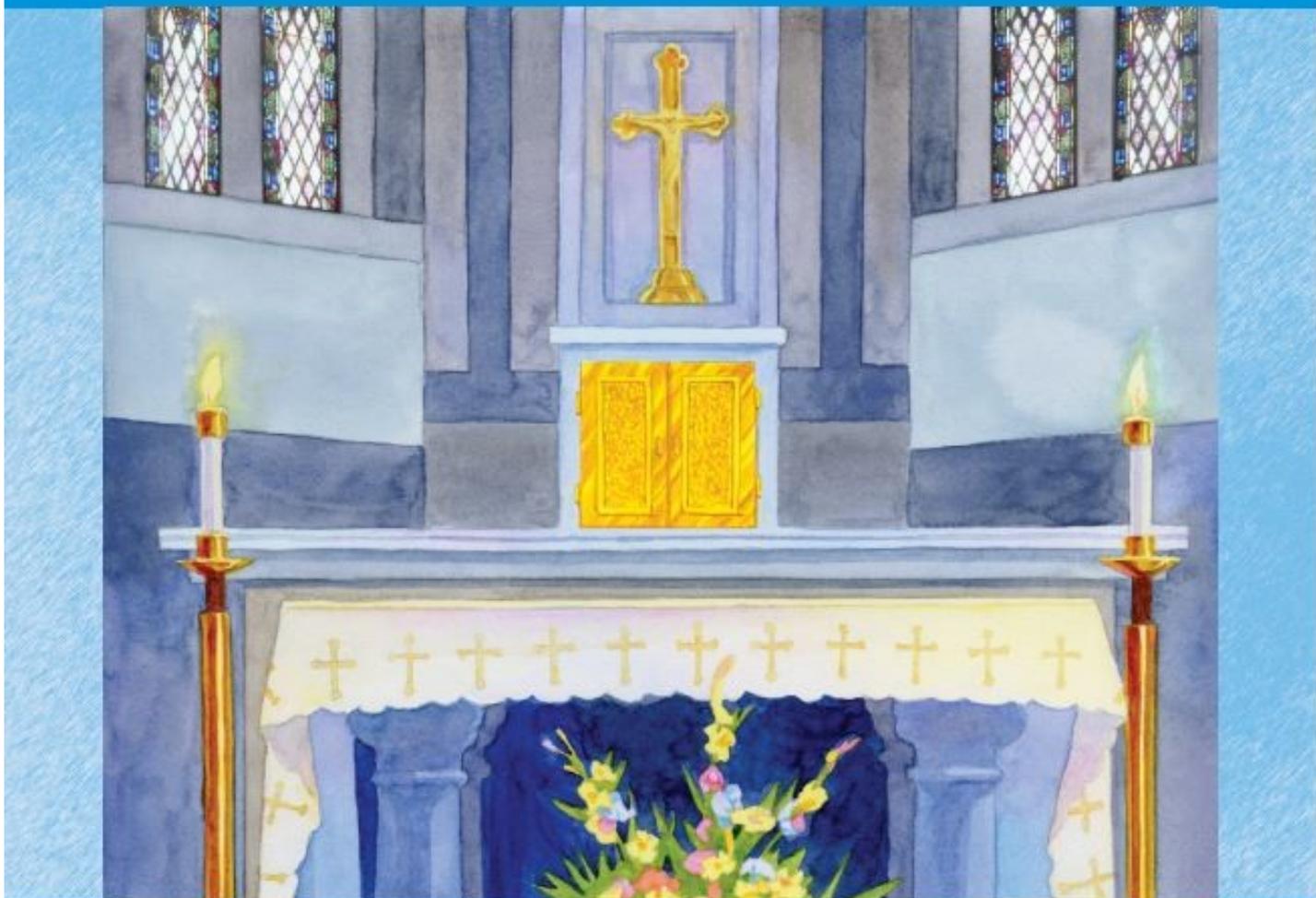




BULLETIN INSERTS FOR THE  
LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE PARISH



