



PRELIMINARY DRAWING OF THE HIGH ALTAR AND REREDOS
CHURCH OF ST. VINCENT FERRER, NEW YORK

THE NEW ALTAR OF SAINT VINCENT FERRER'S CHURCH

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ENTERING Saint Vincent Ferrer's and walking down the long, high-vaulted nave, the sheer beauty of the church seems almost overwhelming. Midway in the centre aisle the slowly-curving grace of Gothic Architecture appears before us in all its loveliness. The stately lines of the arches sweep from nave to transept and chancel in bewildering array; and this very fact provokes the more delight for the full beauty of the Gothic arch is to be found, not by standing directly before it, but by viewing it from an angle and thus beholding a series of arches and semi-arches, providing the imagination with an opportunity of completing what the eye cannot. Entrances to transepts on the right and left are barely visible to us here, but their suggestion adds to the deep richness of the scene. The long chancel is dominated by the great Rood mounted on a huge oaken beam placed at the spring of the chancel-arch. As we approach closer the spacious sanctuary lies before us with its elaborately carved choir stalls, and, rising from the canopies of these stalls, the screened galleries from which the nuns attend Mass, also beautifully designed.

We are now facing the magnificent altar of Belgian Black marble, fronted with empanelled shields of the Order and Province of Saint Joseph. Towering high above the altar is the recently installed Reredos of Hungarian oak with its masterly carved pillars, niches and border designs, preserving in outline all the stateliness of the Gothic arch. Occupying a central position is a large painting in three sections portraying an incident in the life of Saint Vincent Ferrer. In the niches of the Reredos are twenty-four saints and patrons of the Order. Surmounting the whole composition of the Reredos is a figure of Christ the King clad in white vestments, bearing the insignia of His kingly office, and holding the earth "in the hollow of His Hand." On each side of the Reredos and Altar are hangings of a deep maroon, a back-drop against which the Reredos

is framed. The deep maroon of the curtains blends presently into the deep blue of the east window, terminating at the top in a final sparkle of blue and gold. The deep, rich colouring of the hangings and window may be seen through the carved piercings along the sides and upper border of the Reredos and serves to emphasize the delicacy of its tracery the more. Tastefully set amid the splendours of the Altar and Reredos is the Tabernacle of gold-plated bronze, the glittering home of Him Who is "Lord of All."

Precise examination of the details of the Altar and Reredos convince us of the solicitude and great care taken by all those concerned with their planning and execution. Excluding the time required by the architects to design and complete the drawings, the work of construction alone took approximately two years. The Mensa of the Altar, in one piece of Belgian Black marble and inlaid with red Verona, measuring fifteen feet in length, three in width, and has a depth of six inches. The Altar frontal consists of Belgian Black and Lepanto marble uprights and five panels with fields of Tinos Green surrounded by a border of mother-of-pearl and Lapis Lazuli. Three of these panels contain shields of inlaid marble, two of which are shields of the Order and the other of the Province of Saint Joseph. The carving of the Mensa and Altar frontal is finished in gold.

The Reredos Wall which serves as a back-wall for the altar and a base for the Reredos is made in Sienna marble. The wall contains an inscription of the *Panis Angelicus* in a field of gold and two large corbels, the subjects of which are the "Last Supper" and the "Elevation of the Mass."

The Tabernacle, completed a few years ago, was designed by the Architect of the church, the late Bertram Goodhue. It is of such great beauty that it is doubtful if its equal as a work of art exists in this country. It is of bronze, gold-plated, with eighteen panels of biblical scenes in coloured enamels, nine of which are taken from the Old Testament, and nine from the New. It is surmounted by an elaborate crown, crucifixion group, and figures and shields in enamels.

The Reredos proper is a magnificent structure of wood-carving which forms the setting for three large paintings, twenty-four statues of saints, numerous angels of varying size, and a superb heraldic display. Dominating the entire structure is a large figure of Christ the King. The Reredos, extending forty-four feet above the sanctuary floor, is of Hungarian Oak and stained to preserve the natural colour of the wood. Polychrome and gold have been added cautiously for it was not intended to destroy the natural finish of the wood. The

Reredos and Altar were constructed by Joseph Van Uytvanch of Louvain. The work of colouring was entrusted to W. K. Hase, Decorators, Inc., of New York City.

The subjects of the three large paintings are "Penitence" on one side and "Healing of the Sick" on the other; in the centre is Saaint Vincent Ferrer with a group of Dominicans. The painting was done by Samuel de Vrienoll of Bruges.

Prominently placed in the Reredos are the shields of the Orders of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, that of the Province of Saint Joseph, together with the Pelican and Crown shields on the Tester. The arms of Cardinal Hayes and Bishop Dunn are displayed; and there are many smaller shields of less importance. All of these are finished in colour and gold.

