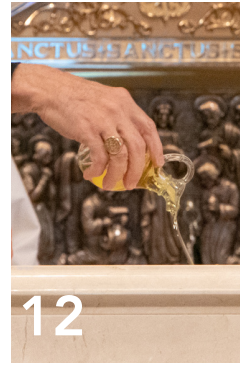




The Connection

JULY 2023 VOLUME I





LISTEN

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Beauty Lifts our Hearts & Minds to God

Fr. Mathias Thelen



Beauty moves us and lifts our hearts and minds to God, the source of beauty. We're made for beauty. But it's easy to see why in a culture that too often reduces the basic needs of the human person to those of the body that our inherent need for beauty—and therefore God—is sometimes obscured and left unfulfilled. As a result of this reductionism, we're left focusing on the immediate gratification of bodily desires and downplaying the deeper needs of the soul. The good news is that the "way of beauty" in Catholic worship has always been an antidote to this impoverished mindset. In fact, the beauty of the liturgy serves as a welcome reminder of the primacy of God, who is the fulfillment of our deepest desires.

We didn't renovate the interior of our church to make it "relevant" or more "appealing" to unbelievers, even though we know full well that authentic beauty is always relevant and appealing. Nor did we do this renovation to simply solve practical problems, even though it did begin with a desire to fix our worn out kneelers and pews. The primary reason why we spent the energy and resources to finish the renovation that began years ago was so that the interior of our church would reflect more appropriately the dignity and holiness of what happens in the church so that we can lift up our hearts and minds in prayer.

As I said in my Holy Thursday homily, we renovated the Church because of the mystery of the Eucharist and what happens during Mass. Mass is where heaven meets earth and we are caught up in God's love in Christ. In Mass we participate and join ourselves to Christ in the perfect worship of God the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit. In the Mass the living God communicates himself to us in his Word and offers himself to us in the Body and Blood of Jesus, who then sends us out to bear witness to his Resurrection.

To this end, our renovation faithfully follows the liturgical vision of the Second Vatican Council which calls for sacred furnishings in church buildings to reflect the splendor of mystery of the Holy Mass.

The art and architecture of church buildings rightly serve as signs and symbols of heavenly realities and a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. Much of the feedback reflects these truths.¹

More than one person has told me that they believe the renovation of the church building is an external manifestation of the inner spiritual renovation happening in the lives of our parishioners, that is that the renovation of the building points to and reflects God's renovation of our hearts. Yes, the interior of the church is beautiful, but we need to remember that Jesus is not ultimately interested in buildings, even if we have a need to make them beautiful for divine worship. Jesus is interested in the resplendent renovation of his Body, the Church, so she can be the beautiful bride in this world and in the world to come.

I'm grateful for so many people who made this project possible, especially all of you who prayed for this project and made generous financial donations. I'm thankful to the Bishop and diocesan liturgical design team who helped make our vision a reality. I'm especially grateful to my staff, especially Ryan Nardozi, who served as the project director, Nancy Coffey and our maintenance staff. Thanks to all of you who served on our renovation design team, our finance council, and the parish council. Your counsel and insights were invaluable in this process. Finally, special thanks goes out to Ben Luther who served so faithfully as our architect and construction manager and who is primarily responsible for the design of what we see now.

As you read this issue of *The Connection*, I pray that you might come to a deeper appreciation for the deal and love that went into this renovation project. Beauty matters and it is my sincere hope that the beautification of our church will assist us all to enter more deeply into the mysteries of Christ in prayer so that we can allow him to renew our own lives by his transforming love. Such renewal will give God more glory than any beautiful church building.

Your servant in the Lord,
Fr. Mathias

¹Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 122-128.

Building a Church: A Journey of Faith and Friendship

AN INTERVIEW
WITH RYAN NARDOZZI
& BEN LUTHER

Embarking on a church renovation project is a monumental task that requires dedication, teamwork, and intentionality. From concept to completion, countless hours ensured a beautiful sanctuary for our parish.

Kevin Bailey sat down with Ben Luther and Ryan Nardozzi, our architect and the Director of Operations and project manager, for the inside scoop.

This project began with a desire to fix the pews, and Fr. Joe offered to do some additional work before he left, and it became so much more than many of us were expecting. What was the best part about this process for you?

