

## Saint Patrick Church and Gothic Architecture: Part 2 of 3

Greetings Parishioners! If you missed part 1, I encourage you to go on the parish website ([www.CatholicBellefontaine.org](http://www.CatholicBellefontaine.org)) and read that article as well.

Church architecture is meant to reflect our beliefs about the Mass. We believe the Mass is Heaven on earth; it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ interceding on our behalf before His Heavenly Father. Our churches should therefore reflect the beauty of Heaven.

As we discussed last week, high arches (like those in our church) and tall spires are characteristics of Gothic churches. Theologically, these characteristics are meant to elevate our thoughts and hearts upward to God. I've often heard parishioners reflect on powerful experiences when they walk into majestic churches. Beautiful architecture uplifts our souls.

The **sanctuary** (which literally means holy place) is the area of the church where the sacrifice of the Mass is offered. For this reason, it is the most beautifully decorated part of the church. It is usually set apart by being elevated. The beauty of the sanctuary should inspire people to meditate on the beauty and grandeur of God. Catholic Churches often have images of saints and angels in the sanctuary (like our statues of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph) to remind us of the saints and angels in Heaven worshipping Jesus Christ.

We know that Christ's primary concern is for the state of our souls, since we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Some may wonder why the beauty of the church building matters at all. There is some truth to this; beautiful churches cannot substitute for interior conversion. However, God created humans as body and soul. What goes on in our souls is reflected in the material world. For example, if someone is happy, they smile. If we're going to an important event, we dress nicely to reflect an attitude of respect. In the same way, if we believe the church is God's house, we should give our best to God in making His house beautiful. That is why the Catholic Church has always emphasized the importance of beauty, whether in art, architecture, music, vestments, or any other part of the Mass. We should strive to glorify God in our souls and with the works of our hands. Our churches should be as beautiful as we can make them.

When beauty is removed from churches, it can have a very damaging effect on the formation of our youth. If the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist isn't reflected in our churches, it should not be a surprise if our children don't have a strong eucharistic faith. Beautiful architecture alone will not instill faith in our youth, but it is one of many important factors.

Stay tuned for article 3 next week in the bulletin or check it out on the parish website.

In Christ,

Father Shawn Landenwitch