





Usher

Usher

Every day, the Cathedral welcomes many visitors from all parts of the country and indeed all over the world. Our Docents and Tour Guides greet them warmly and tell them about the features of our beautiful church.

Every Sunday, our Ushers are stationed at the Cathedral outside doors, warmly welcoming both parishioners and visitors alike to the sacred liturgy.

And we also have a Coffee and Doughnuts Reception regularly to welcome newcomers and visitors as well as allow our parishioners an opportunity to socialize.

This is a very welcoming place.



Tour

Guide









# Looking at the

## OLD HIGH ALTAR

Right: An example of Néo-Grec carving on the exterior of a brownstone home in Brooklyn



"The best way to describe the altar is that it is principally French Gothic Revival with some unusual Néo-Grec detailing including the battering"

Have you ever taken a good look at the old high altar, or "reredos" as we now call it, since it was decommissioned as the altar of sacrifice after the Vatican II liturgical reforms. The upper part is very familiar looking, with a tall spire and multiple pointed arches, resembling a French gothic church or cathedral.

But the lower part, upon which it rests like a foundation, has a different or even foreign look. In addition to having an unusual contour and shape, it is

adorned with repetitive decorations that look quite unfamiliar. One day, when the altar was being photographed, Jimmy Sheehan came by commented "It looks Egyptian to me."

During our Basilica research into the various appointments in the Cathedral, we discussed the old high altar design with Robin Williams, Chairman of the Department of Architectural History at Savannah College of Art and Design.

He quickly identified the recurring stick figure and floral designs as Néo-Grec detailing. Néo-Grec was a Neoclassical revival style of the mid-to-late 19th century that was popularized in architecture, the decorative arts, and in painting during France's Second Empire, or the reign of Napoleon III (1852 - 1870).

In the decorative arts, Néo-Grec was based on the standard repertory of Greco-Roman ornaments, combining motifs drawn from Greek vase-painting and various repetitive decorative modes. It can be identified by the frequent use of isolated motifs of classical heads and figures, medallions and lotus buds. Néo-Grec was eclectic, abstracted and sometimes bizarre. Its treatment was intentionally dry and linear. Its vignettes and repeating patterns lent themselves to stenciling.



Following up on Jimmy's comments, numerous references were found relating to Egyptian Revival architecture in the late nineteenth century. The walls of Egyptian buildings are often sloped or "battered". According to Robin, "To see the impact of Néo-Grec designers on American architects, look at the works of Frank Furness, (as shown above) where you'll frequently see battered elements. The best way to describe the altar is that it is principally French Gothic Revival with some unusual Néo-Grec detailing including the battering."

All of this leads one to wonder what inspired E. Francis Baldwin to use such diverse elements in the design of the original Cathedral altar in 1876. The Néo-Grec decorations with Egyptian influenced elements were prevalent in the time before Christ. And the familiar Gothic forms were clearly well into the Christian era. It was almost as if he was saying the Old Testament was the foundation of the New Testament.

\* noun rere dos \ 'rer-\(\frac{\partial}{\partial}\) also 'rir-\(\frac{\partial}{\partial}\) an ornamental wood or stone screen or partition wall behind an altar.

# We have Relics!

By Peter Paolucci

Our tour guides are often asked by visitors if we have any relics in the Cathedral and the standard answer is no.

In the recent exercise to fill out the Basilica Application, in Section V-Noteworthy Relics, we were asked if there are any relics of Saints or Blessed in the Cathedral? Fr. Schreck and I were concerned that our standard negative answer to that question would prejudice our case to be designated a Minor Basilica.

Monsignor O'Neill believed that we might have a relic in the "mensa" or altar stone of the old high altar but when we examined that area the reliquary was empty.

We were not sure that our claim that we had a relic but misplaced it would carry any weigh with the Basilica reviewers.

Upon completing a tour guide assignment in late June, I exited the Cathedral by going through the Marian Chapel towards the sacristy. I glanced over at the altar stone area of the Blessed Virgin Altar and noticed a small square dark area similar to the empty reliquary on the old high altar. Upon closer examination it appeared to be an intact, sealed reliquary. And a quick look at the Sacred Heart, St. Joseph and St. Anthony altars revealed similar compartments which also most probably contained relics.

As exciting as this discovery was, our Basilica case would only be moderately strengthened by claiming we had relics but didn't know the identity of the Saints.

We contacted Katy Pereira, Director of



Archives and Records Management for the Diocese of Savannah to ask for her help.