# The Parish Church and Its Furnishings

Paul Turner



**Altar**—The altar is a fixed, freestanding table, the central focus for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is both altar and table. As altar, it is the place of sacrifice, where Christ, who was sacrificed on the Cross for us, becomes present again under the sacramental form of bread and wine. As table, it gathers the people of God to share the Body and Blood of Christ, their holiest meal, which recalls the Passover and grants a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. The altar is traditionally made of stone, but it may be constructed of another solid, well-crafted material such as wood or metal, which establishes its beauty and dignity. Its

rectangular shape suited the liturgy before the Second Vatican Council, when the Scriptures were read from the sides of the altar. Today's altar is often more square to accommodate the priest, the bread, and the wine. But it should always be clear among church furnishings that the altar is the center of focus. When the altar of a church is consecrated, the bishop anoints its top with Chrism. Chrism is the perfumed oil we reserve for the sacraments that are celebrated only once in one's lifetime: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. The consecration of an altar sets it apart permanently for its sacred purpose. In conjunction with this anointing, the altar also represents Jesus, whose title "Christ" means, "anointed." The proper reverence upon entering a church is to bow to the altar, unless the tabernacle is centrally located, in which case one genuflects to the tabernacle. In the past, the altar was located against the rear wall, and the priest celebrated Mass with his back to the people. Additional altars were often located in chapels around the church, permitting other priests to celebrate separate Masses at the same time. Today a church should have one altar, free standing so the priest may walk completely around it. It should be permanently

**Altar Cloths**—The altar used for Mass is covered with a cloth. At home and in restaurants, we often cover our tables, especially for a banquet or meal of some importance. Similarly, the altar is covered because of "the banquet in which the Body and Blood of the Lord are offered" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 304). But the altar is covered for another reason: "Out of reverence for the celebration of the memorial of the Lord" (ibid.). We dignify the altar where we will solemnly remember the mystery of Jesus' Death and Resurrection. When a new altar is dedicated for a church, it is sprinkled with holy water, smeared with Chrism, incensed, and then covered with a cloth. Many of these symbols also appear in the baptismal liturgy, suggesting that the altar is covered in a garment just as the faithful are, as a sign of eternal life. There are no rules governing the material to be used. The size, shape, and decoration of the cloth are to be "in keeping with the altar's structure" (ibid.). At least one white cloth must be used. In the United States, cloths of other colors may also adorn the altar, but the topmost must be white. It may cover the top only; it need not dangle over the other cloths. After the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the altar cloths are completely removed. The Good Friday liturgy begins with a bare altar. A cloth is placed on the altar just before The Communion Rite, but it is removed again immediately after the Good Friday service, and the altar stands bare until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.



**Ambo**—Ambo, lectern, pulpit—it goes by many names but it serves one purpose, to mount the Liturgy of the Word. In some denominations, the ambo dominates the worship space. Because the Bible alone governs their system of belief, they give its proclamation primacy of place in the arrangement of the sanctuary. In Catholic churches, the altar typically dominates the sanctuary because our tradition has emphasized the Eucharist as the climax of our worship. However, this worthy emphasis sometimes caused us to slight the role of the Word of God, and our ambos have suffered from sapless designs and insignificant placement. For centuries, the priest used to read the Scriptures himself at the altar. Altars had an "Epistle side" and a "Gospel side." Now the Scriptures have their own place, the ambo. (In Greek, the word originally referred to a platform or stage.) The ambo's specific purpose provides a place for the Scriptures, the Responsorial Psalm and the Easter Proclamation (the Exsultet, proclaimed

once a year, only at the Easter Vigil). It may also be used for the Homily and the Universal Prayer (the Prayer of the Faithful). But that's it! It may be used by choir to lead responsorial song. The priest should pray from his chair, and the songs and announcements belong at a stand in a different location. We reserve the ambo for the word of God. Consequently, the ambo should look special. It enjoys a fixed place in the sanctuary, not a portable status subject to removal or displacement. Too often, we obscure the ambo with decorations and banners, as if it were merely a hook for hanging pictures rather than the home for the word of God. It demands dignity of place, room for candles if desired, and a location where all can see and hear the reader. Microphones of good quality are essential in most churches. A church's best mikes belong with the Scriptures, not just with the musicians. The ambo is the primary place from which we hear the Word of God and it deserves our sacred respect



**Ambry**—An ambry is the cabinet where holy oils are stored. Every church has one, though many people don't know what it's called. We keep three oils there—the oil for anointing the sick, the oil for anointing catechumens, and Chrism for Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, and the consecration of altars and walls. The bishop blesses these oils in large containers at the Chrism Mass every year. Then they are poured into smaller vessels and brought to all the parishes of the diocese. The ambry should be replenished with fresh oil every year. The old oil may be burned, possibly in the Easter fire. The shape and size of ambries varies quite a bit. The church gives very few specific instructions about its appearance. After the Chrism Mass, the

bishop is to instruct the presbyters in the sacristy about the "reverent use and safe custody of the holy oils" (Ceremonial of Bishops, 294). After a priest anoints the sick, he is instructed to return the extra oil to a place "where it is kept with proper respect" (Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum, 21). According to canon law, pastors should carefully keep all the oils "diligently with proper care" (can. 847 §2). With those vague instructions, the design for an ambry needs only to be appropriate for its sacred contents and safe from vandalism, theft, or some other harm.

