The image features a detailed woodcarving of various flowers and foliage. On the left, a tall stem with long, pointed leaves rises, bearing several flowers, including a large one with a textured center. To the right, there are clusters of smaller flowers, some with multiple petals and others with more intricate, layered structures. The carving is set against a dark, textured background and is framed by a decorative border with a repeating pattern of small, rounded shapes.

THE
WOODCARVINGS
OF
ST. STEPHEN'S
CATHOLIC CHURCH

B.F.

I dedicate this book to the Pastor of St. Stephen's Church,
Rev. Benedict A. Horvath, O.Praem.

Béla Ferencz
(Master carver)

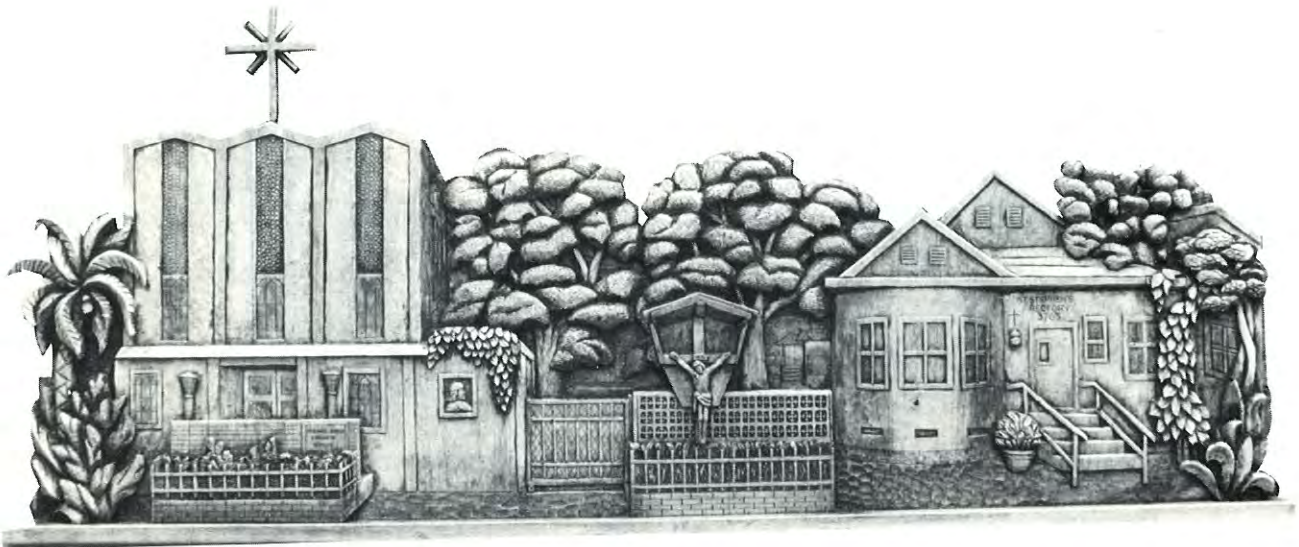


Published and illustrated by Béla Ferencz
Photographic credits: Béla Ferencz and Julius Bogár
Printed in the workshops of Vaughn Printing Co., Santa Monica, CA



St. Stephen's Catholic Church

3705 Woodlawn Avenue
Los Angeles, California



The photographs are of the woodcarvings and the stained-glass windows representing the front-view and the side-view of St. Stephen's Church.



In
Nomine Patris
Et Filii Et
Spiritus
Sancti
Amen

THE
WOODCARVINGS
OF
ST. STEPHEN'S
CATHOLIC CHURCH

Preface

Rev. Benedict A. Horvath, O. Praem.

Carvings

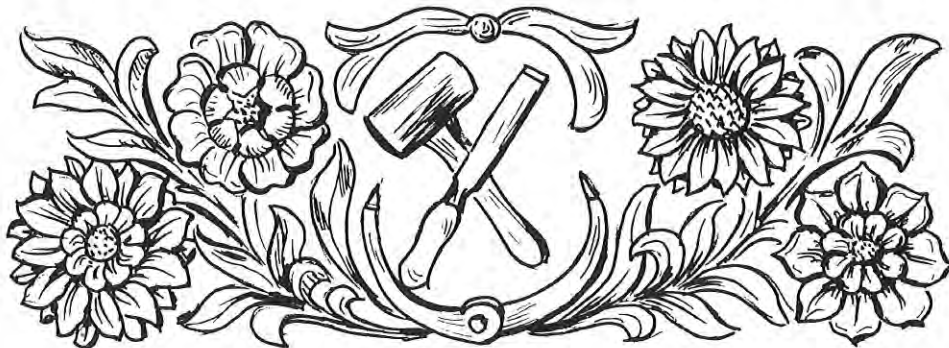
Mr. Béla Ferencz, Master Carver

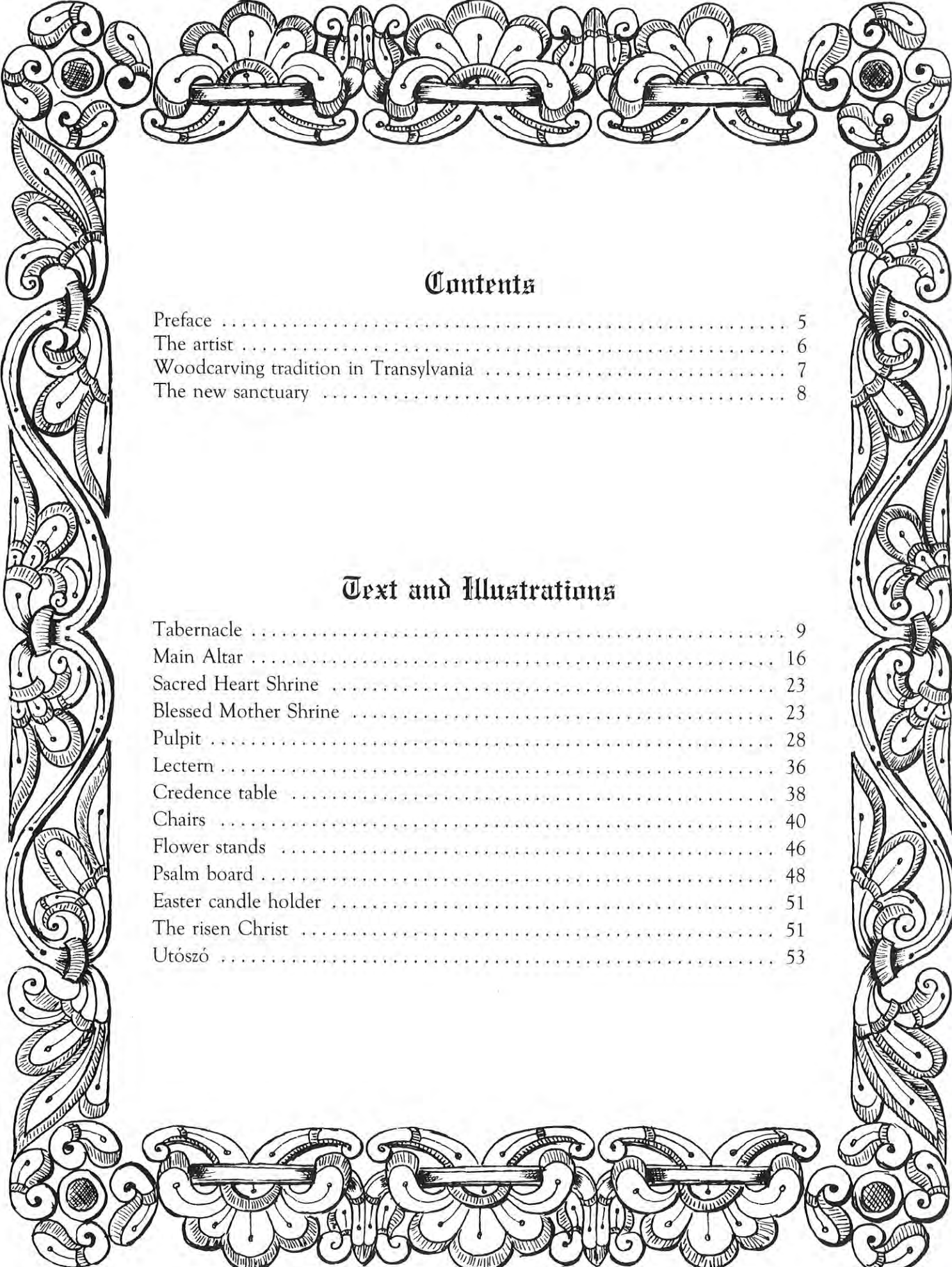
Text

Mr. Akos Thiery, Ph.D.

