

Theological Explanation of the Mosaic Program
Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 2026

In accord with the long tradition of the Church, iconic sacred images are considered the “gospel for the eyes” because they make visible in matter the otherwise invisible liturgical and spiritual realities which pre-exist us and operate around us. For Sacred Heart Church, an iconographic plan was developed by Heritage Liturgical which combined the theology of Saint John’s vision of heaven in the Book of Revelation with the dedication of the parish to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Accordingly, the theological notion of Christ’s pierced Heart as the gateway of grace between heaven and earth became a central theme connecting the large wall mosaic with those of the baptismal font, ambo, and altars.

The great mosaic on the rear wall shows a red curtain pulled open, revealing that the veil between heaven and earth has been opened through the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Lord reigns in glory in the Heavenly Jerusalem, the biblical name for the walled city in which God, humanity, and creation live in perfect union for eternity. Parapeted walls and gates appear in the background, while trees, flowers, and stars reveal it as the new Garden, welcoming humanity back to a new and better paradise than the original Eden. An American robin, state bird of Wisconsin, appears at the lower left, while an American badger, the state animal, appears in the heavenly paradise.

Christ appears with His Sacred Heart exposed, sitting as King on the heavenly throne in gold-lined priestly garments, surrounded by an almond-shaped mandorla, the indicator of the opening between heaven and earth. Below the waist His body is turned in action, while from the waist up His pose is still and hieratic, signifying His nature as God-Man, both eternal and unchanging in heaven yet active in the world. The Hand of the Father appears above, showing His eternal authority and guiding hand in the world, while the Holy Spirit appears as a dove between the Father and the Son as the Love that binds them together.

Choirs of saints stand as part of the Mystical Body of Christ who praise God in the heavenly liturgy. On the left appears the first Native American saint, Kateri Tekakwitha; missionary and architect Venerable Samuel Mazzuchelli, holding a small model of Saint Augustine’s Church, which he designed for New Diggings, Wisconsin; and Visitation Sister Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, known for her devotion to the Sacred Heart. In the second row stand Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati, known for his devotion to Eucharistic adoration; and early Christian martyr, Saint Agnes, holding a lamb. In the third row appears the Conventual Franciscan and martyr of Auschwitz, Saint Maximilian Kolbe.

On the viewer's right stands the Wisconsin Capuchin friar, Blessed Solanus Casey; Dominican nun and mystic Saint Catherine of Siena; and Saint Francis de Sales, master of spiritual formation and Patron of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The second row shows the first millennial saint, Carlo Acutis, standing next to Saint Benedict, founder of Western monasticism. The third row features Wisconsin native and martyr, Christian Brother, Blessed James Miller.

At Christ's feet appears a miniature version of the golden, jeweled walls of heaven inspired by the mosaics at Rome's Basilica of Saint John Lateran. At the center of the small city a palm tree is topped by a phoenix, the legendary bird which prefigured Christ by dying and rising again in three days. Four rivers flow from the city, recalling the four rivers of Eden, and together, they form the new Jordan River, the other side of which is the promised land of heaven. Deer drink from the rivers, recalling the thirst of humanity for God's grace available in the sacraments, expressed in Psalm 42 by the phrase, "as the deer longs for running streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." A close look reveals several fish swimming in the river, with the one on the left evoking a Musky, the Wisconsin state fish.

Importantly, the water flows out through small arched buildings at the mosaic's lower corners and reappears in the mosaic on the altar of sacrifice. Continuing the notion of Christ's pierced Heart as the source of grace in the Blood and Water which established the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist, the water then flows from of a cross-shaped spout and into a blood-red fountain made of Egyptian porphyry, one of the hardest and most permanent stones on earth. The water then pours out the sides to the desert of the earth to restore it to the garden of eternity. Peacocks represent Christian believers who drink from the fountain of grace, with their usually green tail feathers changed to red to indicate the Presence of Christ's Precious Blood giving them eternal life. Grape vines flow from the fountain to signify the Church as Vine and branches, providing the fruit that allows for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

The mosaic enrichment of the church's other liturgical furnishings continues to follow from the heavenly source of Christ's pierced Heart. Motifs of blood and water appear on the new baptistery as red wave patterns on a blue background, edged in gold. On the vertical elements of the sanctuary rail, small diamond shapes feature a blue background filled with small red circles, a geometric enrichment indicating the continued presence of the Sacred Heart in creation. On the ambo, the jeweled crucifix inspired by early Christian examples appears as the new Tree of Life, surrounded by traditional images of the four evangelists who take the fruit of that Tree and offer it to all of humanity. Lastly, the altar of repose features a mosaic recalling the curtains of the Tabernacle of Moses mentioned in Exodus, where God remained with His chosen people. A white circle recalls God's abiding Presence

of the Old Testament and the continuing Real Presence in the reserved Blessed Sacrament. An anchor-cross refers to Saint Paul's indication of the hope we have in the cross as the "anchor of the soul."

The mosaics of Sacred Heart Church form an integrated liturgical vision combining the centrality of the Holy Trinity, the continuing action of Christ in the world through the Church, the grace available in the sacraments, and the vision of future glory which awaits those who say yes to God's offer of redeeming Love. By their beauty they inspire admiration and foster a spirit of prayer. By their content, they teach worshippers how earthly worship is an inbreaking of heavenly worship in the world to which we join our voices in the Mass. Together, they illustrate the words of twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation, offering a promise which brings hope and consolation for the believer:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

Mosaics designed and produced by Heritage Liturgical, LLC, Enzo Selvaggi, Creative Director; Denis R. McNamara, PhD, Director of Liturgical Design.

Artwork produced by Laura Renzi of Lo Scriptorium.

Mosaic fabrication and installation by Leonarduzzi Mosaic Atelier.

Architectural design by Studio iO.

Text prepared by Denis R. McNamara, PhD.