After an exhaustive search Katy miraculously found documentation to identify the relics in the Blessed Virgin Chapel Altar. It seems they were installed during the consecration ceremony on June 3, 1920 as described in the July, 1920 account in the Bulletin of the Catholic Laymen's Association of Georgia. Here is a condensed version of that report:



The custom of the Catholic Church forbids the consecration of a church until it is entirely free from debt, dedica-

tion only being permitted before that time. The consecration, therefore, in addition to the unusual and impressive character of the ceremony, was of special interest to the members of the congregation themselves and an occasion for special rejoicing.

A very elaborate ritual, descending from the early days of the church, is followed in such a ceremony, with chrism, oil, salt, water, and ashes as the symbolical articles used in the blessing of the church inside and out-

side, its walls, doors and altars; with the relics of saints carried in solemn procession and deposited in the altar stone; and with antiphonal prayers, psalms and litanies recited by the clergy. Five bishops and about forty priests took part in the service. Bishop Keiley, of the Diocese of Savannah, was present, but did not take an active part in the service.

The consecration service began at 5:30 pm. The relics in a sealed packet had been deposited outside of

the church and vigil had been kept over them by the clergy, with the singing of matins and lauds. Holy chrism, oil of cate-

chumens, incense and a thurible, a pan of burning charcoal, ashes, salt, wine and hyssop were all placed in the church, before the service began. One vessel of water to be blessed was kept in the sanctuary, and one outside the church. Twelve crosses had been placed on the walls of the church, three on each wall, with a sconce holding a candle at the top of each.

The Most Reverend William Thomas Russell, Bishop of Charleston,

entered the church alone when the hour for the service arrived, and the twelve candles were lighted at his order. The procession moved around the church three times, the bishop sprinkling it with holy water, and stopping each time to knock at the door while the following responsive reading was given, the deacon within the church replying to the words uttered by the bishop: "Lift up your gates, ye princes, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." "Who is this King of Glory?" "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Having completed the procession for the third time the bishop traced the sign of the cross with his crozier on the threshold and entered, saying, "Peace be to this house."

An attendant strewed ashes in the form of St. John's cross from opposite corners of the church while the litanies were said and the name of the patron saint of the church twice repeated, and Bishop Russell then traced in the ashes the letters of the Greek alphabet, to typify the enlightenment received by the catecumens in baptism.



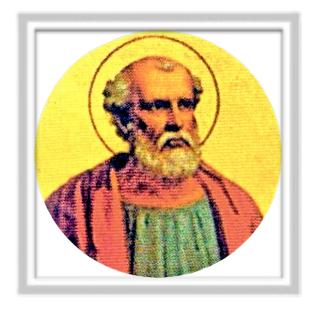
Approaching the altar the bishop blessed the vessel of water, the salt, ashes, and the wine, mixing them, and with them a cross was traced on the church door and then three times on the altar while the prayers of blessing were recited. Four crosses were traced on the altar with holy water while the blessing was repeated, and the clergy then passed around the altar seven times in pro-

cession, the bishop sprinkling it. Passing to the interior of the church, holy water, symbolic of purification, was sprinkled here, the walls were sprinkled, and the holy water scattered to the north, east, south and west.

The blessing of the church having been completed, the clergy went in procession carrying the relics to the altar, while an antiphon was intoned. The sepulchre of the altar was anointed and the relics of the saints, Sts. Innocent, Modestinus and Constantius, were laid and sealed within the cornerstone of the altar of the Blessed Virgin with the following inscription on parchment: "A. D. 1920, on the 3d day of the month of June, Bishop Russell of Charleston, has consecrated this church and altar. and

enclosed therein the relics of the holy martyrs, and has granted to all the faithful of Christ, on this day, one year of true indulgence, and on the anniversary of this consecration, to them that shall visit it, forty days, in the usual form of the church."

This ceremonial with the accompanying prayers concluded the service of consecration.



### WHO ARE THESE SAINTS?

**Saint Innocent I**, was born in Albano, Campania, Italy. He lived during the time of Saints Jerome and Augustine. Innocent was the son of St. Anastasius I, whom he succeeded in the papacy on December 22, 401.

Innocent was pope during the capture and sack of Rome by the Goths under Alaric in 410. He was a powerful champion of papaI supremacy of the entire church and in 417, Innocent condemned Pelagianism, a heresy concerning the role of grace and free will and excommunicated its proponent, Pelagius. This stirred St. Augustine to pen his famous remark: "Roma locuta, causa finita est" (Rome has spoken, the matter is ended). Innocent died on March 12, 417. His feast day is July 28.