Credit

Archaeological references and drawings were taken from various works by Prof. Gyula László.
Avar and ancient Hungarian motifs follow originals as restored by Dr. Nándor Fettich.





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Preface

During the course of half a decade, beginning in 1981, Béla Ferencz set the vision of his Christian Faith into wood. In splendid richness he embroidered onto the altar the words of Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. With flowers, ornamentation, and with a passionate and ancient yearning for the things of above, he adorned the place of the Holy Word, erecting a worthy throne for the coming of Jesus among us and bringing to life the awesome moment of Consecration. The stories from the Gospel brilliantly shed light on the situations of our own day in the tracks of his chisel. Around the person of Jesus shines the approving light of Heaven, and in this light we sense that the agonizing world never stands alone, be it in the region of Jerusalem or in the suffering and steadfast world of the Carpathian Mountains. And our souls rejoice at this message, whispered in wood for the people of our day.

Each and every piece in the sanctuary is there for the sake of Our Lord Jesus. It has no other purpose than to make this tired world a happier and more perfect place, by satisfying the soul's thirst for beauty.

Symbolic and expressive is the paschal candle, whose base, calling us to the sombre reality of the grave, is fashioned after a tombstone, but from whose pinnacle the flickering flame of the Resurrection greets us. Equally profound is the Tree of Life on the tabernacle, suggesting everlasting life.

This Bible in wood proclaims from day to day the one important truth: our call to eternal life. As one person so movingly expressed it: "Being in this church is like being already in Paradise."

With these reflections I send this album on its noble journey, confident that it will serve to edify the spirit of its every reader.

Fr. Benedict A. Horvath

H.S. • Written by Fr. Benedict A. Horvath
Translated by Fr. Hermann-Joseph K. Rettig

The Artist



Béla Ferencz was born in Marosvasarhely, Transylvania, the seat of a centuries-old woodcarving tradition. His early studies in the School of Woodcarving and Sculpture in Szekelyudvarhely perfected his natural talent and strong sense for Hungarian style. Leaving Transylvania, he further developed his talent in Budapest, Hungary, until the Second World War called him to military duty. In Southern Russia he planted on the burial mound of many a fallen comrade the “kopjafa”, the stylized carved spear of the dead warrior.

Retreat brought the artist to the Bavarian woods in Germany, where he was lucky to find a famous old master, who appreciated and enriched the talent of the young woodcarver. There followed, in 1951, emigration to the United States of America, and an artistic activity intermingled with more remunerative trade work.

Béla Ferencz’s work has been exhibited worldwide, from such places as the Summer Palace of the late King of Romania and the United States Capitol to the California Museum of Science and Industry, and he has been acknowledged as one of the few inspired woodcarvers of modern times. His exquisite, fluent, significant lines strike us. No wonder that he has been honored many times, including the Cross of Knight Commander of Merit, which was bestowed on him by the Grand Prior of the Knights of St. Brigitta for his fine, inspired vision titled “Revelation of St. Brigitta.” He also earned a silver medal and a gold medal from the Arpad Academy for his “Noon Bell,” which describes a historic event of the Hungarian past. His sculpture of Miklos Toldi, a legendary Hungarian folk hero, was the highlight of the 1977 International Woodcarving Exhibition in Toronto, Canada.

From monumental reliefs to delicate vases Béla Ferencz brings centuries of tradition and skill to his art, and, at the same time, he is ready to learn and to develop his own talent by catching vivid abstraction from nature rendered in artistic lines.

His latest accomplishments are the carvings in St. Stephen’s Catholic Church, the subject of the present book.



Woodcarving Tradition

in

Transylvania

According to folklore the Szeklers of Transylvania are descendants of Attila's Huns, who survived Avar times, and later blended in with their Hungarian relatives when Arpad's nation arrived in the Carpathian Basin.

Archaeological excavations bring forth jewelry, semi-precious stones, and metal objects whose decorative motifs strongly resemble the patterns on today's Transylvanian woodcarvings. Wood may survive centuries, but not millenia. While carved wood perished, the treasure of their forms survives in the heart of the Szeklers. One of them, Béla Ferencz, when he decorates his panels, uses quite naturally these and old Avar and Hungarian motifs which were preserved in Transylvania, and which came down to him through the heritage he received from his forefathers.

The New Sanctuary

In 1981, Father Benedict Horvath, O. Praem., the parish priest of St. Stephen's Catholic Church, ordered a new pulpit from the Master Carver Béla Ferencz; he started hereby the complete renovation of the sanctuary of the church. After the pulpit there followed the new altar, the tabernacle, the lectern, the Easter candle holder, the flower stands, the celebrant's chair, nine chairs for his assistants, and a credence table. Also, the two side shrines received new bases for the statues of Mary with the child Jesus, and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The whole work took five years to complete, and was finished by 1986.



Tabernacle



Szekler and Hungarian motifs appear on the doors of the tabernacle. These carvings imitate the decoration on a silver purse found in the excavations at Galgóc; stylized trees of life decorate the doorframes.

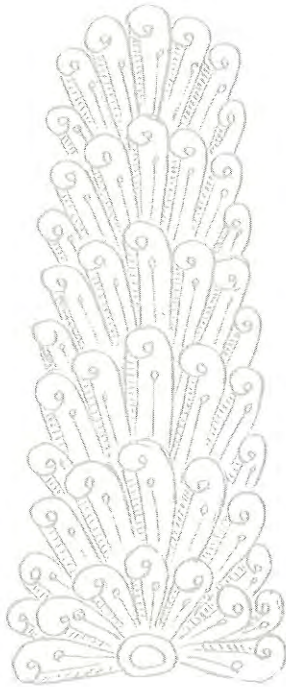
On one side of the tabernacle an elaborate tree of life dominates the design; it is surrounded by carvings taken from the floral and animal motifs found on the blade of "Attila's Sword". The figures on the upper bar of the square frame originate from the grip of the sword found at Geszteród.

