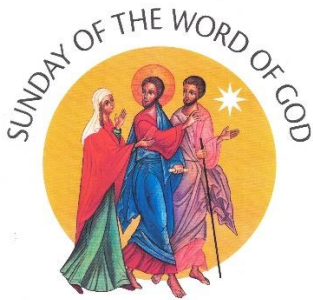


## Introduction



The Church observes the Sunday of the Word of God on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. You may recall that our parish has observed this special day over the past few years. This is a recently instituted observance by Pope Francis with his apostolic letter, *Aperuit Illis*. He wanted to set aside a Sunday given over entirely to the Word of God, “so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people.”



In order to grow in devotion to the Word of God, to fully “remain in the Word,” we should read and study the bible regularly. The Scriptures themselves tell us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword ...” (Hebrews 4:12). God wants to speak to us, and listening to God speak is the way for us to grow into our fullest potential.

Without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus and his Church in this world would remain incomprehensible. Hence St Jerome rightly claims: “*Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.*”

Over the coming months, we will share a series of short essays each devoted to one of the four Evangelists. We hope to instill a desire to engage and re-engage in a continuing, prayerful dialogue with our Lord and God’s Word.

But first, let’s take a look at a wonderful piece of iconography portraying the four Evangelists and why each evangelist has the specific attribute assigned to him. Do you know where it is located?



Pat yourself on the back if you said the historic altar at the St. Francis Xavier Historic Church. The image, which can be seen on the main altar frontal, depicts the four Gospel writers represented by the following symbols (from left to right): St. Matthew, a divine man, St. John, a rising eagle St. Mark, a winged lion, St. Luke, a winged ox. The following article from the *Arlington Catholic Herald* by Father William Sanders explains the assignment of each symbol.

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Biblical images from the Prophet Ezekiel (1:1-21) and the Book of Revelation (4:6-8) prompted St. Irenaeus (140-202) to liken them to the four Gospel writers because of the content of their Gospels and their particular focus on Christ. He explained the symbolism as follows:

**St. Matthew is represented by a divine man** because the Gospel highlights Jesus' entry into this world, first by presenting His family lineage — "A family record of Jesus Christ, Son of David, son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1) — and His incarnation and birth: "Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about" (Mt 1:18). "This then," according to St. Irenaeus, "is the Gospel of His humanity; for which reason it is, too, that the character of a humble and meek man is kept up through the whole Gospel."

**St. John is represented by the rising eagle.** The Gospel begins with the "lofty" prologue and "rises" to pierce most deeply the mysteries of God, the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the incarnation: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. (Jn 1:1-3). And "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love" (Jn 1:14). The Gospel of St. John, unlike the other Gospels, engages the reader with the most profound teachings of our Lord, such as the long discourses Jesus has with the Samaritan woman, and the teachings on the Bread of Life and the Good Shepherd. Jesus, too, identified Himself as "the way, the truth, and the life," and anyone who embraces Him as such will rise to everlasting life with Him.

**St. Mark, represented by the winged lion,** references the Prophet Isaiah when he begins his gospel: "Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In Isaiah the prophet it is written: 'I send my messenger before you to prepare your way: a herald's voice in the desert, crying, "Make ready the way of the Lord, clear Him a straight path.'" "The voice in the desert crying" reminds one of a lion's roar, and the prophetic spirit descending to earth reminds one of a "winged message." The lion also signified royalty, an appropriate symbol for the Son of God.

**The winged ox represents St. Luke.** Oxen were used in temple sacrifices. For instance, when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, an ox and a fatling were sacrificed every six steps (2 Sm 6). St. Luke begins his Gospel with the announcement of the birth of St. John the Baptizer to his father, the priest Zechariah, who was offering sacrifice in the Temple (Lk 1). St. Luke also includes the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the fatted calf is slaughtered, not only to celebrate the younger son's return, but also to foreshadow the joy we must have in receiving reconciliation through our most merciful Savior who as Priest offered Himself in sacrifice to forgive our sins. Therefore, the winged ox reminds us of the priestly character of our Lord and His sacrifice for our redemption.

Article accessed at: <https://catholicexchange.com/what-are-the-symbols-of-the-four-evangelists/>