

Window Symbols

1. Ark of Noah

The ark of Noah, which floated safely in the midst of the deluge while everything else was overwhelmed, became symbolic of the Church riding in safety amidst the strife and turmoil of the world. It has also been used in connection with baptism. Just as the world was drowned in the flood, so too through the waters of baptism our old nature is drowned, and we are reborn in a new creation; we become bearers of immortality.

2. Anchor

A ship is one of the earliest symbols of the Church sailing unharmed through all perils. The anchor was an early Christian symbol of the stability of the Church. It, thus, becomes a symbol for hope and steadfastness. This symbolic meaning rests on the Epistle to the Hebrews 6:19, which refers to the everlasting virtue of God's counsel in these words, "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul..." We find this symbol in the catacombs of ancient Rome, where the early Christians hid from persecution.

The anchor is attributed to St. Clement, who was condemned to be cast into the sea bound to an anchor, and to St. Nicholas of Myra, patron saint of seamen.

3. Dove & Olive Branch

The dove, in ancient and Christian art, has been the symbol of purity and peace. It will be recalled that when Noah was in the ark during the flood, he sent forth a dove to find out whether the waters had receded from the earth. The dove brought back an olive branch to show that the waters had receded and that God had made peace with humanity. Gen. 8:11 "And the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth." A dove with an olive twig in its beak is often used to indicate that the souls of the deceased have departed in the peace of God.

4. Palm

Among the Romans, the palm frond was traditionally the symbol of victory. This meaning was carried into Christian symbolism, where the palm branch was used to suggest the martyr's triumph over death. Martyrs are often depicted with the palm either in place of or in addition to the instruments of their martyrdom. Christ is often shown bearing the palm branch as a symbol of His triumph over sin and death. More often, it is associated with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. "The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!" (Jn. 12:12-13) The crown and the palm frond are symbolic of Jesus Christ's triumph and sovereignty over this world.

5. Crown of Thorns

The crown of thorns with which the soldiers crowned Christ before the Crucifixion was a parody of a Roman emperor's festal crown of roses. Our salvation came at great cost and suffering for the Almighty. "And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe" (Jn. 19:2)

6. Lamb

The lamb, as a symbol of Christ, is one of the favorite, and most frequently used, symbols in all periods of Christian art. Many scriptural passages give authority for this symbolism. A typical reference is John 1:29, when John the Baptist sees Jesus: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" In Christian art, the Lamb of God often bears a banner with the cross symbolizing victory over death won by the martyrdom of Christ. Often the banner is inscribed with John's words: "Ecce Agnus Dei" (Behold the Lamb of God). Christ himself carries a banner only when rising from the grave, in the Descent into Hell, and in the Appearances on the earth after the Resurrection and before the Ascension.

7. Cross and Crown

That a cross and a crown should be imposed on one another is the greatest paradox in Christianity. The cross was known as an instrument of death. Yet, through Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross, he became victorious over death, and we are made inheritors of God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God makes even a symbol of death to one of victory and fulfillment. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, ...humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, in the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2: 5-12)

8. Sheaves and Sickle

The sheaves and sickle is symbolic of the Kingdom of God and signifies both judgment and completion at the end of time. Jesus told a parable using this symbol: "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he would not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, the head, and then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29)

9. Angel

An angel with the scroll brings to mind the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of St. John. In that book, the scroll refers to the mysteries of God, which are revealed by the

“Lamb of God”, by Christ (Rev. 5). In Revelation 10, the evangelist is commissioned to carry God’s mystery of salvation in Christ Jesus to the ends of the earth: *8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, “Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” 9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, “Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.” 10 So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11 Then they said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” This window reminds us of Christ’s great command to the faithful to become bearers of the Good News to all people.*

10. 1 John 4

At the core of the Christian message is the proclamation “God is love.” These are the German words that appear on the open pages of the Bible in this window: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” In God’s great love for us is at the center of our life. Greater and more secure than any edifice, God’s love is our dwelling place.

Plants

Almond

The almond is a symbol of divine approval or favor. This symbolism is based upon Numbers 17: 1-8, in which it is told how Aaron was chosen to be the priest of the Lord through the miracle of his budding rod: “The staff of Aaron put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.” It is with reference to this passage that the almond became a symbol of the Virgin Mary.

Apple

In Latin, the word for apple and the word for evil, malum, are identical. It is for this reason that the legend has grown up that the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the fruit of which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat, was an apple tree. (Gn.3:3). In pictures of the tempting of Eve by the serpent, Eve is generally shown with an apple in the hand, offering it to Adam. The apple may also be symbolic of Christ, the new Adam, who took upon himself the burden of humanity’s sin. For this reason, when the apple appears in the hands of Adam it means sin, but when it appears in the hands of Christ, it symbolizes the fruit of salvation. Such interpretation is based upon the Song of Solomon 2:3: “As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” This passage has been interpreted as an allusion to Christ. As Christ is the new Adam, so, in tradition,

the Virgin Mary is considered the new Eve, and, for this reason, an apple placed in the hands of the Virgin Mary is also considered an allusion to salvation.

Carnation

The red carnation is a symbol of pure love. According to a Flemish custom, a variety of carnation, the pink, was worn by the bride upon the day of her wedding, and the groom was supposed to search her and find it. From this custom, the pink has become a symbol of marriage. Newlyweds are often shown carrying a pink in their hands.