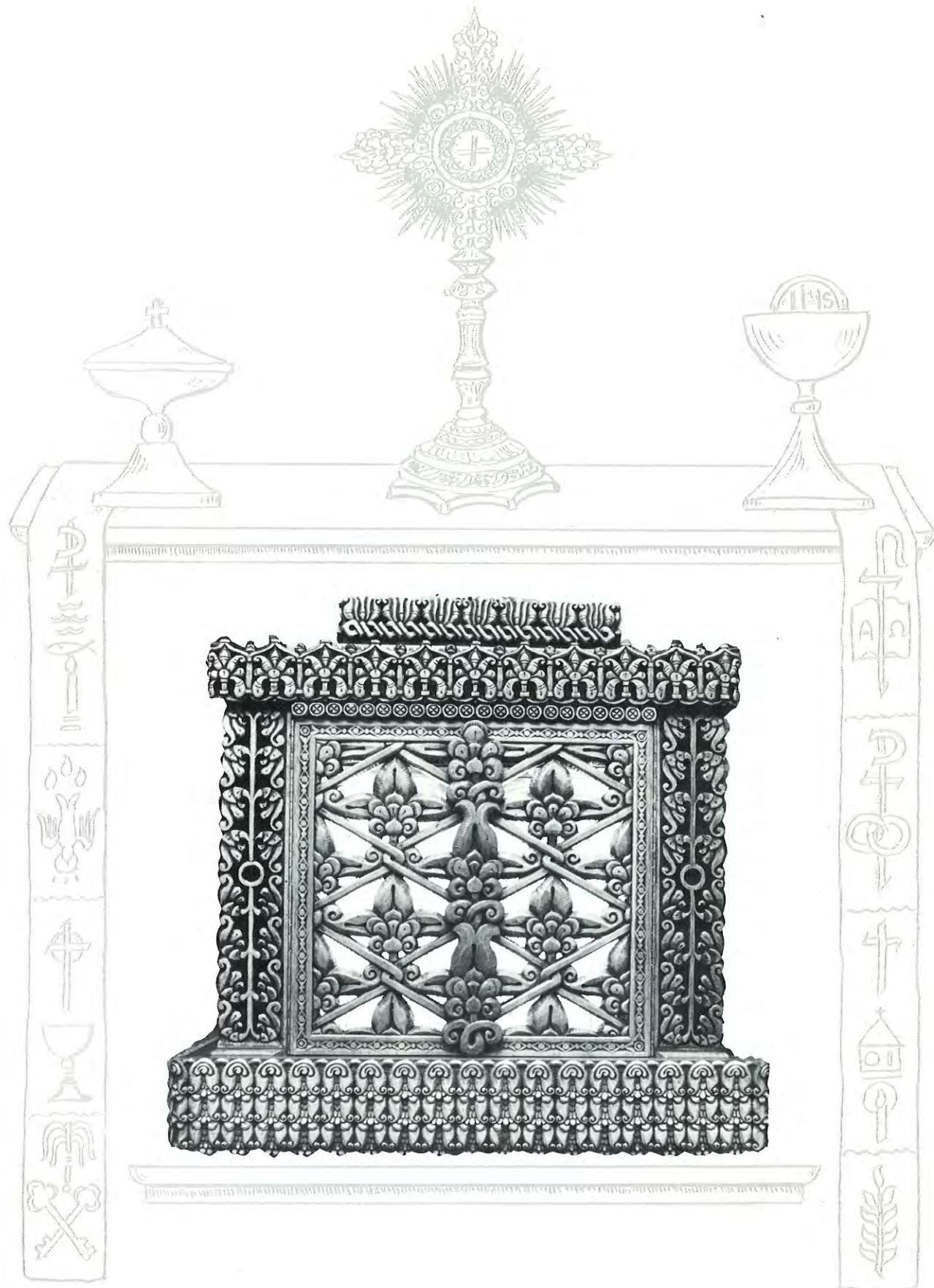
The other side of the tabernacle repeats the ornaments of the opposite side around a "Turul Bird", the insignia of the House of Arpad, the leader who brought the Hungarians into the Carpathian Basin. The design is taken from an archaeological find in Rakamaz. A plate, "Béla Ferencz 1985," substitutes for a signature of the Master Carver on each one of the woodcarvings in the church.

The support of the tabernacle is a rectangular block of wood standing on its small side. On the front appears a large medallion with Christ's head; the rest of the field is filled with Avar motifs, framed by ancient Hungarian decorative designs.

The two sides of the support have identical decorations taken from a purse found at Farkasrét; the medallions, however, are different. On one side we find the facsimile of the Golden Stag found at Zöldhalompusztá standing before the tree of life, while the other side shows a Scythian fish. The fish was a symbol for Jesus Christ the Son of God, already in the first centuries of Christendom, and is repeated here, in the church of St. Stephen's.













Main Altar



On entering the church, the faithful's attention is caught by the *main altar*, whose massive proportions dominate the symphony of woodcarvings in the sanctuary.

Facing the spectator are three panels. Behind the window of the middle panel a copy of the *Holy Crown of Hungary* greets the viewer; the window is encircled by wild flowers beneath a cross in a field of lilies. Under the window there is a heart-shaped medallion with ears of wheat and grapes in a field of apple blossoms.

The panel to the north shows the boat of the *Szeklers* amid raging waters. Christ, illuminated by a ray of light, stills the storm. To the south, *Jesus feeds the crowd of five thousand*. On His left, the artist carved the replica of a gate leading into the courtyards of a Szekler village; in the background, there are two churches. The one behind two towers is the pilgrimage church of Csiksomlyo, a center for Transylvanian Catholics; the spire appearing to Christ's left is typical to most village churches of the region.

On one of the side-panels of the altar in a heart-shaped field the artist sculpted two *lit candles*. Between them, there is a covered chalice topped by the inscription "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti" (In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), and a ciborium, topped by the inscriptions "Gloria in excelsis Deo, Pax vobis, Sursum corda" (Glory to God in the highest, Peace be with you, Lift up your hearts).

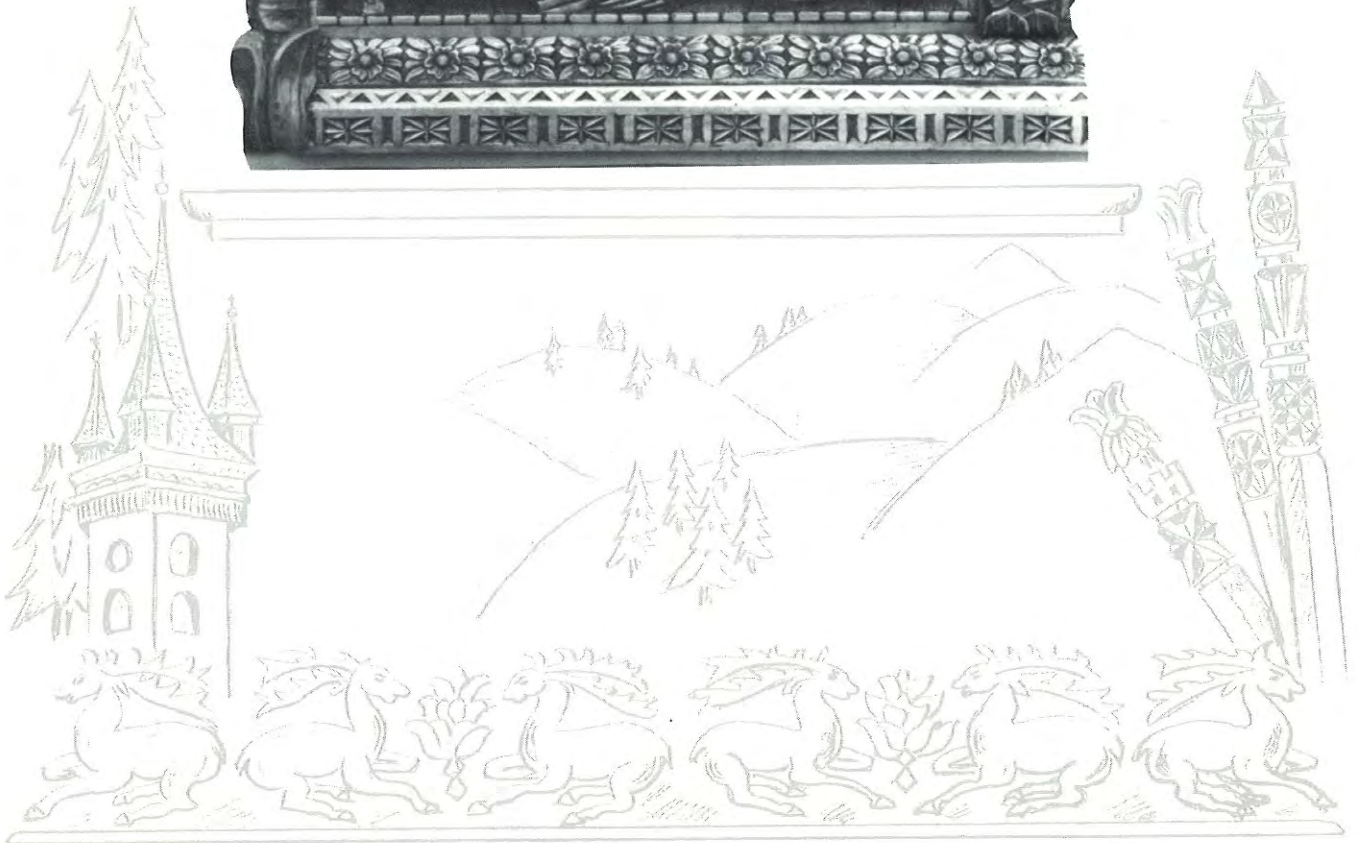
On the other side-panel we see sunflowers and wild flowers amid tendrils winding around the host and chalice beneath the cross.

