

About the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Peter in Chains ~ 1845



The **Cathedral Basilica of Saint Peter in Chains** is the cathedral church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati. It is a Greek revival structure located at 8th and Plum Streets in downtown Cincinnati.

Saint Peter in Chains was begun with the laying of its cornerstone on May 20, 1841, under the direction of then-bishop (later archbishop) John Baptist Purcell, and formally dedicated on November 2, 1845. Its striking single spire, which soars to two-hundred and twenty feet above street level, was the tallest man-made structure in the city for many decades, and is constructed of pure white limestone.

The large stone angels that were on each side of the main altar were created by Odoardo Fantacchiotti in the late 1840s. They now grace the Cincinnati Art Museum's Cincinnati wing. They were among the first European sculptures to come to Cincinnati.

The interior of Saint Peter in Chains is distinctly unique among Roman Catholic cathedrals in America, with its Greek-themed mosaics depicting the Stations of the Cross, its ornate Corinthian columns and its massive bronze doors.

The crucifix was made by Benvenuto Cellini, the murals by Carl Zimmerman and the mosaic in the apse is by Anton Wendling.

The Mosaic

The Venetian glass mosaic which fills the rear wall of the sanctuary is the largest such work in the States, 35 feet high and about 40 feet wide.



Its design, based on the ideas of Archbishop Alter, was developed by Anton Wendling, a professor of the University of Aachen, Germany, and associate artist of the T.C. Esser Stained Glass and Mosaic Studios in Milwaukee.

The thousands of small pieces of stone and glass were produced and mounted in reverse on linen by highly skilled craftspeople in the United States and Germany. Under the supervision of master craftsman Erhard Stoettner, skilled craftspeople, brought from Germany under a special permit issued by the State Department, installed the mosaic in mortar on a masonry background.

Stoettner described the mosaic in a commemorative booklet published by the Catholic Telegraph at the time of the Cathedral's rededication in 1957.

As one enters the Cathedral, one is awed by the vision of a majestic wall of gold mosaic dominated by a heroic concept of the figure of Christ seated on a throne. His garment is resplendent in various shades of rich rubies embellished with gold stars, symbolic of Christ's burning love and sacrifice for the salvation of men. Here is a youthful Christ, his youth indicating that the Church is ever vital and unchanging amid the changes of time. He extends His right hand in blessing. With His left hand, He gives the keys of authority to Saint Peter who kneels before Him. The Saint's figure is surmounted by a tiara, symbolic of the papacy.

To the left, below the figure of Christ, the mosaic portrays the miraculous release of Saint Peter from the prison in Jerusalem. His deliverer, an angel, loosed his chains and led Him to freedom. In the opposite corner, the mosaic again portrays a prison scene, showing Saint Paul, the great preacher and symbol of the Church Militant, visiting Saint Peter in the Mamertine prison in Rome.

The panel shows the two Apostles strengthening one another spiritually before going to their martyrdom. Both the prison scenes are surmounted by architectural elements symbolic of the cities in which Saint Peter was imprisoned. In the center, below the figure of Christ, a Latin text is inscribed: Et Petrus Quidem Se, vabatur in Carcere Vinctus Catenis which translates: And Peter was kept in prison, bound in chains. (Acts 12:5)

Sanctuary



The sanctuary is built around the **Altar**, a simple mensa (table) resting on Bleu Belge marble pillars. The central panel in its base is a bronze sculpture of the *Paschal Lamb* done by Ernest Bruce Haswell.

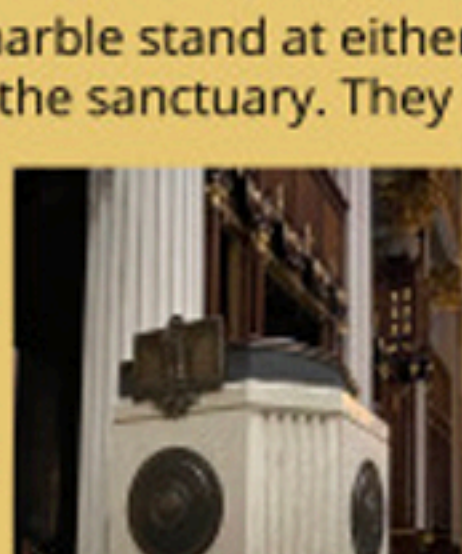


To the left of the altar is the **Archbishop's Cathedra** or chair, the sign of his teaching authority in the archdiocese. It is because the archbishop's cathedra is here that the building gets its designation as cathedral.



Woven in Holland, the **Carpet** has a central design of the coat of arms of Archbishop Alter, who restored the cathedral. The motto below "The charity of Christ urges us on," is taken from 1 Corinthians 14. A pattern of chains in honor of St. Peter borders the carpet.

Pulpits of Tavernelle marble stand at either side of the entrance to the sanctuary. They are decorated with shields containing the symbols of the evangelists. The south (left) pulpit displays emblems of Mark on the front and of John on the side; the north (right) pulpit bears symbols of Luke on the front and Matthew on the side.



The symbols of the basilica designation, the **Umbraculum** (red and gold umbrella) and the **Tintinnabulum** (bells mounted on a pole with the crossed keys), are displayed in the sanctuary.