanctuary surrounded by a space that permits the mass to be a gathering of the faithful at the Table of the Lord. A part of the congregation gathers with the celebrant to partake of this holy meal. At communion the celebrant is surrounded by servers and Eucharistic ministers and the readers and commentators in symbolic commemoration of the institution and celebration of the Eucharist with Christ's apostles (Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1348).

The first Christians venerated the relics of their martyred saints – their tombs, bones and possessions. By the sixth century, the custom became widespread of enclosing these relics in the Christian altar.



The often violent surrender of the saint's life in faith is much like the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ's life for mankind, an act that is present at each Mass. In the center of St. Michael's altar, a place of honor, lies a stone in which a relic of an early-century martyr is enclosed.





The Eucharistic Christ is also present in the tabernacle of reservation. The first “tabernacles” were intended for the reservation of the Eucharist so that it could be brought to the sick, the imprisoned, and those absent outside of Mass. (Many of the early day martyrs received the Eucharist as it was smuggled into their prisons.) As faith in the real presence of Christ in His Eucharist deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord under the Eucharistic species. It is for this reason that the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the blessed sacrament (Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1379).

The tabernacle in St. Michael's was once in the high altar where Mass was celebrated. This high altar, technically called the reredos, rises like a holy mountain in the sanctuary, reminiscent of other holy mounts which have marked salvation history, the Mountain of Sinai, the Mount of Zion, and ultimately, Golgatha in the New Testament. “And in the last days, the mountain of the House of the Lord shall be prepared on top of the mountains and it shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it.” (Isaiah: 2:2).



The altar of reservation is structured around the tabernacle, the glistening brass compartment which contains the blessed sacrament.



The tabernacle has double doors; one set which depicts two angels who stand as guardians. These figures continue a tradition which dates back to Old Testament times when Moses surmounted the Ark of the Covenant with angels with outstretched wings (Exodus 37:6-9).

Fr. William Sherman donated a relic of the True Cross of Jesus to St. Michael's in 2004. The relic is displayed for veneration in an ornate reliquary in the niche above the tabernacle, beneath the Crucifix. Documentation of authenticity is hanging in the "history room" in the church basement.



To the right of the tabernacle is a brass lamp stand containing a candle which is always lit, day and night, when the Eucharist is present.



The origins of the sanctuary lamp go back to the Old Testament, "The fire shall always be burning upon my altar . . . This is the perpetual fire which shall never go out on the altar" (Leviticus 6:9-14); "Speak unto the sons of Aaron that they may offer oil most pure, that the lamp may burn continually in the tabernacle of testimony." (Leviticus, 24:2).