Three panels decorate the far side of the main altar. The carvings on the middle panel are grouped around the winged head of a seraph, and represent a composite of the decorations on the sarcophagus of St. Stephen, the first king of Hungary.

Around the rosette in the middle of the two identical side panels the design of the carvings is taken from embroideries of the Matyo people who inhabit the northern parts of Hungary.





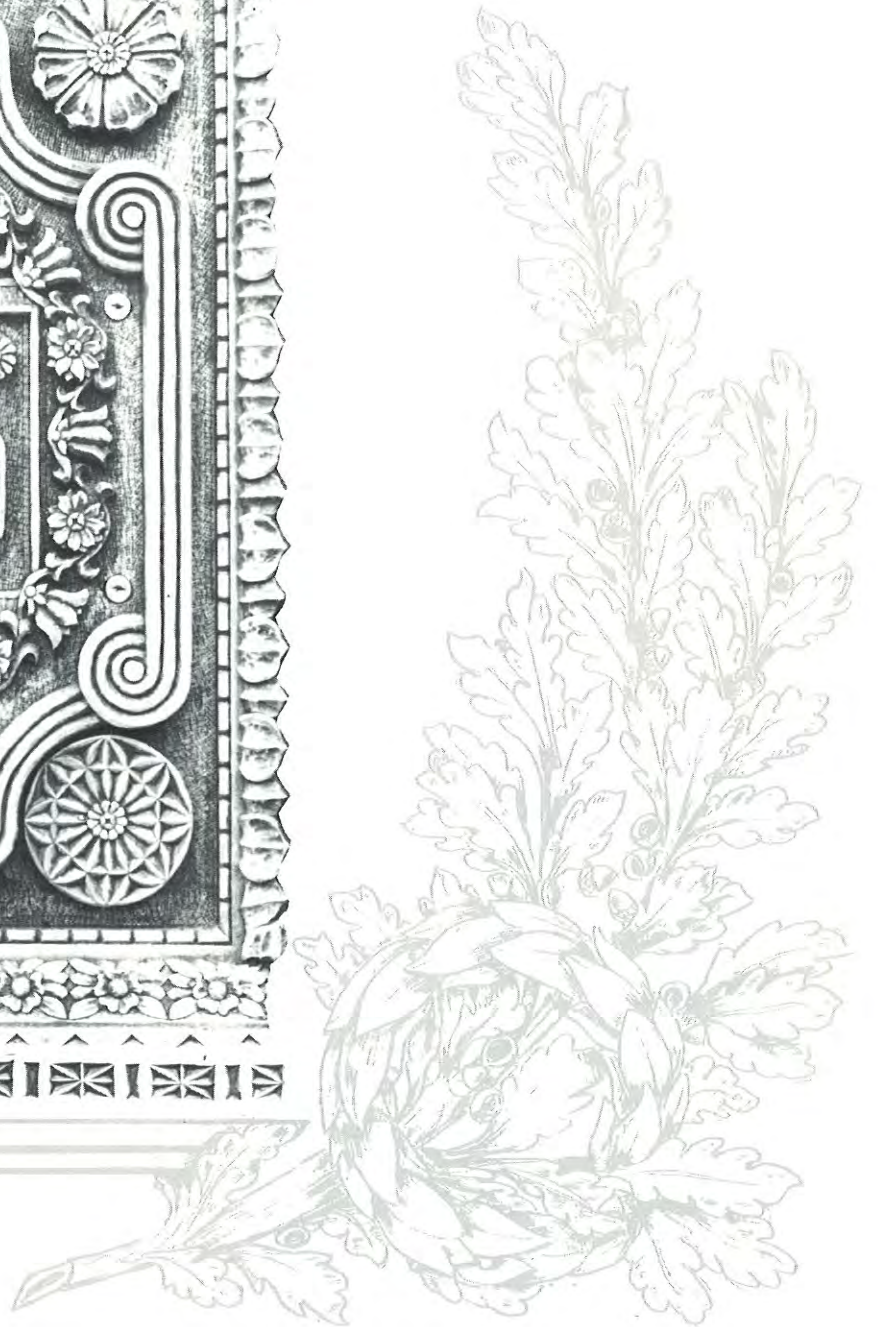




THE ALTAR OF THE SACRAMENT, AS IT APPEARS IN THE CHURCH OF ST. MARTIN, PARIS.







Sacred Heart Shrine

In Holy Week, the Eucharist leaves the tabernacle behind the main altar and is reserved here, at the feet of the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On the front doors of the tabernacle are carved twigs of apple trees in full bloom, flanked and topped by ancient Hungarian decorations. On one side panel a flaming heart is enclosed by laurel leaves; stylized leaves and flowers encircle the carvings.

