

# A Letter from Fr. Jerry Gunderson

June 1, 2025

Dear Friends,

The gold elements on the new crucifix raised questions about what symbolism is represented. They are the symbols of the four evangelists (gospel writers). Since parishioners have been inquisitive, I thought I would use this letter to explain.

The symbolism of the four evangelists can be traced back to the first chapter of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel describes a vision. *“And in the midst, there was the likeness of four animals. Their countenances were the face of a man and the face of a lion, and the face of a calf and the face of an eagle.”*

In the Book of Revelation St John sees similar creatures surrounding the throne of heaven. *...“and round about the throne were four beasts...And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast was like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.”*

As far back as St. Jerome who translated the bible into Latin, these symbols were applied to the four evangelists. Over time, these four images were interpreted as symbols of the four Evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Artists simplified the complex forms described in Ezekiel’s vision.

A winged man, or angel, came to represent St Matthew, because his book opens with the genealogy – the human ancestors of Jesus.



A winged lion stands for St. Mark because he emphasizes the royal dignity of Christ. Many consider the lion the king of the forest. Mark opens his book with John the Baptist roaring like a lion in the wilderness.

St Luke is suggested by the ox, a sacrificial animal, because his Gospel stresses the sacrificial nature of Christ’s ministry and opens with Zechariah performing his priestly duties. The ox here is winged.

And a winged eagle, the creature that dwells closest to heaven, symbolizes St John, because of his visions and the heavenly opening of his Gospel.

I hope this explanation and the accompanying graphic help make the images on the cross more easily distinguishable. They are appropriate.

Since we are called to be Christ-like, and to be messengers of the good news, may have a fourfold

aspiration: to be humble people, and to still be bold like the lion, to bear burdens like the ox, and to still rise toward the presence of God, perceiving lessons which our physical eyes cannot see, squinting in the light as we approach Scripture.

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