(**Ambry** cont.) The ambry may be visible or concealed. Many churches have an ambry built into a wall of the sacristy. Accessible to priests, but virtually invisible to people, the ambry was often located there, where it would not intrude on the Mass. However, since ambries were kept locked with a key that could easily be lost, many priests have simply kept the oils in a sacristy closet or safe. More and more, Catholic parishes are building beautiful ambries and placing them where they can be seen. We have a great respect for the sacraments in which we use these holy oils. By keeping them in dignified vessels and displaying them in a handsome, well-lit case, the faithful can better regard their significance. Canon law also permits a priest to carry the Oil of the Sick with him in case of necessity. Most priests carry a small container in the glove compartment of their car.

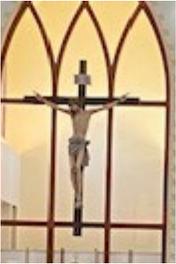
**The Book of the Gospels** is a collection of Gospel passages proclaimed at Mass. It is an excerpt of the lectionary, usually containing the Gospels for Sundays and solemnities, and decorated with dignity. It does not contain the entire texts of all four Gospels. The words of Jesus are highly esteemed by Christians, so the Book of the Gospels receives more respect than other volumes of the lectionary. It is not required to use of the Book of the Gospels at Mass, but it is recommended. This book—not the lectionary—may be carried in the Entrance Procession by a deacon, or by a reader when there is no deacon. The minister walks with the book slightly elevated and places it upon the altar, which represents Christ, the living stone (1 Peter 2:4). This placement unifies two primary symbols for Christ from the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the Gospel Acclamation, the deacon or priest goes to the altar, lifts the Book of the Gospels, and carries it to the ambo. He may incense the book after announcing the evangelist. He proclaims the Gospel and then kisses the book. If a bishop presides, the deacon who proclaims the Gospel carries the Book of the Gospels to the bishop for him to kiss. The bishop may then grasp the book and bless the people by making the Sign of the Cross with it. Afterward, the book may be placed on the credence table or in some other worthy place. During the ordination of a deacon, the Book of the Gospels is placed briefly in his hands. During the ordination of a bishop, the Book of the Gospels is briefly laid upon his head

**Candles** —We use candles at every liturgical service as a sign of reverence and festivity. They bring honor to God and joy to our celebration. At Mass, candles may attend the Cross in the Entrance Procession. The servers who carry them place them on or near the altar or on a side table. Candles may number two, four, or six. A seventh may be lit for Masses with the bishop. They rest in any arrangement suitable to the design of the altar and the sanctuary. They should look nice up there, but they should never obstruct our view of what is placed upon the altar or what takes place around it. At church dedications, the walls are adorned with four or twelve crosses, each with a holder for a candle. Lighting these candles, especially on the date of the anniversary of its dedication, recalls the solemnity of the Church's origins. Although the candle that burns by the tabernacle must consist of oil or wax, there are no restrictions about the other candles. Formerly they were pure beeswax. As the church spread to areas where that material was difficult to obtain, we lowered the content to fifty-one percent beeswax, but we no longer require even that. The bishops of a conference may select other materials native to their region. Such candles should dignify the value of the celebration without producing an excess of smoke, illness to worshipers, or stains on the cloths. Originally, candles proved practical: they gave light and warmth for those gathered to pray. Today we rely on electricity and gas. Still, candles have remained because they offer a natural symbol of the power of God to break darkness and dispel chill. In our homes, candles have also moved from the practical to the symbolic. They cast a romantic spell; they enhance intimacy and vulnerability. We still use them when the electrical power goes out. They subtly remind us that what we call "power" still has its weakness. Our Church forbids electrical candles except for Masses onboard ships, where regular ones may be scarce. The frail flame of the candle imitates our flickering faith, which burns in honor of God, enhances celebration, and spends itself to light the way for others.