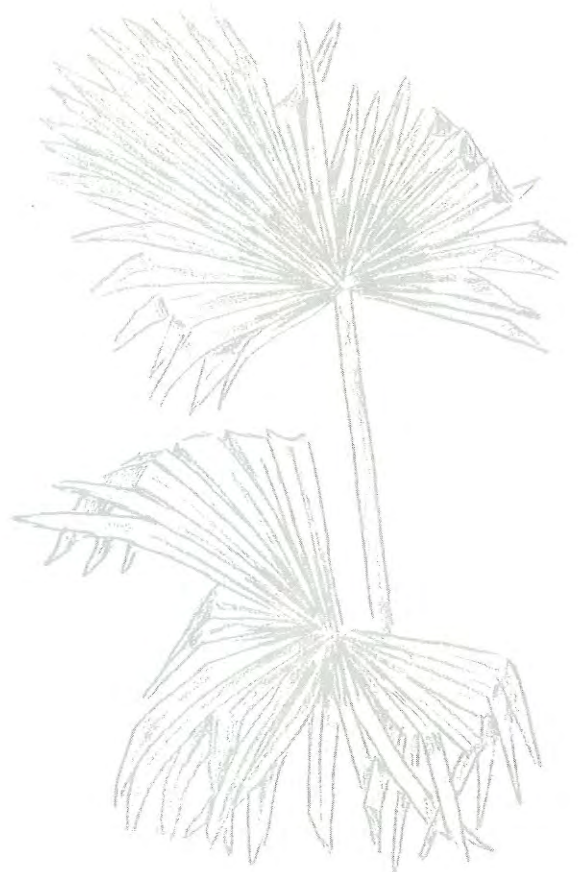


Blessed Mother Shrine

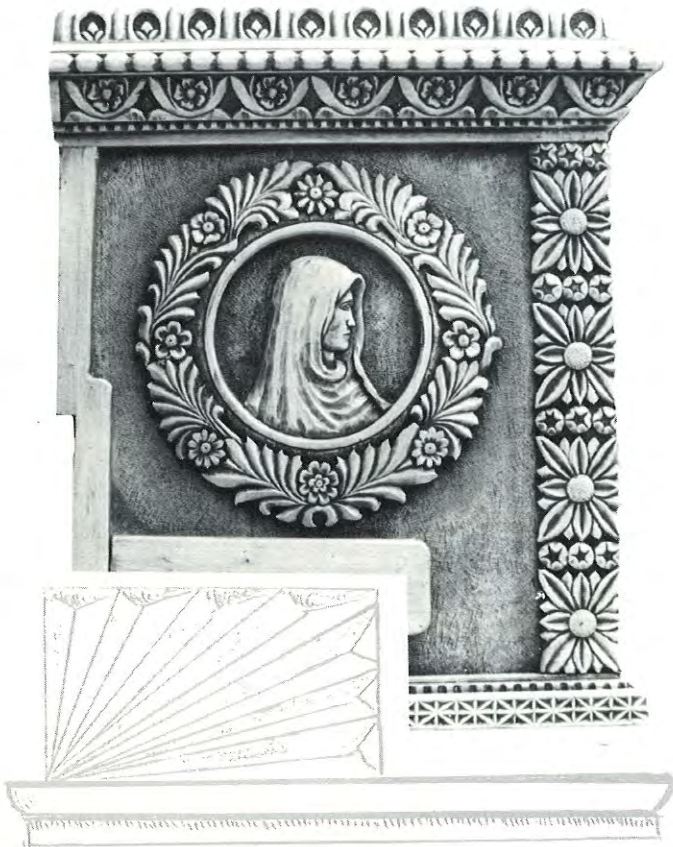
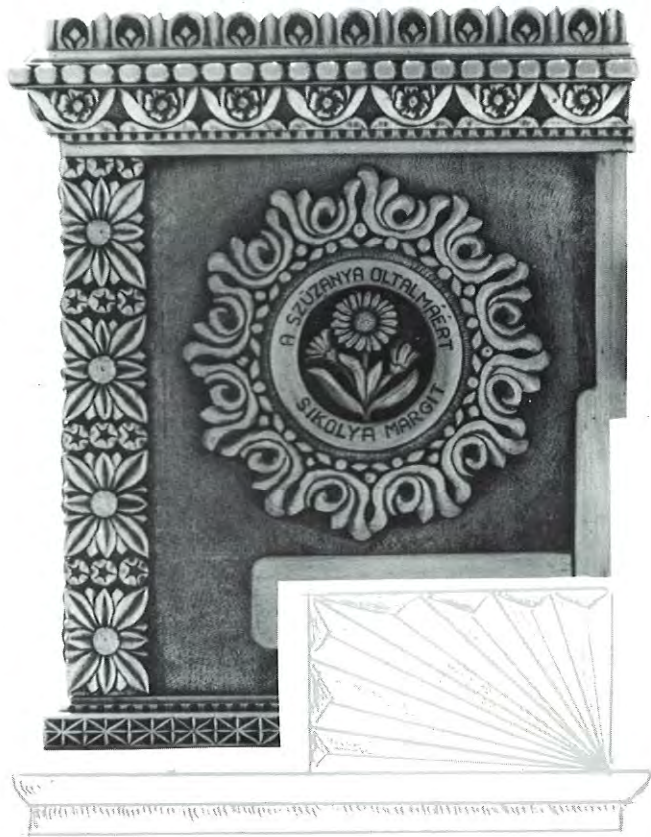
The statue of the Holy Virgin is supported by a tabernacle-like base. On its doors blooming lilies symbolize Mary's chastity; the doorframes show old and modern Hungarian decorative elements.

On one side of the base the same Hungarian motifs frame Mary's profile, carved in wood, while the other side has three flowers encased in the inscription in Hungarian: "A SZÜZANYA OLTAMÁÉRT."











Pulpit

To the left of the viewer, at the front of the sanctuary, stands the hexagonal pulpit. Five panels cover the sides, while the side which is left open gives access to the priest to deliver his sermon.

Starting from the priest's right, the main figure on the first panel is the Great Emblem of Hungary, where the crests of all provinces of Old Hungary are grouped around the Small Emblem of the country. Two angels hold the Holy Crown of Hungary above the Great Emblem.

The next panel shows the head of St. Stephen, the first king of Hungary; two smaller medallions in the upper corners depict the head of Gisella, the wife of St. Stephen, and of Imre, their son.

On top of the next panel there appears a Szekler's gate, in whose opening is written the *motto* of the Order of the Premonstratensians: "AD OMNE BONUM OPUS PARATUS" (Ready to do any good work). The panel itself shows the *Holy Spirit* in the image of a dove, enclosed in a field of floral design.

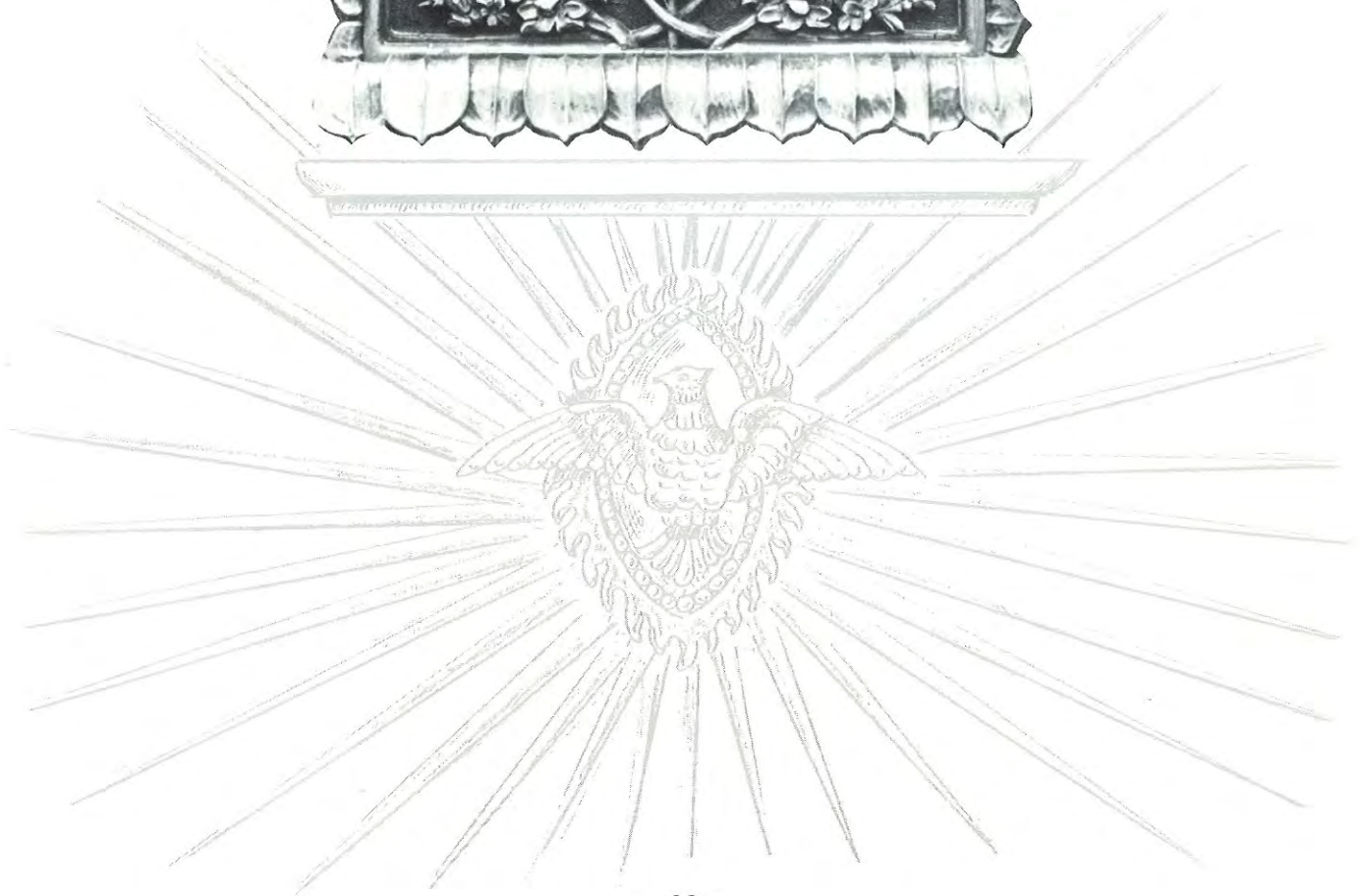
There follow the panel of the *Sacrificial Lamb* amid blossoming lilies, and the panel of the *Holy Eucharist*, which concludes the woodcarvings around the pulpit.