The Reredos was designed by Mr. Wilfred Anthony and Mr. Elliott Chisling of New York City. Mr. Anthony has been from the very beginning intimately connected with Saint Vincent Ferrer's, for he was an associate of the late Bertram Goodhue and assisted him with the plans when the latter was commissioned to design the new church. With the collaboration of Mr. Chisling he has produced an Altar and Reredos which are undoubtedly the most beautiful of all his works. Mr. Anthony is at his best when delicacy of detail, skillful blending of colour, and deep symbolism are required and he has laboured mightily here to produce this Reredos with its wealth of fragile and delicately-carved wood-work, its beautiful blend of coloured wood and marble, and its symbolism so masterfully contained in its shields, eucharistic inscriptions, and in its statues of saints and angels.

At first glance it would seem that the statues of the saints had been set up without much attention to their proper disposition. Close inspection assures us however that even in this detail care and precision have not been lacking. As has been noted above, the figure of Christ the King dominates the entire scene. On either side of Him are two great patronesses of the Order, the Apostola Apostolorum and the Patroness of philosophers and scientists, Saint Mary Magdalen and Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The Architect has not failed to appreciate the outstanding events in the history of both, that is, the supreme intensity of their love of God and God's love for them: the one He chose to be the messenger of His glorious Resurrection to His Apostles and the other He sent as the messenger of the tidings of salvation to the priests and doctors of Alexandria. Flanking these are four sponsors and propagators of religious life, the

Founders of the Franciscan and Benedictine Orders, Saint Augustine from whose writings has been drawn the rule for the majority of the religious organizations of the Church, and Saint Bernard, *Doctor Mellifluus*, zealous reformer of Monastic life during the Middle Ages. Immediately below the figure of Christ the King and, as it were, supporting Him are the four Evangelists whose Gospels are a part of the final deposit of Revelation and are the mainstay of God's kingdom on earth.

Standing now in perpetual adoration around the Tabernacle before which they spent so many hours of prayer during their mortal lifetime is the glorious family of Dominican saints. Here are two great Pontiffs of the Order, Saint Pius, undaunted Father of Christendom when it was harassed by the awful menace of the constantly advancing Moslem, and Saint Antoninus, intrepid Archbishop of Florence when the city was torn by political strife; Saint Dominic, zealous Apostle to the Albigenses, and Saint Vincent Ferrer, Angel of the Apocalypse, both of whom recalled countless thousands to their forgotten God; Saint Hyacinth, indefatigable preacher of the Blessed Sacrament and the holy Mother of God, and Saint John of Gorcum, martyred with the praises of the Blessed Sacrament upon his lips; Saint Catherine of Sienna, untiring defender of the prerogatives of popes, and Saint Raymond of Pennafort, brilliant jurist of the Church; Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Catherine de Ricci, perfect lovers of the crucified God; Saint Peter, martyred for his unshaken belief in God, and Saint Rose of Lima, truly a martyr in her sufferings for her loved One; finally, Saint Louis Bertrand and Saint Agnes of Montepulciano, ardent champions of the religious life. Interspersed throughout this company of the saints are numerous angels perpetually engaged in a never-ending canticle of praise to the most Holy Trinity.

But this attention to detail is for the connoisseur. Just outside the sanctuary is the vantage point from where we may best appreciate the wondrous beauty of it all. The grandeur of the heavens is here in the sweeping arches of the high-vaulted nave. The beauty of the celestial court lies before us empanelled and traced in the majestic altar and reredos. The full, rich cadences of the organ roll toward us in an ever-increasing swell, and then, the lilting phrases of Gregorian chant poured forth from the eager, young throats of the choir. Clouds of fragrant incense ascend, obscuring somewhat the enthralling grandeur of the altar scene. The arch of the reredos, so suggestive of the triune God, has for the moment faded from our view. Details,

which make it such a thing of perfect beauty, are present to us only dimly. It is in very truth a mirroring of our life on earth in which we can never fully know divine Truth and Beauty hidden from us in the impenetrable mists of eternity. But we know that ere long the clouds of incense will clear and all will shine forth again: so too, the mists that shroud this life will finally be swept away and we shall then stand in the pure white light of heaven. All around us heads are bent in reverent prayer. The Sanctus bell tinkles out its act of homage and warns us presently that we are close, so very close, to God in His earthly home.

Any note of the new altar and reredos of Saint Vincent Ferrer's is incomplete without a word of commendation of the efforts of Father Meagher and Father Moran. Their zeal, their vision, together with the cooperation of the architects, have produced a church, not merely beautiful in the casual sense of the word, but a church remarkably superb in its every minute detail. What a happy choice was theirs when they decided upon Gothic as the best that could be dedicated to the service of God. Other styles are so patently of the earth. Gothic is as near to the divine as it is possible for human endeavour to approach. It is pre-eminently Catholic. Franco-Norman in origin, it was developed by that Catholic civilization which emerged from the great struggle with pagan influence during the Middle Ages. Through the centuries it has received its most enthusiastic support from the great Orders of the Church: and rightfully so, for it more than any other has discovered the secrets of Beauty and pours them forth for our continual delight. To the grace and majesty of the Gothic architecture have been added the stained windows, superb statuary, masterly wood-carving, and the beautiful blending of colour and gold. The Prior has provided for his parish a church of surpassing splendour. Once again—tribute to this magnificent achievement.