**Church Exterior** —On the outside, Catholic church buildings look different from one another, but they have many common features. Many people have a mental image of what a church should look like, and they are satisfied or disappointed when approaching one for the first time. There are no rules governing the exterior appearance of churches. Some look as plain as a storefront. Others look as breathtaking as a cathedral. The appearance of a church exterior depends on the function of spaces inside, the demands of architecture and the search for beauty. Hundreds of years ago, architects discovered that Gothic (pointed) arches were stronger than rounded ones, which permitted the height of churches to increase. Many beautiful churches and cathedrals were built with this new technology. Although height can be attained in other ways today, many people associate Gothic arches with what a church should look like, but genuine designs are better than artificial ones. As the art of stained glass developed, it became popular with churches. Images depicted in windows taught people about their religion. The colors made a church interior look beautiful on a sunny day. The overall effect created a sense of awe conducive to prayer. Towers elevate the bells used to summon people to worship. A higher bell can be heard at farther distances than a lower one. Some churches are surmounted by a dome, which imitates the vault of the heavens. Others are topped with a steeple that lifts a cross on high. No matter what the outside looks like, the most important feature is the door. Church exteriors should invite you in. When you cross the threshold, you pass into a place designated for communion with God

**Church Interior**—On the inside, Catholic church buildings look different from one another, but they have many common features. Upon walking through the doorway of a church, you should be able to notice several things.

- **Narthex:** Many churches bring you first into a narthex or gathering area. There you can meet other people or view bulletins and posters.
- **Nave:** The body of the church is the nave. The word is related to “navy” because a church interior somewhat resembles a ship. The congregation assembles in the nave.
- **Sanctuary:** The place where most of the action takes place is the sanctuary. It is set apart from the nave by its height and spaciousness. The three principal furnishings of the sanctuary are the chair, where the priest stands to begin the service; the ambo, where the Liturgy of Word unfolds; and the altar, the center of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- **Choir:** There may be another area designated for musicians. In older churches, musicians entered a loft behind the congregation, because they created music to be heard, not shared. Today a choir area is more commonly visible to the entire assembly, where the musicians can better lead everyone in singing.
- **Sacristy:** The vessels, vestments, and other items needed for Mass are stored in one or more sacristies. These are not readily visible upon entering a church, but they are essential for the smooth flow of worship.
- **Other items:** Statues, Stations of the Cross, votive candles, the tabernacle, and other items may be seen in the church. These occupy devotional areas that are not essential for the celebration of the Mass, but they are part of the environment one customarily sees on entering a Catholic church.



**Cross**—A cross often dominates the sanctuary of a Catholic church. We trace its lines at the beginning and end of every Mass and we adore it every Good Friday. On solemn occasions, we incense the cross—even if it stands separate from the altar—to signify our respect for the suffering and death of Jesus. For centuries, the location of the cross never varied in a Catholic church. It rested on or above the altar against the back wall. Then in the 1960s, we allowed the altar to come forward. This happily brought priest and people face to face around the table of the Eucharist, but the cross needed a new home. Resting on the altar or suspended above it, the cross might obstruct everybody’s view. Besides, the top of the altar itself is reserved for the most important elements of the Mass, bread and wine and whatever else is absolutely necessary, like the book from which the priest prays. The liturgy permits the use of a processional cross.

If your parish wishes, you may lead the Entrance Procession into the church with the cross flanked by candles. Incense may prepare its way. When the cross leads the procession, it animates the first action of the Mass, even before we mark ourselves with its sign at the first words we speak. Once inside, the cross may stand somewhere near the altar. Its position may vary, depending on where other objects occupy the sanctuary. Our Church urges us to avoid duplicating images where we pray—having two or more statues of the same saint. For that reason, parishes that elect to lead processions with the cross need not provide another cross on the wall of the church. The processional cross that first draws our eyes in the service keeps them focused on Christ throughout. The main cross of the church should carry the image of Christ Crucified. A good cross is one that brings harmony to the sanctuary and inspires devotion among the people

**Flowers**—Flowers that decorate a church beautify the sacred place. Flowers please the eye and the nose, engaging our senses in the wonder of creation. Flowers may draw attention to some object or to the sacred space they occupy. If your church has a gathering area between the front door and the worship space, a large floral arrangement on a central table may greet you as you enter. Some churches keep vases of flowers near statues of beloved saints, in wall niches or on shelves. You may also see flowers adorning the altar, ambo, or font. Flowers can draw attention to themselves, but they should not distract people from the sacred objects they adorn. For example, the top of the altar should be free from flowers, lest they vie for attention with the bread and wine. If placed before the ambo, they should not obstruct anyone’s view of the reader. Floral arrangements need not be restricted to the sanctuary or devotional spaces. Flowers may decorate the area where the assembly gathers. But such arrangements should not block access to the sanctuary or the aisles of the church. Some occasions call for special decorations. Advent wreaths, evergreens, palm branches, and lilies evoke the mysteries of the liturgical year. At weddings and funerals, flowers cheer the heart and comfort the soul. When arranging decorations for these events, be mindful of those already in place for the season. During Lent, for example, many churches prefer to keep the sanctuary rather bare. Real flowers always support worship of the Creator better than artificial flowers do.



