

## Four Creatures (Tetramorph)

By the river Chebar, in the land of the Chaldeans, the prophet Ezekiel received a vision of God: *“As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. The four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle”* (Ezekiel 1:5-10). The imagery described by the prophet may suggest the influence of Babylonian symbols in the Jewish representation of angelic realities. The iconic relevance of this vision points out a new sense of reality that emerges when matter and spirit meet, when heaven and earth are fused, in sum, when God embraces creation and elevates what is tangible to a transcendental realm.

In the Book of Revelation, John the Evangelist described a similar vision in the Island of Patmos, *“Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come”* (Revelations 4:6-8). In this vision, John appeals to Ezekiel’s description to represent the courts of angels who praise God around his heavenly throne.

In the second century of Christianity, St. Irenaeus associated the four creatures with the four evangelists. From that point onward, Christian authors such as Victorinus of Pettau, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory have applied this interpretation and influenced this depiction in sacred architecture. Traditionally, the man is linked to Matthew and represents the human incarnation of Jesus, the lion is connected to Mark and represents the royal and courageous resurrection of the Lord seen as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the ox is connected to Luke and represents the sacrifice of Jesus for humanity, and the eagle is associated with John and represents the divine nature of Christ who invites and encourages the believer to a spiritual ascent.

The Parish of Christ the King has commissioned the art déco representation of the four creatures for its sanctuary. They were designed and completed in fiberglass resin in Córdoba, Spain. They will be a constant reminder in our Eucharistic worship of the words of Jesus in the gospels and our constant commitment to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. May Christ the King of the Universe, the Lamb who sits on the throne, bless us all and bring us to the full knowledge of his Truth.

In Christ,

Fr. Elkin J. González