Ben: For me, the best part of this entire process has been the relationships formed along the way. Meaningful friendships often arise from working together towards a common purpose. The design and construction process went superb thanks to the people involved. I've worked with many Catholic churches, but the staff and the culture at St. Patrick's are exceptional.

Ryan: Thank you! I have to agree. Working with this team of people was one of the best aspects of the project. From start to finish, the word "collaboration" sums up this experience.

We had parishioners, staff, artists, vendors, contractors, and Diocesan representatives all shaping this project and it was an honor to work alongside such dedicated individuals.

I love that! It is beautiful to hear you both reflect on that piece first. As we all know, no project comes without its challenges. What was the toughest piece of this project?



Ben Luther (Architect)

Ryan: Definitely the front end. Like an iceberg, it is the part you can't see that gets you. Receiving approval and managing the procedural aspects required multiple meetings and countless hours. Once we had the go ahead, we had to ensure the timing and get the contractors all lined up.

Between everything, we built a thousand piece puzzle and God guided each piece.

And you did it without a box to tell you what the puzzle looked like! What about you Ben?

Ben: Balance. My role is to honor the unique circumstances of each project and try and then craft something worthy of an infinite God. I have had to trudge through some projects, but this renovation has been full of meaning. My hope is this project will raise people's eyes to Heaven and better dispose them to the graces offered each time they receive the sacraments.

That is not an easy line to walk. Continuing with challenges, were there any "hit the panic button" moments?

Ben: Of course! When we got the first stain sample we realized the color was off. I drove two hours during an ice storm to inspect the samples with the contractor so we could find a solution. Initially, rectifying the issue required stripping the finish off the already stained woodwork. I'm thankful we found a separate solution that minimized any additional work.

Ryan: Not the mural artist saga? That was PANIC for sure. We did extensive planning with our artist only to have her sent back to Europe by customs the moment she landed. We scrambled to find alternatives and discovered she could paint the mural in Florence and ship it to us. I was nervous and the logistical challenges were numerous, but we found a company to install it and everything fell into place.

I remember getting the panic message in the group chat. My heart sunk but you navigated a significant issue without altering the timeline. Bravo sirs!

Ben: Going back to earlier, we had the right tradesmen and an abundance of God's grace and in the end it all worked out. The people made this project. We only had that one intense moment that required us to step back and revisit the issue later. Most of the project was packed with fun.

Perfect transition! Tell us more about some of the fun moments or great stories from the process.

Ryan: Without a doubt, I had a blast with the design process. Collaborating with Ben, and the design teams, as well as Fr. Mathias, the Parish, and the Finance Council, allowed us to delve into the project's details. I deepened my knowledge of our faith and have a new appreciation for Church architecture.

It was eye-opening to go into the theology of the space and the intricate depictions in the mural. Speaking of the mural, a huge moment for me was bringing the initial renderings of the reredos home to my wife. I was expecting her to gush about the project with me but instead she said, "It's nice but I thought there would be more." Disappointed, I brought this back and we began looking at ways of elevating the space. As we revisited the concept, we saw an opportunity for transformation and opted to incorporate the mural and elevate the design.

Praise the Lord for an honest wife, we have all been blessed by her insight. What about you Ben?

Ben: I have several enjoyable memories from this project. Having worked in custom woodwork, visiting the wood shop was cool. Watching the woodworkers fabricate the materials is an intricate process. I also loved riding the boom and getting to see the details of the project up close.

But the best moment happened as we approached the deadline. There is always a rush at the end as you finish up projects, often leaving people stretched thin. But the primary woodworker shared how he could tell people had been praying for the project.

He shared that the end was always the most stressful part of a project, but with this one there was a constant sense of calm. It was a simple moment that highlighted the power of prayer.

Wow that is beautiful. Such a simple thing but so profound. As we wrap up, tell me about walking into the Church for the first time and seeing the finished project. What was that like?

Ryan: I will let you know when the statues and the sacred heart carving come in...

Just kidding! Because I helped prepare the Church for Mass on Holy Thursday, I didn't get a grand unveiling moment. But as we celebrated Mass that first night, overwhelming joy and a profound sense of peace filled me. I was nervous about people's reactions but the enthusiastic response has been phenomenal. This was a significant moment and this project holds a special place in my heart.