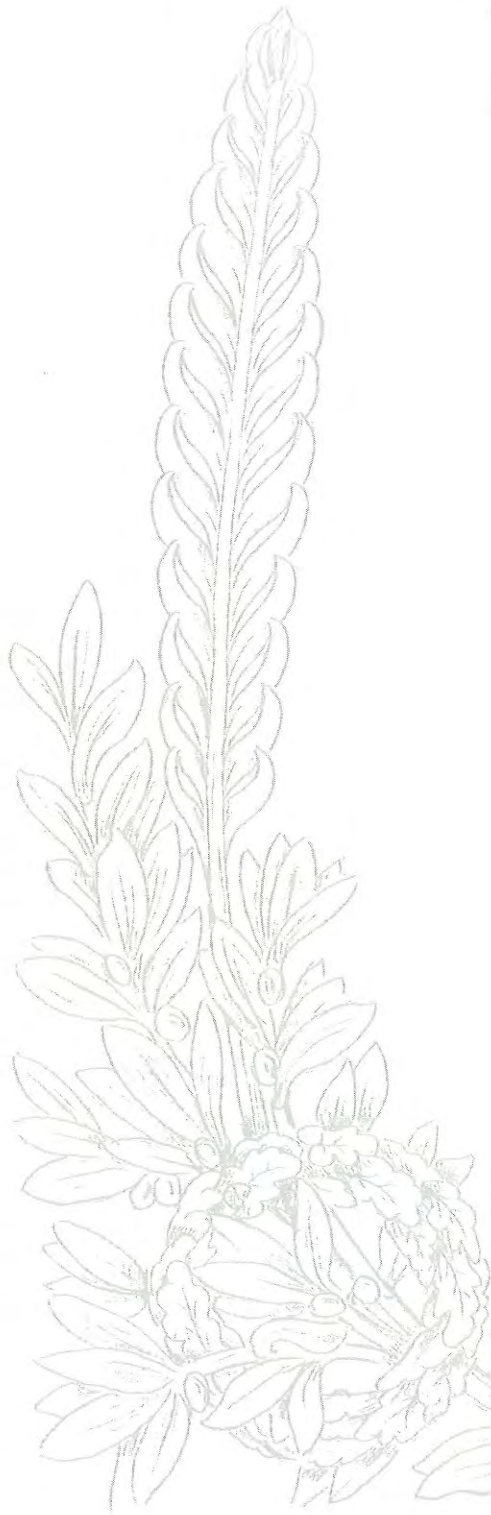
Photographs of carvings in the upper corners of the Holy Spirit panel and of the base of the pulpit show the utmost care with which the Master Carver has shaped the smallest detail of his work.









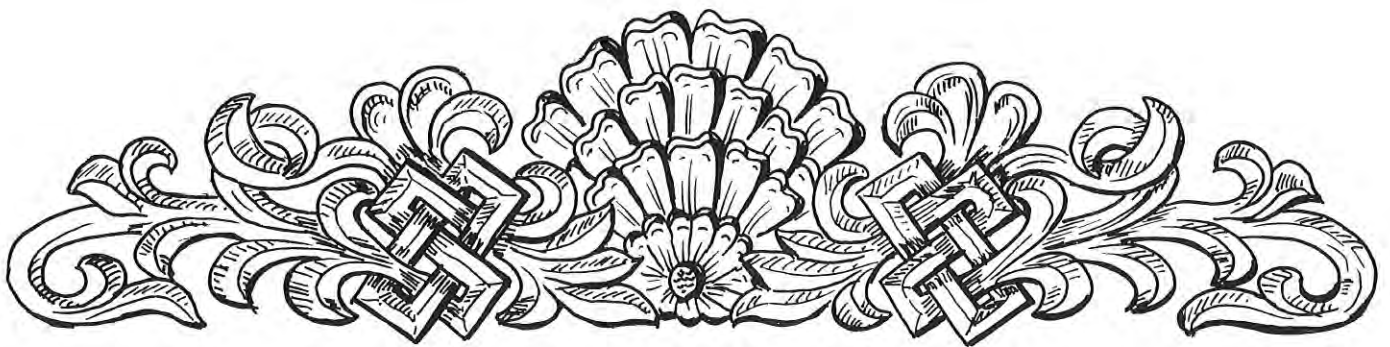






Lectern

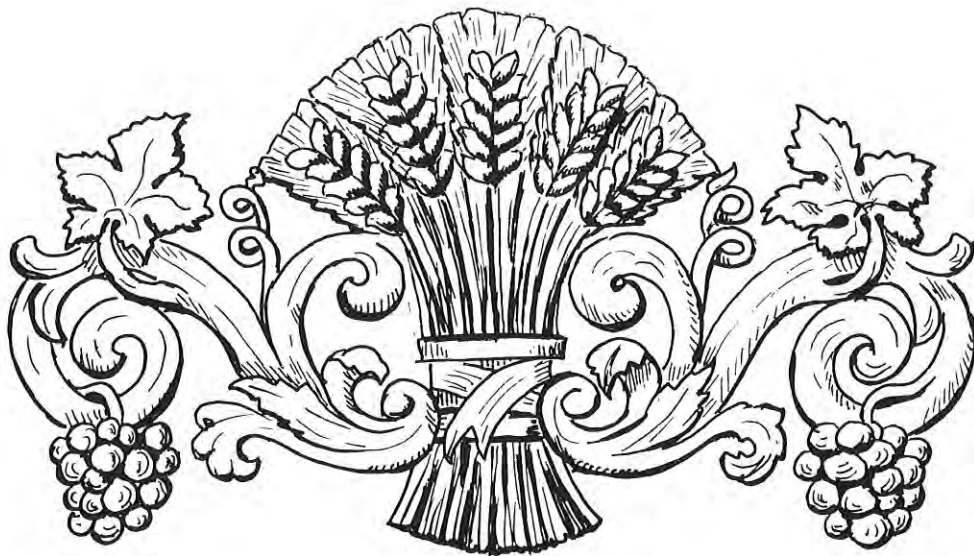
Opposite the pulpit in the sanctuary stands on a raised platform the lectern. Three panels enclose the cantor; on the middle panel Dürer's folded hands invite the faithful to prayer, while the text on top, "CANTATE DOMINO" (Sing to the Lord), reminds them of the function of the cantor.





Credence Table

During the celebration of Holy Mass, wine and water are kept ready on a small table in the corner of the sanctuary. A plain table would disturb the harmony of all the carvings around it, so it, too, is richly decorated. Being too small for large figures, only ornaments of old Hungarian motifs decorate the table.





Chairs



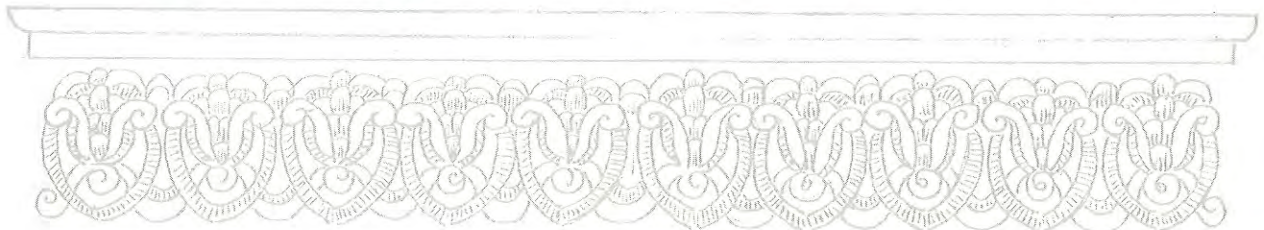
In the sanctuary, during Sunday Mass the celebrant and his assistants sit on chairs while all listen to the readings; these chairs are also used for a short while before the concluding prayer.

