# How to Read Sacred Christian Art

Begin by identifying the details of the following elements:

* Start with the main story or event and the main figures - always read the *Bible* story again checking for its details in the picture. Then use the index of citations in the *Catechism* and find those Scripture references there and look up the paragraphs indicated there that the CCC links to the Scriptures. The Catechism can be thought of as Tradition’s reading of Scripture and so links us to the meanings that the Church has found in the passage and maybe in the painting.
* What is in the center of the painting? Take time also to look at the background.
* Light or light source(s). Where is the light coming from?
* Colours - colours have meaning - for example, in Western Christina art:

- red (passion of Christ - ‘washed in the blood of the lamb’)

- blue (importance, divinity, holiness, grace)

- gold (divinity, heaven, eternity, eternal bliss)

* Perspective/place/positioning.
* For figures, follow the gaze, then look at the hands and the feet.

Then look for signs of the foundational truths of the Catholic faith:

* Signs of the *Blessed Trinity* (for example, symbols of the Holy Spirit – dove, water, fire…) and images of Christ (lamb, lion…) and the Father (light, hand…)
* *Incarnation* - that is Christ as human and as Divine.
* Signs of the *Paschal Mystery* (passion, death and resurrection of Christ)
* *Ecclesial/Eucharistic signs* - especially:

- Church buildings and architecture (Church),

- bread, wine, wheat, grapes, chalice, book, acolytes, gestures of Jesus, white cloth (Eucharist)

* *Salvation history*

- creation, fall and promise of merciful redemption - Old Testament

- fulfilment of all promises- in Christ,

- journey towards completion - in the Church

* Look at how the dignity of the human person is presented – look for virtues, for faith, hope and love, for wisdom, redemptive suffering, fruits of the Spirit

Finally, if possible, check on original situation and usage, especially if it was an altarpiece. That signals Eucharistic meaning.