Ben: This moment was special for me, but not for the reasons one might think. Having been on-site throughout the project, I watched the gradual progress unfold and expected the beauty. I started my company with the intention of revitalizing Catholic sanctuaries and this unveiling highlighted the power of that. My success belongs to the Lord and glorifies him and that is particularly meaningful.



L: Ben Luther (Architect) R: Ryan Nardozzi (Director of Operations)

Symbols

in the

Sanctuary



The mural surrounding the crucifix was painted by an artist from Florence and was done in acrylic. The scene on the center panel of the mural depicts heaven. Above the crucifix there is the image of the Holy Spirit, casting rays of light down on the scene of the crucifix. On each side of the center panel, we see scenes from the Holy Mass, as shown in the book of Revelation.

We took the depiction of the angels from the angels in Heaven in the book of Revelation. The highest angels in the mural are using trumpets, followed by the next set of angels which are using incense, these scenes are also revealed to us in Revelation chapter eight. The lowest set of angels are each carrying something different. One angel is holding the holy book with the seals from Revelation chapter five. The truth of this book can only be opened by the lamb of God, Our Lord.

The last angel is shown holding a crown down low in its hands. This is from Revelation chapter four, where the 24 elders are seen casting their crowns down before Our Lord. The elders are traditionally understood to be the 12 apostles and 12 patriarchs who humble themselves before Our Lord.

On the left panel is a scene showing John the Baptist kneeling down as he casts his gaze upon Our Lord on the cross. He holds a staff in his hand representing his authority as one who comes from a priestly line and has been called to preach repentance to prepare the way of Our Lord. His red garment reminds us of his death.



A mountain is shown in the background of this scene because John himself is a masculine figure in the Holy Scriptures. He is bold and unshakable in his conviction, yet he is humble and lowers himself down before Our Lord even saying that he is not worthy to unfasten Our Lord's sandals. A mountain, like St. John the Baptist, has a strong presence and is not simply a reed blowing in the wind.

The right panel of the mural is a scene showing St. Mary Magdalene kneeling down as she looks upon Our Lord. She holds an empty bottle of expensive perfume which has been poured out as a gesture of love and affection towards Our Lord. Her purple garment reminds us of the need for penance. The empty tomb in the background is a symbol of the joy of the resurrection, but also a symbol of the joy of Christ's friendship. St. Mary Magdalene is a close friend of Our Lord and even though she had no special standing in society she was given the special grace of meeting with him right after the miracle of the resurrection.

Together these panels share one common theme. The idea that during the Holy Mass, and during the celebration of each of the seven sacraments, there is a proper way of worshipping and a proper way of approaching Our Lord. The same Christ present on the cross, who also walked with St. John the Baptist and St. Mary Magdalene is also present in these sacraments, and in this holy place. And when we approach Him in the sacraments with the same faith and devotion as seen by those who loved Him in the Holy Scriptures, lives will be saved, and miracles will happen.





The characters IHS come from the tradition of scribes who would shorten the sacred name of Jesus by using the first two characters and sometimes the last. In this case, I (iota) and H (eta), are the first two letters of the name of Jesus in Greek. This tradition carried forward into the Latin during the Middle Ages. During this time many saints and some popes used this monogram as an emblem for the holy name of Jesus. "Then call on me on the day of distress; I will rescue you, and you shall honor me." Psalm 50:15

***"THEN CALL ON ME ON THE DAY OF DISTRESS;
I WILL RESCUE YOU, AND YOU SHALL HONOR ME."***

-PSALM 50:15



There is a rich heritage in the Catholic Church of praying with the use of relics. In the Holy Scriptures a man is raised from the dead after he touches the bones of Elisha. The Altar used at the Holy Mass contains relics and traditionally special relics are even brought out and displayed for a special mass or other solemn occasion. This beautiful devotion inspired the reliquary design which was incorporated into the St. Patrick church sanctuary.

These relics include: a piece of the True Cross, a piece of the cloak of St. Joseph, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John Henry Newman, and Pope St. Pius X.

HOLY HOLY HOLY

On Thursday, May 11, 2023, we celebrated the renovation of our wonderful St. Patrick's Church as well as dedicating its new altar. Bishop Earl Boyea was the principal celebrant at the mass along with our Pastor, Fr. Mathias and Fr. Miguel. It was a double celebration for me to be present at the mass, as I was also celebrating my birthday.

The Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship for our church issued a decree regarding the dedication of a church and altar. That decree instructs us that the Rite for the Dedication of the Church and Altar is considered among the most solemn liturgical services. A church is a place where the Christian community is gathered to hear the word of God, to offer intercession and praise to Him and above all to celebrate the holy mysteries. It is a place where the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist is kept. Thus, it stands as a special kind of image of the church itself which is God's temple, built from living stones. The altar of the Church, around which the holy people of God gather to take part in the Lord's sacrifice and to be refreshed at the heavenly meal, stands as a sign of Christ himself, who is the priest, the victim, and the altar of his own sacrifice.

Since Bishop Boyea had been entrusted with the care of the Lansing Diocese, it was his responsibility to dedicate to God new altars in this Diocese. We were honored to have him. Our Redeemer Jesus Christ made Holy the table for the community to come to celebrate their Passover. Therefore, the altar is the table for sacrifice and for a banquet. Thus, it was fitting that the Bishop representing Christ the Lord accomplished what the Lord himself did and what he handed on to his Disciples to do in his memory. As St. Paul stated in First Corinthians 10:16-17, (the blessing cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ and the bread that we break is the communion with the body of Christ) the fact that there's only one Body means that, though there are many of us, we form a single Body as we have a share in this one Bread.

Fr. Mathias in speaking of the renovation said; "we didn't renovate the interior of our church to make it 'relevant' or 'more appealing' to unbelievers even though we know full well that an authentic beauty is always relevant and appealing". He added, "we renovated the church because of the mystery of the Eucharist and what happens during Mass. Mass is where Heaven meets earth and we are caught up in God's love in Christ. At Mass we participate and join ourselves to Christ in the perfect worship of God the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit".

As Fr. Mathias says, we recall that the Second Vatican Council calls for sacred furnishings in church buildings to reflect the splendor of the mystery of the Holy Mass. We also joyfully hope that the renovation of the church building is an EXTERNAL MANIFESTATION of OUR INNER SPIRITUAL RENOVATION happening in the lives of parishioners. We hope that the renovation of the building points to and reflects God's renovation of our hearts.

All of us should remember that at our Baptisms we were blessed with holy oils and the Holy Spirit. We were cleansed of our sins and dedicated to God. When we were confirmed, we were blessed with Holy Chrism and Holy Spirit to be soldiers of Christ to go forth, to fulfill the Great Command of our Lord before he ascended to Heaven:

"Go forth to Baptize all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen."

Written by Dcn. Patrick McDonald





DEDICATED FOR ALL TIME

On the evening of Thursday May 11th, 2023, a gathered parishioners and priests from around the diocese experienced something relatively rare when Bishop Earl Boyea dedicated the new marble altar in the renovated sanctuary at a special Mass celebrated specifically for this purpose.

The Mass for the Dedication of an Altar is a beautifully profound liturgy with many important rituals and symbols. One will notice that the rites of sprinkling the altar, anointing the altar, and celebrating the Eucharist reflect the Church's Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

SPRINKLING

After the bishop blesses the water, the people, who are living stones, are sprinkled to remind us of our baptismal dignity and to cleanse us of venial sins. The Church's new ambo was sprinkled, and the new altar is sprinkled to purify and cleanse it for its dedication.

POURING CHRISM

The altar is anointed, signifying that it is given over entirely and perpetually to divine worship in Christ. We recall that members of the Church have been anointed with Sacred Chrism at the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

INCENSE

Incense is burned on the altar to signify that Christ's sacrifice ascends to God as an odor of sweetness and also to signify that the people's prayers rise up pleasing and acceptable, reaching the throne of God.

PLACING OF THE ALTAR CLOTH

The covering of the altar indicates that it is both the altar of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the table of the Lord. Around it, priests and people celebrate the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection and partake of His supper. The dressing of the altar clearly signifies that it is the Lord's table at which all God's people joyously meet to be refreshed with the Body and Blood of the Lord.





EUCHARIST

The celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice achieves the end for which the altar was constructed. The Eucharist, which sanctifies the hearts of those who receive it, in a sense consecrates the altar, as the ancient Fathers of the Church often assert: 'This altar should be an object of awe: by nature it is stone, but it is made holy when it receives the body of Christ.'

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