

Reflecting Heaven

Notes on the OLMC Sanctuary Renovation

Pt. 20 – Color and Light

At the time of this writing, we've all had about a week to enjoy the "end" result (which is not *really* the end) of our nave/sanctuary renovation! Thanks be to God for the generosity of the people of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and the artistry and hard work of all those dozens of people who have had a role in the renovation. The feedback we've received from parishioners has been *overwhelmingly* positive, but of course there are some who are dissatisfied with one aspect or another – as is to be expected. One lesson well-known by anyone who's worked on a project like that is that NO ONE gets everything they want.

As I've said repeatedly in the last few articles, the project still has a ways to go before final completion. Most notably, much remains to be done on the gold mosaics in the sanctuary, refining and adjusting lighting and sound, repairing some floor areas, re-coloring the lighting fixtures in the sanctuary to blend in with the ceiling, refining Communion procession flow, etc. It will take some time living in the new space to figure out the best way to deal with these and other issues. But please mark your calendar for Sunday, July 16 (the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel), when Bishop Doherty will preside at our 11:00 Mass to officially bless our renovation. This will coincide with the 15-year anniversary of our Perpetual Adoration Chapel at OLMC – a great weekend to celebrate God's goodness and mercy!

The ten days before Easter saw enormous changes in our nave and sanctuary, and much of it had to do with color and light. So perhaps this is a good

time to review these aspects of the renovation. You may recall that one of the Catholic liturgical architects we consulted on this project had a memorable first impression of our church: "relentless brown," he called it.

Perhaps that was a bit unfair. After all, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel is identified by her Brown Scapular, so brown as our base color makes sense. And many shades of brown still remain: the support beams, the pews, the sanctuary furniture, the frames for the stations, etc. The "bones" of the building are still brown, and that can help us remember our roots in the Carmelite Scapular.

But now we have far more interplay of color! Most obvious, of course, are the brilliant stained glass windows. Our goals with the windows were several. First of all, we wanted them to invite and inspire prayer, to entice worshipers to spend some time before them in reflection, being drawn into a relationship with Christ and his Church. Second, we wanted them to let in enough light to brighten the nave.



Finally, we wanted glowing colors, set off even more by the newly-stained, lighter brick outer walls. You've undoubtedly noticed the vibrant reds and blues, in particular, colors that are picked up and reinforced in the Stations of the Cross. But the color is not simply for color's sake, but rather as a suggestion of the jeweled foundations and walls of the heavenly Jerusalem. Just recently, at the Easter Vigil, we heard a reading from the Book of Isaiah in which God describes the new Jerusalem: *"I lay your pavements in carnelians, and your foundations in sapphires; I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of carbuncles, and all your walls of precious stones."* (Isaiah 54:11-12)

The Book of Revelation carries this description of the heavenly jewels even further: jasper, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, hyacinth, and amethyst are added to the mix (Rev 21:19-20). Colored stained glass is meant to invoke this richness and variety of color of the heavenly kingdom.

The same could be said of every aspect of the renovation, of course. The ongoing title of this series is, after all, "Reflecting Heaven." The Catholic tradition is that the church building, nave, and sanctuary should witness to the heavenly Kingdom by their very structure, appearance, and action.

In the Book of Revelation's famous description in chapter 21, we get a few more hints of what heaven is like: *"The city was pure gold, clear as glass,"* and *"the street of the city was of pure gold, transparent as glass"* (Rev 21:19, 21). This is where the color and shimmer of the sanctuary and



center aisle come from. Okay, so we didn't actually pave them in pure gold – we'll save that

for the *ultimate* Heaven. But the shining

white marble of aisle and sanctuary are at least suggestive of the gleaming streets of gold and glass described in Revelation. This effect will be even more evident when our gold mosaics arrive for the sanctuary arches – thousands of facets of glass reflecting the light!

And that brings us to light. The new LED lighting system in the church will illuminate all the colors and effects with subtleties and flexibility not possible with our old lighting, and all at a fraction of the operating cost! If you're not sold on the lighting just yet, we urge you to wait just a little longer, until the mosaics are in and much of the lighting is re-adjusted and reconfigured. We are well aware of the problem of odd shadows and bright spots, and all that will continue to be addressed into the summer. And, yes, the problem of the black lighting fixtures looking so jarring against the white sanctuary ceiling will be solved, as well.

That brings us, finally, to the sanctuary and its ceiling. The bright white of floor, altar, ambo, back wall, and ceiling all, once again, are meant to reflect the Heavenly Jerusalem: *"The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb"* (Rev 21:23). Our hope is that, when all is said and done, that effect of radiant light will shine forth, particularly in the location of the Tabernacle, so that the effect will be that the light emanates from the "lamp that is the Lamb" in the Tabernacle and on the Altar.

In sum, we have white and gold for the heavenly city, brown for Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, a lot of blue in the windows and Stations for Mary's mantle, a good deal of red in the windows and Stations for the Precious Blood of our Lord, and jewels of color all over the walls, both in the windows and in the Stations. May this interplay of light and color help draw us closer to our Lord and risen Savior, Jesus Christ!

- Rex Rund, Director of Music and Liturgy