

— St. Mark's Guide to our Vestibule Artwork —

Catholic vestibules are traditionally decorated to bring those entering to an immediate awareness of the sacredness of the building. Paintings can inspire us, remind us of important scriptures and history, and be a tool for education and evangelization. With art, a picture is worth a thousand words. There is much more story beneath the surface—much symbolism and meaning usually done deliberately and thoughtfully by the artist and/or the Spirit inspiring him/her. Meditating on art can lead us into deeper prayer. This is an overview of each painting's symbols and purpose for being here, and hopefully gives a starting point for each of us to determine what other messages the paintings send.

— Our Lady of Guadalupe —

This is a reproduction of the image the Blessed Mother left on Juan Diego's tilma (cloak) in 1531, Mexico.



Symbols: Black belt = worn by pregnant Aztec women
Sun and moon = that she (**but especially the child she bears**) is greater than the greatest Aztec gods of the moon and sun
Colors of gown = royalty colors in the Aztec culture
Stars on gown = heavenly, or not of this world
Broach = symbol of the flag of Cortez; not that all Spaniards were saints, but they did help bring Christianity to America
Angel = heavenly; Mary is supported by heaven
Words (not in original) = words of Hail Mary in different languages (Spanish, French, German, Italian, Vietnamese, Latin and English);
Mary is mother to the world, to us all, for all times.
Roses on wall = roses play a part in the apparition story, but they are also symbolic of love; people leave roses here to honor Mary.

Purpose: This very familiar image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a sign of welcome to people of all races. Our Blessed Mother greets every person with joy and serves to strengthen the unity of our universal Church.

— Supper at Emmaus —

This reproduction of the Roman artist Caravaggio's 1602 painting portrays Luke 24:13-32, the resurrected Christ meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and their recognizing Him at supper.

People: Jesus in the center (without a beard to suggest His different resurrected appearance), two disciples seated (Cleopas and the other unnamed by Luke), and the inn keeper, standing, who knows nothing about Christ.

Symbols: Seashell = mark of a pilgrim or traveller
Bread and wine = Eucharistic themes; the rest of the feast suggests the heavenly banquet awaiting them
Ornate tablecloth and vessels = everything a little more royal or heavenly than would be expected
Torn sleeve, average-looking disciples = to show us as we are and contrast the heavenly Christ
Direction of shadows = Jesus seems to be a source of light as well as the sun or other source above left



Purpose: Reproductions connect us to the long history and tradition of our Church. This particular painting, with the angles of the lines and action, as well as Jesus's hand extended in welcome, was chosen to draw people into the church where we are invited to be fed. The two disciples recognize Jesus's presence in the breaking/blessing of the bread. If you look through the doors below the mural, you see the altar, where we should recognize the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. How many of us are like the innkeeper... there at Mass, but not really paying attention or realizing the miracle right in front of us?

— The Pentecost —

This reproduction of French artist Jean Restout's 1732 painting tells the story of Acts 2:1-4. Mary and the 11 apostles along with other disciples are in Jerusalem 50 days after Jesus's death, hiding in "the upper room", fearing their own persecution and death. A strong, driving wind comes and then tongues of fire descend upon them, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit and with courage to go out and preach the good news.



Symbols: Tongues of fire = Holy Spirit, heavenly power
Altar = Mary and the disciples offer all that they are to God
Pillars = strength; structure of the Church, which is built on these disciples
People of different races and ages = the people in Restout's original all look caucasian. It's common for artists to show their subjects in their own race (i.e. Japanese Jesuses, Black Madonnas, etc.); the figures in this mural were changed to reflect the diversity of our parish population.
Hands at the far left and right of people otherwise unseen = to represent any one of us
Hidden doves = the shapes of doves in the clouds represent the Holy Spirit
Hidden "ghosts" = there are five different "ghosts" or hidden figures Restout put in the shadows, sky, and stone. Do they represent the presence of past or future members of the Church, or maybe demons/fears/worries that the Holy Spirit empowers us to put down, or something else?
Hidden image on the altar's front = a cross and rays represent Christ as foundation, rock, and sacrifice

Purpose: This painting was chosen for the entrance to the part of the building where ministries take place. The Supper at Emmaus draws us in to be fed; Pentecost sends us out to bring Christ to the world. Jesus offers Himself on the altar in the sanctuary; we should offer ourselves here and everywhere as a loving response to the great love God has shown us. Also, this painting is about community and working TOGETHER to do God's will, just as Mary and the disciples did. When we work together, we can accomplish greater things, as well as help keep each other strong. This is definitely true of our very active and spirit-filled parish.

About the Artist—

Cindi Duft has been a parishioner of St. Mark's most of her life. You can see more of her work and contact her through <http://myweb.cableone.net/cindiduft>.

Watch the St. Mark's August 2008 newsletter for inside information about the painting in the nave of our church!