Fig

The fig tree is symbolic of wealth and well-being that comes from the following of God's instruction. There are many references in the Old Testament to this. 1 Kings 4:25 "During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees." Thus, a fig tree that does not bear fruit is symbolic of destruction, loss, misfortune and this comes especially when people have fallen from God's teachings: Jer. 8:13 "When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them." The fig is sometimes used, instead of the apple tree, as the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The leaf of the fig tree appears in the story of the Fall in Genesis 3:7: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."

Grapes

The grape has many meanings. Bunches of grapes with ears of grain symbolize the wine and bread of Holy Communion. In general, the grape, like the Eucharistic wine, is a symbol of the Blood of Christ. The grape vine is one of the most vivid symbols in the Bible and is used to express the relationship between God and God's people. The vine as the emblem of Christ follows from His words expressing the new relationship between God and humanity through Jesus Christ. "I am the true vine, and my Father the vine grower... I am the vine, you are the branches... Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... My father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples (John 15: 1,5,8)

Iris

The iris, a rival of the lily as the flower of the Virgin, first appears as a religious symbol in the works of the early Flemish masters, where it both accompanies and replaces the lily in the pictures of the Virgin. This symbolism stems from the fact that the name "iris" means "sword lily", which was taken as an allusion to the sorrow of the Virgin at the Passion of Christ.

Lily

The lily is a symbol of purity and innocence. It was found on many of the saints' graves to show their virginity, their total dedication to the way of Christ.

Olive

The olive is a true Biblical tree, a tree "full of fatness" which yields great quantities of oil. Its rich yield symbolized the providence of God toward His children. "The trees once went out to anoint a king over themselves. So they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' The olive tree answered them, 'Shall I stop producing my rich oil by which gods and mortals are honored, and go to sway of the trees?'" Judg. 9:8-9

The olive branch has always been regarded as a symbol of peace, and appears as such in allegorical paintings of Peace. It will be recalled that when Noah was in the ark during the flood, he sent forth a dove to find out whether the waters had receded from the earth. Gen. 8:11 "And the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth." A dove with an olive twig in its beak often used to indicate that the souls of the deceased have departed in the peace of God. As a token of peace, an olive branch is carried by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary in the scenes of the Annunciation.

Rose

Traditionally, among the ancient Romans, the rose was the symbol of victory, pride, and triumphant love. It was the flower of Venus, goddess of love. In Christian symbolism, the red rose is a symbol of martyrdom, while the white rose is a symbol of purity. This interpretation has been present since the earliest years of Christianity. St. Ambrose relates how the rose came to have thorns. Before it became one of the flowers on the earth, the rose grew in Paradise without thorns. Only after the fall of humankind did the rose take on its thorns to remind humankind of the sins which brought about the fall from grace; whereas, its fragrance and beauty continued to remind humankind of the splendor of Paradise.

Pomegranate

In Christian symbolism, the pomegranate as a rule alludes to the Church because of the inner unity of the countless seeds in one and the same fruit. Also, due to the many seeds contained in this sweet fruit, in the Jewish tradition the pomegranate symbolizes the 613 laws of Moses and the sweetness of their taste. Often a pomegranate tree is planted before the door of a synagogue to remind the worshiper of this.

Colors

Colors are very symbolic in Christian tradition. Each season in the Church year bears its own color and carries a meaning to the believer.

Blue

Blue, the color of the sky, symbolizes heaven and heavenly love. It is the color of truth, because blue always appears in the sky after the clouds are dispelled, suggesting the unveiling of truth. In paintings, both Christ and the Virgin Mary wear mantels of blue; Christ during his ministry on earth, and the Virgin when holding the Christ Child or shown with him. In the Church, blue has become the traditional color for Advent and the days commemorating the Virgin Mary.

Green

Green is the color of vegetation and of spring, and, therefore, symbolizes the triumph of spring over winter, or of life over death. Being a mixture of yellow and blue, it also suggests charity and the regeneration of the soul through good works. Green is the color of the season after Trinity.

Red

Red is the color of blood, which is associated with the emotions, and is, therefore, symbolic of both love and hate. Red, the color of sovereign power among the Romans, has a similar meaning in the dress of the cardinals. Red is the Church's color for martyred saints, because many early Christians suffered martyrdom in the Roman persecutions, or at the hands of the barbarians rather than deny their faith in Christ. In a different sense, because red is the color of fire, it is used during the Church's season of Pentecost, which commemorates the coming of the Holy Ghost.

White

White has always been accepted as symbolic of the innocence of the soul, of purity and the holiness of life. Several references are found in the Bible. Ps. 51:7; Mt 17:2; 28:3. White has become the color for the Holy Days in the Church year such as Christmas, Easter, Holy Trinity and the festival days of the saints.

Yellow

The color yellow may have either of two opposed symbolic meanings, depending on the way in which it is used. A golden yellow is the emblem of the sun and of divinity. The backgrounds of many Renaissance paintings glow with a golden yellow. On the other hand, yellow is sometimes used to suggest infernal light and degradation...

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Mrs. Dorothy Praeger.**

Signs and Symbols in Christian Art: N7830.F37