

Saint Agnes Stained-Glass Windows Explained

Designed, crafted, and installed by Conrad Schmitt Studios in New Berlin, Wisconsin

Our Catholic faith has a long tradition of breathtaking churches, fine art, and beautiful stained glass because we are convinced that beauty communicates the goodness of God (beauty evangelizes) and beauty helps us become better people (the transformative power of beauty). We appreciate beauty even more when we understand the meaning behind the signs and symbols that are a part of our Christian tradition. Below is an explanation of the symbols in our windows. *Thank you to all of you who made these windows possible!*

The “Radiant” Alabaster Background: Balancing the goal of mitigating the blinding sun in worshipers’ faces with the desire to have some transparency to continue to allow light into our sanctuary, the stained-glass artists selected a “milky” or “opal” alabaster. Aligning the streaks in each window, the effect “glorifies” the Crucifix with gold-ish extension through the windows. Jesus, speaking about his death in John 12 and after the voice of the Father thunders from heaven, says: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show by what death he was to die” (12:31-33). By the glorious Cross, Jesus vanquishes the evil one; by the glorious Cross, Jesus draws all men and women to himself. Saint Paul says to the Galatians, 6:14: “But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

The Top Medallion of the Dove Descending: In Christian iconography, the dove descending represents the Holy Spirit that “descended like a dove” upon Jesus at His Baptism (Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22). The dove being a peaceful bird also represents the peace and tranquility of the Holy Spirit, as a dove once carried an olive branch to Noah after the great flood. The soft call of the dove reminds us of the tranquility of God; doves also produce their own “milk” to feed their offspring, just as Holy Mother Church nourishes her faithful. One can also recall the connection to St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, wherein the Altar of the Chair has a beautiful window of a dove surrounded by rays of light, constructed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini around 1660.



The Right Medallion of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: *“The Immaculate Heart of Mary is a devotional name used to refer to the interior life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, her joys and sorrows, her virtues and hidden perfections, and, above all, her virginal love for God the Father, her maternal love for her son Jesus, and her compassionate love for all people”* (The Catholic Encyclopedia, 2012). In full-body icons, Mary’s heart is *outside* her body as a sign of her undying love for all people that cannot be contained. As we venerate and honor (NOT worship) the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we pray that our hearts would be more “on fire” with love of God and Jesus as hers was inflamed with “love beyond all telling.” Roses surround her

heart, a symbol of her perfect purity and the Immaculate Conception. A sword pierces her heart, as Simeon prophesied it would in Luke 2:35 during Jesus’ presentation in the Temple (“and a sword will pierce through your own soul also”). At the foot of the cross (John 19), Mary participates in the Crucifixion of Jesus as “co-redemptrix,” but in an un-bloody way as she experiences the sword-like pain of Jesus’ death. Mary, acquainted with sorrows, can comfort us in our sorrows, and her title “Our Lady of Sorrows” dates back to the 13th century. Rays of light also surround this heart, as Mary is the woman in the book of Revelation who is “clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1). Although devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is an ancient custom, it became more prominent through the 17th century and again through the apparitions of Mary in Fatima, Portugal in 1917. The Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the Saturday after the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Both the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary are on the miraculous medal.

The Left Medallion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is one of the most widely known and practiced devotions in the Catholic Church. We even share this devotion with High-Church Anglicans, Lutherans, and Eastern Catholics. The devotion is quite rich in history, dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries, and in 1353 Pope Innocent VI instituted a Mass honoring the mystery of the Sacred Heart. The devotion became especially prominent through St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the 1600's. The heart is crowned with thorns, burns with love, and "out comes blood and water." We venerate the Sacred Heart of Jesus as an image of his love, praying, "*Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine!*" The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart is always 19 days after Pentecost.



Pope Benedict offered the following on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart in 2009, opening the year for priests: "*The heart of God burns with compassion! On today's solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the Church presents us this mystery for our contemplation: the mystery of the heart of a God who feels compassion and who bestows all his love upon humanity. A mysterious love, which in the texts of the New Testament is revealed to us as God's boundless and passionate love for mankind. God does not lose heart in the face of ingratitude or rejection by the people he has chosen; rather, with infinite mercy he sends his only-begotten Son into the world to take upon himself the fate of a shattered love, so that by defeating the power of evil and death he could restore to human beings enslaved by sin their dignity as sons and daughters...*

Together let us pause to contemplate the pierced heart of the Crucified One. Just now we heard once again, in the brief reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, that "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-6). To be "in" Jesus Christ is already to be seated in heaven. The very core of Christianity is expressed in the heart of Jesus; in Christ the revolutionary "newness" of the Gospel is completely revealed and given to us: the Love that saves us and even now makes us live in the eternity of God. As the Evangelist John writes: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). God's heart calls to our hearts, inviting us to come out of ourselves, to forsake our human certainties, to trust in him and, by following his example, to make ourselves a gift of unbounded love."



The Lower Medallion of the Lamb of God: Perhaps the richest symbol of the four windows, the Lamb of God refers not only to Jesus, but to Saint Agnes, whose name is similar to "lamb" in Latin. In the Gospel of John 1:29, John the Baptist proclaims "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!" We recognize this as part of our Catholic Mass! Jesus is also the new Passover Lamb, who gives us His flesh and blood as "true food and true drink" that gives life to the world (John 6). Feasting on the Lamb of God, we pass over to newness of life! The book of Revelation mentions a lion-like lamb 28 times who delivers victory as Jesus Christ does in His Resurrection. The Lamb sits upon a "book" with 7 "clasps" that have

been opened, referring to the vision of Revelation chapter five with the scroll and seven wax seals that have been opened, symbolizing the reality that Christ's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension have opened access to the meaning of ALL the Sacred Scriptures and the mysteries they contain. In heaven, Christ forever appears as a sacrificial "victim" or lamb *for us*, having brought with Him into heaven the scars of His Crucifixion—marks of His love. The lamb holds a "*vexillum*," or a Roman military flag, referring to Jesus' stupendous victory in battle over sin and death. In a wonderful connection, this same image appears on the front of the altar of our Cathedral in Duluth.

Our patroness, Saint Agnes, died a virgin martyr around the year 304 at the age of 12 or 13. She is usually depicted holding a lamb and/or a martyr's palm, since the name Agnes closely resembles the Latin word for lamb, "*agnus*." The name "Agnes" in Latin comes from the Greek "*hagne*," meaning "chaste" or "pure." She was a beautiful young woman of Roman nobility, and was pursued by many suitors. Slighted by her rejections due to her determination to follow Jesus, her name was submitted to the authorities at a time when Christianity was not legal and she was martyred shortly thereafter. Saint Agnes, pray for us!