**Saint Constantius**, left. According to his legend, he was arrested during the persecutions of Antoninus (some sources say Marcus Aurelius) and whipped, then forced into a stove along with his companions, from which all escaped unharmed. He was jailed, then set free by his guards whom he had converted to Christianity. He sought refuge in a house owned by a Christian named Anastasius. But he, along with Anastasius, were arrested again and after being tortured in prisons at Assisi and Spello, were decapitated near Foligno. Local tradition makes him the first bishop of Perugia. His feast day is January 29.



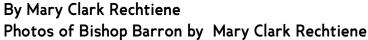


**Above: Decemviri Altarpiece** is a painting by Pietro Perugino, executed in 1495–1496, and housed in the Pinacoteca Vaticana in Rome. It was commissioned by the Decemviri ("Ten Men") of Perugia for the chapel in the Palazzo dei Priori. It portrays the Virgin, holding the Christ Child with Saints Lawrence, Louis of Toulouse, Herculanus and **Constantius of Perugia** (in the right rear) at her sides.

Saint Modestinus, above, and Sts. Florentinus and Flavianus are three Christian martyrs of Campania, Italy, martyred in 311. Their relics were re-discovered in 1167 by Gugliemo, bishop of Avellino. St. Modestinus and his companions are the patron saints of the city and diocese of Avellino. The Cathedral in Avellino is dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and to Saint Modestinus. A statue of Saint Modestinus is in a niche on the left side of the central doorway to the church. The most important chapel in the Catherdal, below, is dedicated to Saint Modestinus. Located in the north transept, alongside the presbytery, it is known as the Chapel of the Treasure of Saint Modestinus, because it preserves in precious caskets the relics of the patron saint of the diocese and a silver bust of him adorns the altar. His feast day is February 14, the date of his death.







"Quiet on the set" was heard quite often on the afternoon of July 16, 2018 inside the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

Bishop Robert E. Barron, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, was here to film a segment for Vol. II of his "Catholicism: The Pivotal Players." The featured players in this volume are Venerable Fulton J. Sheen and Mary Flannery O'Connor.

The Venerable Fulton Sheen was a Bishop of the Church. Besides being a prolific author, in the 1950s he used the medium of radio and television as a tool of evangelization.

Bishop Barron is following in his footstep as an author and in his use of the media to spread the Word of the Faith and the gospel.

The other subject of Vol. II grew up in our own backyard and was the reason for Barron's visit to Savannah. Mary Flannery O'Connor spent her early life across Lafayette Square at 207 E. Charlton St. She was baptized, received her First Communion and attended Mass at the Cathedral with her family. Parish records from the 1930s show that her Aunt Kate Flannery Semmes paid the rent for right center side aisle pew #12. In all probability Flannery sat there.

Bishop Barron's video comment on entering our church: "We are checking in from the magnificent Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, dubbed the 'Sistine of the South'. We are here to see where Flannery O'Connor, one of the greatest Catholic fiction writers of the last century, was nurtured in the faith".

Flannery became one of the greatest Catholic fiction writers of the 20th Century. She has had a profound influ-







ence on contemporary culture, literature and film. Most of her stories, written in a sardonic Southern Gothic Style, rely on grotesque

characters in violent situations. Her stories are arresting and macabre. As described by Flannery herself, they are stories of grace offered but refused. She lived her life and wrote through a Catholic lens.

She was well read and versed in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the French philosopher Jacques Maritain.

The theme of some of her stories was meant to puncture one's self-righteousness as depicted in her short story "Revelation". Christian Century magazine named "The Habit of Being" one of the twelve most influential religious books of the decade.

If you want to sample some of O'Connor's writing and themes read "A Good Man is Hard to Find". It is guaranteed not be about what you think it is.

Although she moved out of Savannah in 1938, her experiences here undoubtedly had a lasting impression. Flannery's writing reflected her Roman Catholic faith and frequently examined questions of morality and ethics.

In his interview with Barbara King that appeared in the *Southern Cross*, Bishop Barron said, "I don't know of anyone who tells the Catholic 'thing' more dramatically than Flannery O'Connor and with such intelligence. I see her as a major player of our time."

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Before coming to Savannah, Bishop Barron visited Yaddo, a literary colony in New York State frequented by O'Connor. From here he was off to Milledgeville, GA where she lived the last years of her life at Andalusia Farm. She died of lupus at the early age of 39. August 3,1964.

The home of Flannery O'Connor on Charlton Street is open for tours. If you are not familiar with Bishop Barron's ministries go to wordonfire.org.