

St. Pius V Catholic Church Consecrates New Altar and Blesses New Mosaic

For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.
- Isaiah 56:7

The Advent season at St. Pius V Catholic Church in Buena Park has been an extra special one this year, with the dedication of its newly renovated sanctuary. On Friday, December 17th, an evening prayer service was held to bless its newly installed mosaic and, on Sunday, December 19th, the church held a special Mass for the dedication and consecration of its new altar. The Most Reverend Kevin Vann presided at both liturgies.

While many aspects of the church sanctuary have been updated, the single most noticeable (if only because of its size) is the 31'x 25' mosaic. Mosaics have been used in the Catholic Church since the earliest years of Christianity and are often referred to as “windows into heaven”. They do not become outdated. Both the Eastern and Western Churches recognize the importance of this traditional form of sacred art.

The St. Pius V mosaic (below) is inspired by the mosaic in the apse at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome.



When designing a mosaic, every detail is intentional. The St. Pius V mosaic speaks of the meeting of two realities – the heavenly realm (represented by the gold area of the mosaic) and the earthly life (represented by the green area at the bottom). The green area also represents the rolling hills of Orange County. There are poppies in the fields – the orange poppies represent the State of California and the red poppies pay tribute to soldiers who have lost their lives in service to our country.

Christ Pantocrator (or “Christ Almighty”) is seated on his throne. In his left hand is the New Testament, with the quote “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:51), while, with his right hand, he extends a blessing to all who are present.

Christ is surrounded by eight saints, two angels, two seraphim, and rays from the Holy Spirit. The saints (from right to left) are: St Pius V, holding a book representing the Council of Trent; St. Paul,

holding the Book of the Gospel, which he spread throughout the Mediterranean; St. Peter, holding the keys to the Kingdom; St. Mary Magdalen, who was the first to announce that “Christ is risen”; Mary, Mother of God; St. Joseph, who holds a lily, signifying his fidelity and commitment to Mary and to Jesus, and, in the other hand, holds a carpenter’s angle; St. John the Baptist, who declared “He must increase. I must decrease”; and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who holds nothing in her hands, as all she had to offer was her compassion and mercy.

The “owl-like” creatures in the top corners represent seraphim. According to the prophet Isaiah, seraphim are angelic beings that surround the throne of God singing “holy, holy, holy.” The seraphim have six wings, two of which are for flying, two with which they cover their faces, and two with which they cover their feet.

Water flows from the foot of Christ, representing the water of baptism. The water is depicted flowing, literally, to the east, as described in Ezekiel 47:1, “I saw water flowing out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east...”. It also brings reference to Christ speaking to the Samaritan woman, saying, “The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). The water depicted in the St. Pius V mosaic flows from Christ (the temple) and heads eastward toward the church’s baptismal font.

In the background, there are four trees – two palm trees and two orange trees. Palm trees are used to represent Southern California. Additionally, in the tradition of the Church, palm trees and branches represent victory and eternal life, and are also used to pay tribute to Christian martyrs, both past and those in our present time. The orange trees represent the Diocese and county in which our church is located.



In addition to the large mosaic, there are several smaller mosaics in the newly revised sanctuary. Above the presider’s chair is a mosaic of the cross. On the ambo, from which the Gospel is read, is a mosaic which depicts the symbols of the four evangelists: an angel (Matthew), an eagle (John), a lion (Mark), and an ox (Luke).



St. Pius V Church also consecrated a new marble altar. On the altar is a mosaic of the Lamb of God, lying on the Book of the Seven Seals, which represents the judgement of Christ, and in front of the Banner of Victory, representing the risen Christ’s triumph over death. During the consecration of the altar, Bishop Vann placed relics of three saints (St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Pope John Paul II, and St. Pope Pius V) into the reliquary of the altar.





Two other important structures in the church have also been renovated. The baptism font was restructured into a cruciform shape, with symbolism on every side of those who will be baptized in it. The candidate enters the font from the west, where the alpha (A) is inlaid on the top step, walk through the font, mindful of the five wounds of Christ (depicted by inlaid stars), which call to mind the scripture “by his wounds we are healed”, over the ancient Chi Rho symbol $\chi\rho$, symbolizing the peace of Christ and eternal life, and rises at the east end, over the omega (Ω) and facing the church’s large crucifix, born a new person in Christ.

The final renovation is found in the chapel, where a new tabernacle altar was designed and installed. The mosaic of the fishes and loaves is inspired by the mosaic found in the Church of Multiplication in Tabgha, on the Sea of Galilee, the site where Jesus performed the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish.



Recently, Pope Francis stated that “the Church must bear witness to the importance of beauty.” The clergy and parishioners of St. Pius V pray that the beauty of this sacred space will inspire all who pass through the doors of the church to follow Christ and to become his faithful disciple.