**Sacred Art: Stained Glass**

If [stained glass windows] fail to do what ordinary windows do, it is because they have been designed to do something very much out of the ordinary. They are windows *in excelsis*, bearers of light and beauty and meaning, meant to be looked at, not through. They are, in other words, not windows plain and simple, but true “picture” windows, elevated to the status of fine art, and brought to the service of God.

– Michael Schrauzer, “Visible Reminders of Invisible Light,” *Catholic Answers*, retrieved 11/4/14

Like icons, stained glass windows draw us in by their captivating beauty. Though present earlier, the use of stained glass came into prominence in churches around the 12th centuries, when advancements in architecture and engineering (e.g. Gothic arches and flying buttresses) made it possible to insert large glass windows into the walls of churches.

Often, stained glass windows depict essential events and persons in salvation history. Content ranges from Old Testament narratives to the mysteries of the life of Christ, as well as portrayals of the angels and saints. As worshippers enter the body of the church, they experience their own involvement in the story of salvation.

Some stained glass windows do not have any content at all, but communicate meaning through their shape and structure:

…the circle as an emblem of eternity or divine perfection, for example; rose windows and linked roundels additionally express the interlocking order of the cosmos, centered on Christ…Trefoils allude to the Trinity, squares to the Evangelists or the four ancient elements. Mathematical harmonies like the golden ratio stand behind the pleasing proportions of many a Gothic window or arch. Other shapes and configurations hold their corresponding meanings (ibid).

All sacred art is rooted in the Incarnation: that God became flesh and, in doing so, affirmed the goodness of the material world and brought it to an even higher glory by His own participation within it. Stained glass windows capture this truth in a unique way:

…each [window] is a shining symbol of the Incarnation. That is broadly true of all art, which plants the artist’s immaterial idea in a material body. But stained glass uniquely receives light, in itself invisible and intangible, and gives it a solid, visible form (ibid).