

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Cathedral of the Osage

Photostory by Richard Gross





It is always a joy for me to visit a church or a synagogue — any place where people come together in the worship of our Creator — and meet the people who consider that place their spiritual home; to see their stained glass, mosaics, murals, statuary and other art; and to, perhaps, enjoy a glimpse of what makes them a unique community. As a Catholic theologian, it is a special joy to be able to visit Catholic parishes, and I look forward to these visits with great anticipation.

However, last spring, while driving to the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, it was not I who was experiencing the greatest anticipation but rather



my wife, Katei. Immaculate Conception Catholic Church is on the Osage reservation, which is where Katei was born. Some of her earliest memories were formed on the reservation, and she was on a quest to find a face in a stained glass window... one she remembered from her youth.

The stained glass windows in the nave and transepts of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church are magnificent. Imported from Munich in 1919, the transept windows measure 36 feet tall. The *Osage Window* in the north transept (page 58) depicts Jesuit Father John Shoemakers with Osage in tradi-

tional attire. Father Shoemakers came to what is now St. Paul's, Kansas, in 1847 and established a permanent mission among the Osage people.

Opposite the *Osage Window* is the *Columbus Window*, in the south transept. This window (page 63, bottom right) depicts Christopher Columbus's first encounter with the native people of the Americas.

The remaining windows at Immaculate Conception depict traditional Biblical scenes in a highly detailed and theologically rich way. The *Child Jesus Teaching in the Temple* window (page 59, left) shows the Christ



among the learned rabbis, who are amazed that one so young could have such knowledge. In the background we see Joseph and Mary and experience their joy at finding Jesus safe in the temple. In front of the child Jesus, we see a scroll and are immediately reminded of the scroll from which He will later read the words of Isaiah and the beginning of His public ministry.

In the *Wisdom and Age and Grace* window (page 59, top right) we again encounter Christ as a child, this time in a touching and supremely human family portrait with His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his adoptive human father, Joseph. In the background is an angel bearing a banner that reads “Pray and Work.” Of course, the angel offers this advice not to Christ but to the viewer of the window.

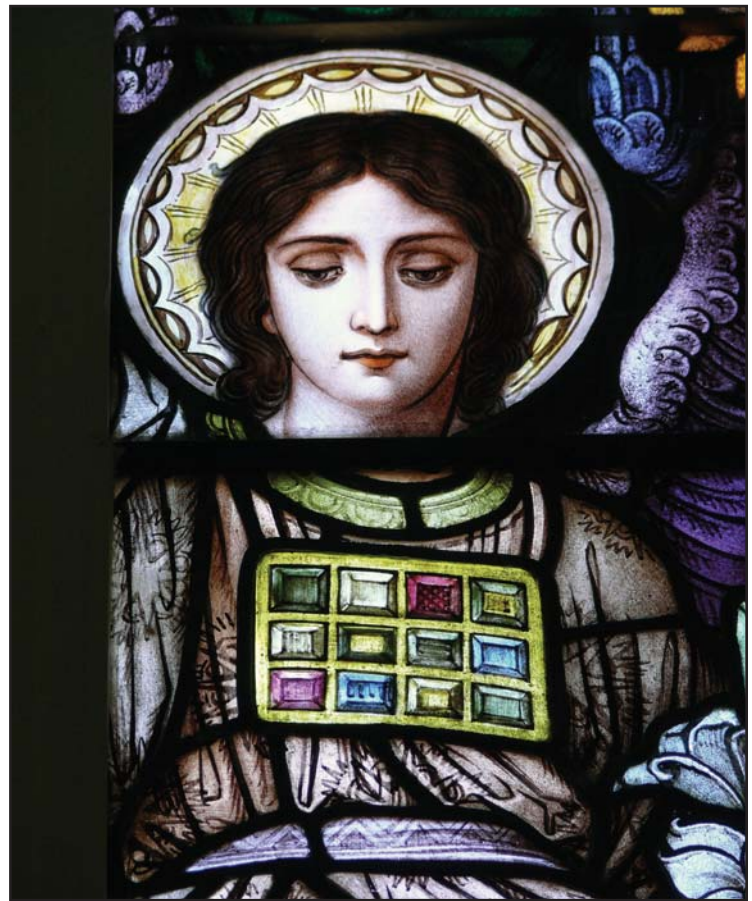
In the *Wedding Feast at Cana* window (page 59, bottom right), we see the

bride and groom seated behind Christ. His mother stands to His right, having already instructed the wine steward to do as her Son says. Christ stands in the foreground in the act of transforming the water to wine, an act that not only signifies a divine blessing of marriage itself but is also symbolic of the transformation that occurs during the Holy Eucharist. Interestingly, in an act that will be repeated in countless wedding celebrations throughout the centuries, we see behind Christ what appears to be a waiter bringing a Jello mold to the table.