The armchair of the celebrant is the most elaborate one. The decoration found on a purse excavated at Farkasrét is imitated near the upper rim of the back of the chair; beneath, a “fleur de lis”, a stylized lily, is encircled by the same motifs.

The parish of St. Stephen’s is entrusted to the Order of the Premonstratensians, and the lily appears in their heraldic arms. Many of the parishioners hail from the Old Kingdom of Hungary; the small emblem of this country and the Holy Crown of Hungary is carved below the lily of the Premonstratensians. The two heraldic arms are embedded in designs taken from a sword found in an ancient grave at Geszteréd. The inscription “URAM JÉZUS LÉGY VELÜNK” (Our Lord Jesus, be with us) encircles the Hungarian emblem. Intertwined tendrils cover the rest of the field; ancient Hungarian motifs embellish the chair’s legs, crossbar, and supports of the armrests.

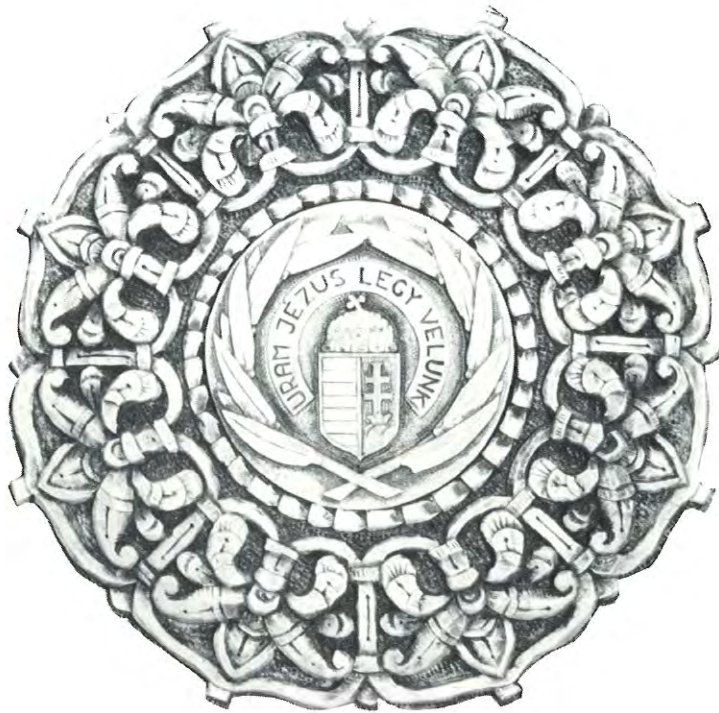
The design of the decoration on all assistants’ chairs is identical, and borrows its forms from embroideries done by housewives in Kalocsa and Matyófold, a city and a region in Hungary, renowned for their beautiful folk art.













Flower Stands

On both sides of the tabernacle stand two columns supporting two flower vases. Avar designs cover the shafts of the stands; on the capitals of the columns the decorative carvings follow Avar models unearthed at Strázsahalom in Hungary.

A wreath of flowers winds up the shafts. The two columns are identical except for the medallions facing the viewer. They are enclosed in ancient Hungarian decorative motifs and bear two inscriptions.

New geometric designs appear on the base of the columns and attest to the inexhaustible richness of the phantasy of the Master Carver.



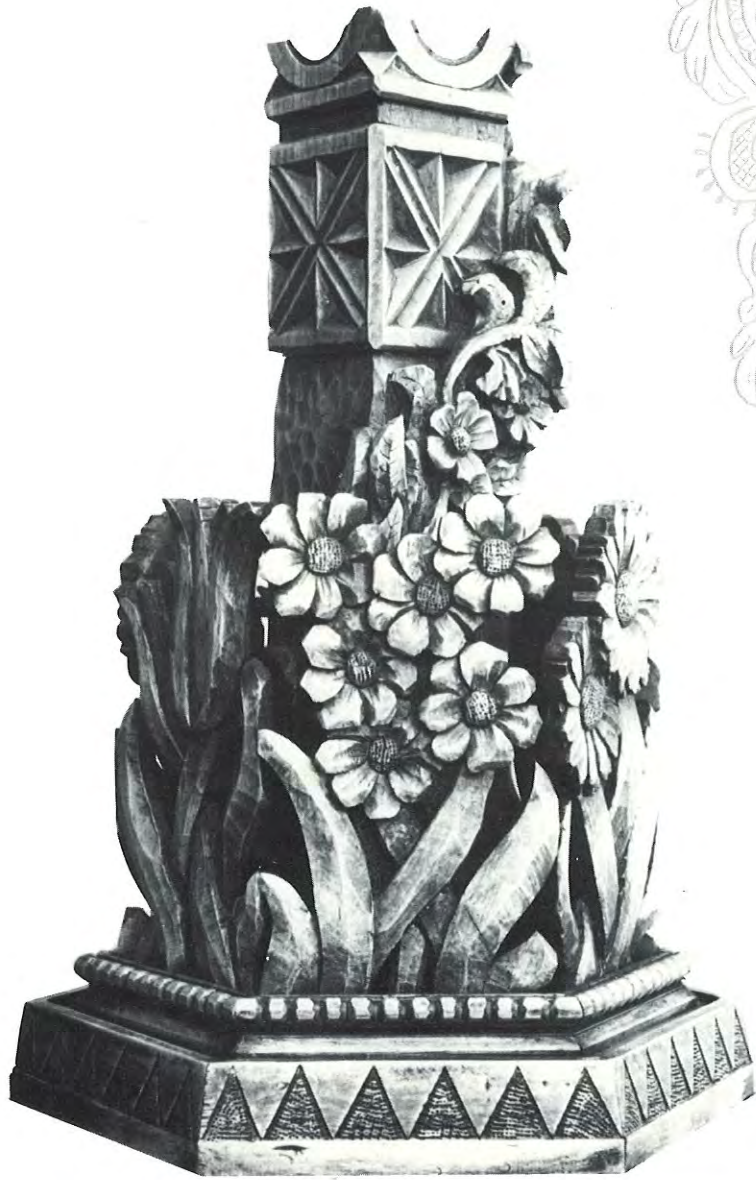
Psalm Board



Above the pulpit hangs the psalm board. An open book with the letters Φ amid floral patterns decorates the top; two burning candles flank the body of the board, which bears the inscription: IN PRINCIPIO ERAT VERBUM ET VERBUM ERAT APUD DEUM" (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God). On Sundays, a blackboard is fitted over the inscription and indicates to the faithful the text of the day's responsorial psalm.

