Now, look up to find some high-flying creatures in the windows of the sky-like dome:

The **phoenix** is a mythical bird that symbolizes the Resurrection and eternity. Legend says it could never die: after 500 years, it would burn up and then be reborn from the fire.

The **pelican** was said to pierce its breast with its beak, to feed its young from its own blood when other food was unavailable. It represents the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Dome windows include both a **descending dove** ("the Holy Spirit among us") and an **ascending dove** ("the graces that lift (humans) up to God through the religious life").

The "ascending dove," shown with its feet ready to perch on the glass, could also represent the "dove at the window," in the Old Testament story of Noah and the Ark. This is especially appropriate, since the Catholic Encyclopedia points out that the word "nave," which is used to describe the main part of a church, comes "from the Latin 'navis' a ship, possibly with some reference to the 'ship of St. Peter' or the Ark of Noah."

Incidentally, our church has a whole flock of Holy Spirit doves in its artwork: look for a dove in the mosaic lunette above the Mary Altar and another in the Trinity window behind the altarpiece. Yet another can be found representing the Annunciation in the first long window on the St. Joseph side. How many can you find?

**Fish** don’t generally fly, but they’re up in the dome too. ICHTHUS, Greek for fish, is also an acronym for the Greek phrase “Jesus Christ Son of God Savior.” Three fishes represent the Holy Trinity.

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Below the dome, but still pretty high-up, are chunkier creatures, some of which may not soar quite so gracefully.

On top of several of the columns in the church, you can just about identify the carved limestone **two-headed birds.** The two-headed eagle was an emblem of Byzantium (the Greek-speaking part of the Eastern Roman empire 500-1450AD) – fitting the Byzantine Revival design style of our church.

Perched on the pulpit, halfway up the wall on the Mary side of the church, is a sculpted **eagle** with a book rest -- the symbol of Saint John, who wrote the Gospel that begins “In the beginning, was the Word...”

Above the four columns supporting the dome, are round mosaics bearing the symbols of the four Gospel-writing Evangelists, based on images described in Revelations. Matthew is shown as a **human figure with wings,** or an angel, representing Christ’s human nature, since his gospel describes Christ’s human lineage. Mark is the **winged lion** who uses an emblem of monarchy to invoke the dignity of Christ. Luke is the **winged ox** – a traditional sacrificial animal. His Gospel begins with Zacariah, the father of John the Baptist, going into the temple to make a sacrifice. John employs the airborne **eagle** as the symbol of divinity, reminding us of Christ’s spiritual nature, because his Gospel begins in the heavens before Jesus came to earth.

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In the back of the church, in the stairway to the choir loft, find a non-flying creature. The **Lamb of God** reclines on a book with seven seals -- an image from the Book of Revelations, referencing the Second Coming! The lamb, together with the scallop shell in the window border, signifies baptism.

The Baptismal Font, topped with a sculpture of John the Baptist, is nearby. Check its side rim for a water creature: a **dolphin** on an anchor, symbolizing Christ on the cross and Christianity.
Curiously, the church menagerie also includes several snakes.

The wreath design currently under the middle long window on the Mary side of the church, was originally located under the Agony in the Garden to its right. Its central passion flower is said to represent “faith and suffering.” The laurel wreath surrounding it is a traditional symbol of victory, creating a message of triumph over death. The two snakes nibbling at crosses represent original sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden – the reason we need a Savior.

In 1940, the parish anniversary book reported on the snake-and-cup emblem of Saint John the Apostle (by the 47th Street door) that: “according to the tradition handed down by Saint Isidore, the idolatrous enemies of the Saint having poisoned the wine which he used for the holy sacrifice of the Mass, hoped thus to kill him. But the Saint frustrated their design, for on his blessing the wine a serpent came forth to warn him. The story, with other versions in which he safely drank the wine, was never considered reliable enough to be included in the Bible. In fact, descriptions of the snake chalice closely resemble the “bowl of Hygieia,” or cup of medicine from an early medical center related to the Greek cult of Asclepius at Ephesus. Did John’s religious faith give him courage to try the science of his day?

Our tour began with St. Francis of Assisi; let’s finish with another saint who loved animals. Martin de Porres, standing below the high pulpit, was born in Lima, Peru, in 1579. His father was a Spanish nobleman, and his mother was a freed Black slave from Panama – possibly with some Native American heritage. Martin grew up in poverty, became a lay servant, and was later admitted to the Dominicans. He was known for giving to the poor, and for his gentle and effective medical ministry, helping anyone in need, regardless of status. He is also recognized, like Francis of Assisi, as a friend to animals. A story is told that when the monastery was troubled with mice, Saint Martin refused to poison them; instead, he politely asked them to leave, which they did. Martin de Porres was canonized on May 6, 1962, and his feast day is November 3.

“Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another...” (Pope Francis, May 2015)

Welcome to St. Francis de Sales Parish United By The Most Blessed Sacrament. Once a year, we celebrate the Blessing of the Animals for all of our neighborhood pets, but our church, built in 1911, is filled with animal art all year long. The Parish History Committee hopes you enjoy discovering the many creatures hidden in our church decorations.

A good place to begin, is at the big round window above the 47th street door (by D’Ascenzo Studios, based on a 16th c. painting by Andrea del Sarto) showing Mary and Jesus in the middle, with Saint John the Evangelist on the right, and Saint Francis of Assisi on the left. Saint Francis of Assisi is known as the saint who loved animals, and our annual Blessing of the Animals occurs near his October 4 feast day.

Find Mass times at saintfrancisdesales.net
Explore parish history and more at https://SFDShistory.wordpress.com

FIND THE ANIMALS AT ST. FRANCIS DE SALES