The *Expulsion from the Garden* window (page 60, left) depicts the Fall, but it also promises the triumph to come in the fullness of time. Behind Adam and Eve we see the New Eve, who we encounter in the central portions of *The Revelation of St. John*. Though sin and death came into the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, salvation would come

through the action of the New Adam, Christ Himself, and the obedience of the New Eve, His Blessed Mother. The presence of the Virgin Mary in this window depicting the Fall attests to the Catholic’s understanding that God’s mercy and love endures and the promise of salvation remains even when man experiences his darkest hour, either as the race of man or as man the individual.

The *Expulsion* window can only be seen — and then not in its entirety — from the interior in a very small room off of the vestibule. This window attests to the unfortunate truth that stained glass sometimes suffers in the name of growth during church building remodeling. The *Expulsion* window is the window seen to the left of the main door in the church exterior photograph on the same page while an overall view of the interior is seen in the photograph on page 61, top.

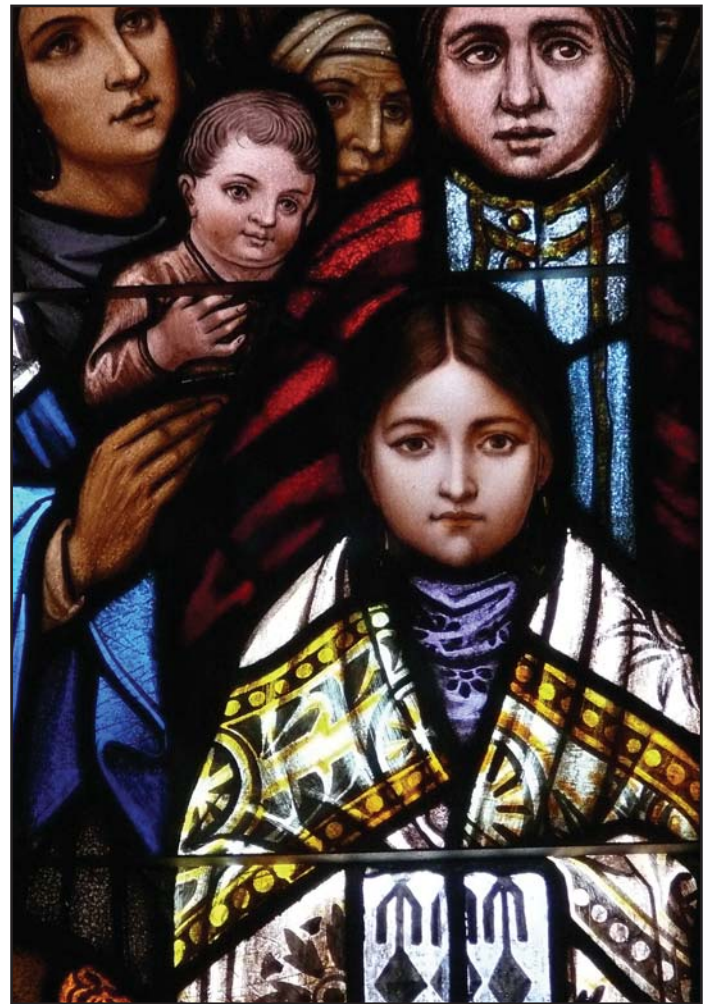


Also hidden away in a small room opposite the *Expulsion* window, and, sharing a similar fate to the window across the vestibule, itself partially obscured, is a particularly beautiful *Annunciation* window. It was here that Katei discovered the faces that she remembered seeing as a child: both the tranquil beauty of the Virgin Mary and the calm, reassuring expression on the angel Gabriel's face (page 62, with details). Katei was delighted to discover that the faces are as beautiful today as she remembers them being when she was a child.

In the *I Am the Immaculate Conception* window (page 63, top left), we see the Blessed Virgin flanked by angels who are prepared to crown her Queen of Heaven; above her is a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Under her feet is the crescent moon, which again is a reference to *Revelation 12:1*, as are the stars with which she is crowned. Beneath her feet we see the bloody serpent, ever a symbol of sin and evil, whose head is crushed, symbolizing the defeat of sin.

Someone with an understanding of theology and iconography would have little difficulty going through the many windows of Immaculate Conception and picking out specific details, such as the roses in the *Annunciation* window or the lily, symbolic of Mary's virginity, in that same window. Even details such as Gabriel's breastplate and its significant 12 jewels can be clearly read, but there is one story told by the windows that might not be so apparent at first glance.

As was said, the *Osage Window* (page 58 and detail page 63, top right) depicts the Jesuit missionary Father



Shoemakers encountering the Osage people and bringing to them the Good News of Christ. In this window, all of the Osage listen attentively to Father Shoemakers' words, except two. Two girls are seen who appear not to be listening to Father Shoemakers, but rather looking intently back at the viewer. Not only do these children not listen to the words of the priest, but even the style of figure seems to be ever so slightly different from that of the rest of the Osage.

This is because these two girls do not represent the Osage people as a group, but rather are actual portraits of children who Father Shoemakers knew and taught. These girls died tragically young of smallpox, a disease that was devastating to the Native American peoples. These girls stand as silent witnesses to the saving power of God's Word; they invite the viewer to gather with those around them, to hear the message that Christ sent forth to all nations, to believe and, through faith, to be saved.



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