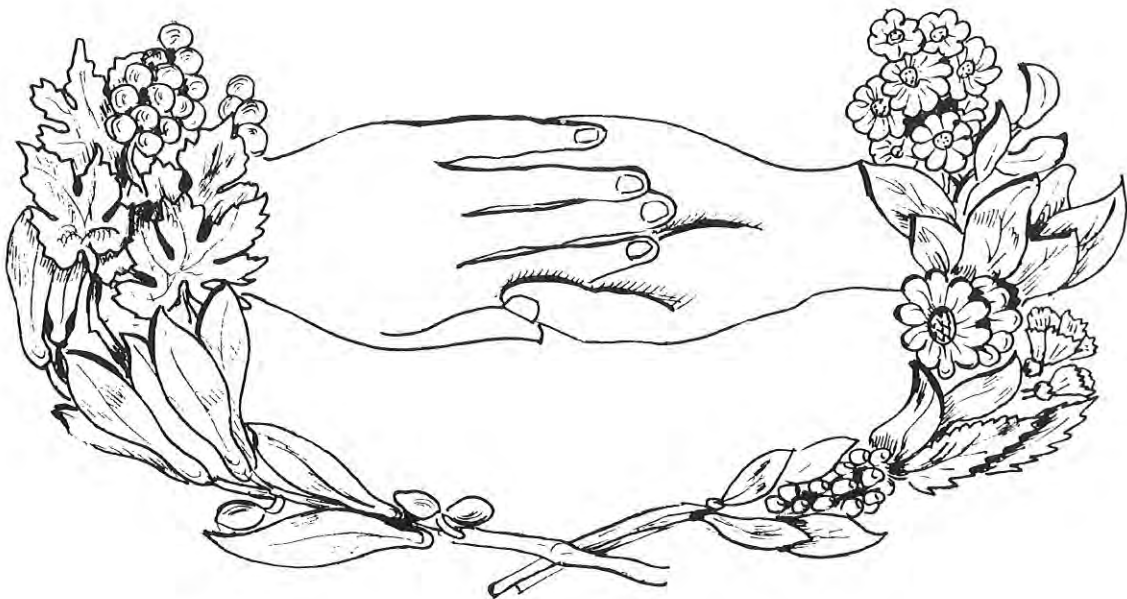






Easter Candle Holder

Easter Sunday celebrates Christ's resurrection from the dead and mankind's awakening from the darkness of paganism to the light of Christianity. To symbolize the meaning of Easter, the artist chose the javelin of a dead warrior which his comrades plant at the head of his burial mound. This he richly decorated with ancient Hungarian motifs, and carved a wreath of living flowers around it to indicate resurrection from the dead, the ultimate hope of every Christian.



The Risen Christ

Before the cross of Jesus' passion hovers the risen Christ, proclaiming victory of life over transient pain.



Utószó



Ferencz Béla egy fél évtizeden át (kezdvén 1981-től) beleálmódta fába keresztény hitét. Gazdagon himezte az oltárra Annak szavait, aki az Út az Igazság és Élet. Virággal, díszsel, régről magasra tört tisztuló vágygal rakta meg a Szent Igék helyét, és építette föl Jézus közénk-jöttére a trónt az átváltozások perceinek megéleséhez.

Az evangélium történetei mai helyzetekre villantanak fényt vésője nyomán. Ott áll Jézus lenye körül az Égből jövőhagyó fény, és e fényben úgy érezzük, hogy a szenvedő világ sohasem marad magára: lett legyen az Jeruzsálem táján vagy a Kárpátok hegyeinek tűrő és kitartó világában. Ezért a mához közelítő fába sugott üzenetért örvendezik a lelkünk.

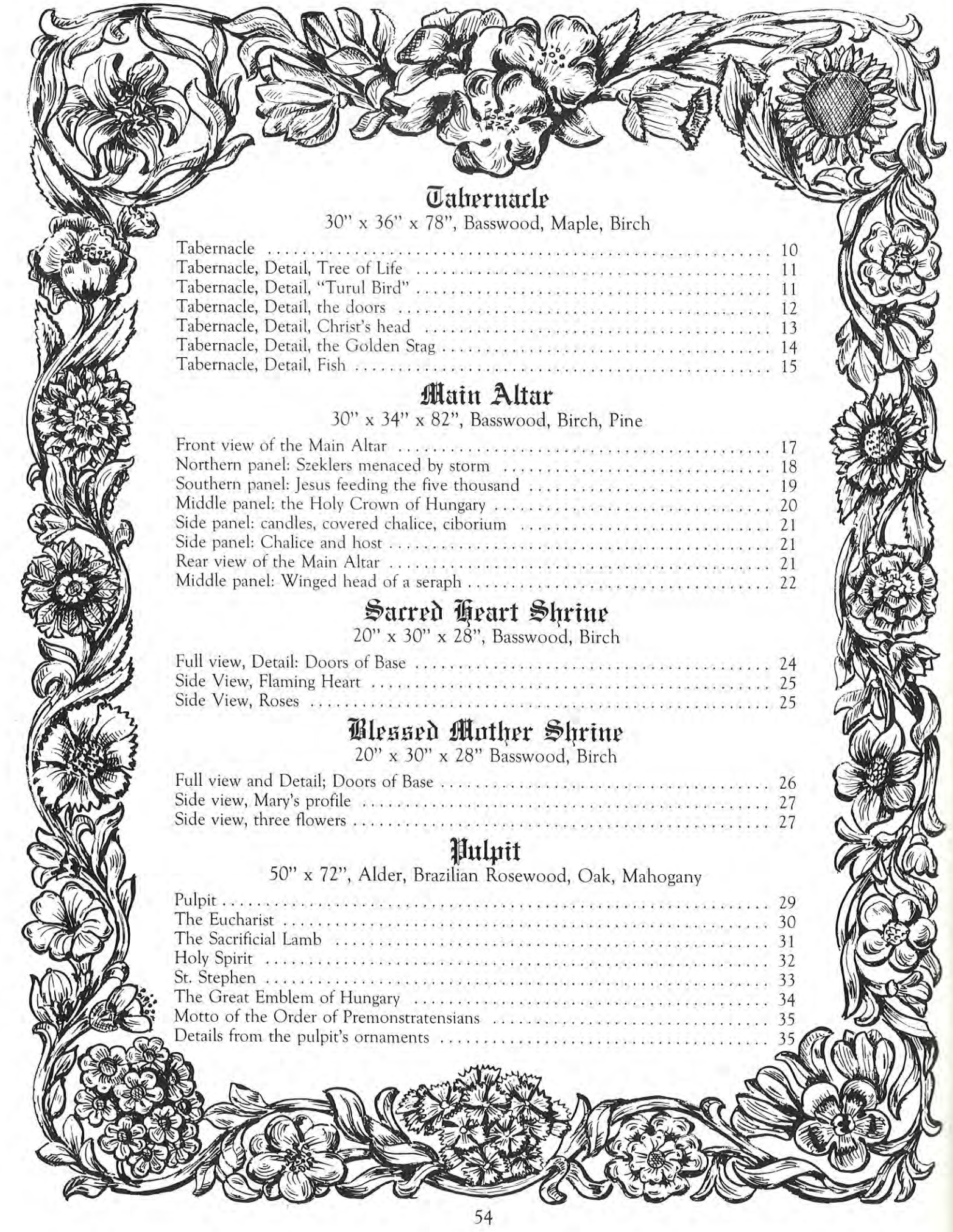
Minden darab ott a szentélyben Jézusért áll. Nem akar mást, mint a lélek szépet-kereső vágyát megfaragra tökéletesebbé és boldogabbá tenni ezt a fáradt világot.

Szimbolikus és kifejező az a sirriól idestilizált kopjafa, amelynek tetejéről imbolygó lánggal köszönt ránk a Föltámadás, a Husvét gyertyalángja: vagy a Tabernákulum örök életet sugalló életfája.

“Olyan jó e templomban lenni, mintha az Égben járnánk már.”

Ezzel a gondalattal indítom e füzetet lelkeket nemesítő útjára.

Fr. Horváth A. Benedek



Tabernacle

30" x 36" x 78", Basswood, Maple, Birch

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Main Altar

30" x 34" x 82", Basswood, Birch, Pine

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Sacred Heart Shrine

20" x 30" x 28", Basswood, Birch

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Blessed Mother Shrine

20" x 30" x 28" Basswood, Birch

Full view and Detail; Doors of Base	26
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Pulpit

50" x 72", Alder, Brazilian Rosewood, Oak, Mahogany

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Lectern

24" x 48", Basswood, Birch

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The Credence Table

20" x 24", Basswood

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Chairs

Celebrant's armchair: 24" x 28" x 54", Alder, Birch

Small chairs: 20" x 20" x 36", Alder

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Flower Stands

18" x 18" x 52", Basswood, Douglas Fir

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Psalm Board

36" x 36", Basswood

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Easter Candle Holder

20" x 62", Douglas Fir, Birch

The Easter Candle Holder	50
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The Risen Christ

10" x 16", Basswood

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