**Font**—The Baptismal font is the womb from which Christians are born. As physical birth happens only once, so does our spiritual birth. Although fonts originated as part of the furnishings for cathedrals, today virtually every Christian church building maintains a font to facilitate the welcome of new members. Fonts have many traditional shapes. Some are round, recalling a mother’s womb. Some are cruciform, showing our sharing in the death of Christ. Others are tomb-shaped for the same reason. Still others form an octagon, reminding us that Christ rose on the “eighth day” of the week, a day outside normal time, like the eternity we will share with him through our Baptism. The font may be placed in one of many

traditional locations. Some are in a room to themselves. Originally, fonts were in separate buildings. At the Easter Vigil, the assembly would go out to the font to attend the Baptisms, and then bring the newly baptized into the church for the Eucharist. Some of our fonts, in rooms by themselves, keep this tradition, but small rooms make it difficult for the assembly to celebrate with the newly baptized. For this reason, other fonts are placed in or near the sanctuary for better visibility, or near the door of the church to symbolize our entry into the Christian community. In churches where the faithful enter each Sunday past the baptistry, they may use it to sign themselves with holy water. We remind ourselves of our Baptism in Christ each time we enter our churches. Some parishes have a movable font—they wheel it in for Baptisms and wheel it out afterwards. It helps visibility but lacks the reverence of a stable place. Many fonts are large enough for full immersion of the candidate. Others are small to accommodate pouring water over the head of an infant. Both forms of Baptism are permitted, but a renewed interest in immersion in the universal church is introducing larger fonts in full view of the assembly, suitable for fully symbolizing our death and rising in Christ. Some fonts resemble fountains, with flowing water even when Baptisms are not celebrated.

**Gathering Space (Narthex)**— When you walk into someone’s home, you expect to find inside the door a living area suitable for conversation. The rooms designated for special usage—the kitchen, den, or bedrooms—are usually deeper in. In church design, the areas set aside for special usage—the sanctuary, nave, and sacristy—are usually deeper in. Just inside the main door of the church, though, you can often find a place suitable for conversation. The early Church called it the narthex. Later churches call it the vestibule. Today many parishes are calling it the gathering space. The earliest Christian basilicas established a narthex where ministers forming processions could prepare. A cathedral church today should have one for the same reason. A procession begins smoothly when the ministers who carry incense, cross, candles, and Gospel book have a suitable space for organization. The vestibule in many churches is often a room of small scale. It may hold bulletin boards and tables for announcements. It offers a place to let umbrellas dry. A small vestibule assists those who need a practical place to pause before entering or exiting the building. By contrast, a gathering space’s larger area allows people to meet, greet, and mill around before and after the church service. Located inside the main doors, it allows people to make the transition from world to worship. (In some climates, a landscaped area outdoors may serve this purpose.) The space is designed with socializing in mind. Because of their size, some gathering spaces get cluttered with too many bulletin boards, tables, and activities. Their main purpose is not to provide stations for advertising the parish, but to help the community assemble. In churches with a gathering space, you are invited to stop inside the door to visit with others. Once you establish relationships, you have prepared yourself to join people in prayer upon entering the body of the church.

**IHS**—The letters IHS sometimes appear among the symbols adorning church furnishings. They draw the believer’s attention to Christ and his cross. The letters have two meanings, one in Latin and the other in Greek. According to one early biography of Constantine, the emperor was praying to the false god of his family before an important battle in Rome. He saw a vision: a cross before the sun with the words “In this sign, conquer.” Constantine ordered the shields of his warriors painted with the cross of Christ. He won the battle and became a Christian. The cross of Christ, to which Constantine attributed his military victory, is the emblem of victory over death for every Christian. The first three of the words in the emperor’s vision are rendered in Latin as *In hoc signo*. The first letter of each produced the monogram IHS, a symbol still used to proclaim the power of the cross of Christ. The Greek and Latin alphabets are different. The capital letters for I are identical. In English this letter may be rendered as an I or a J, depending on the context. The Greek capital S (Σ) is fairly similar to the one used in Latin and English. The Latin letter shaped “H” is equivalent to the same English letter, but the Greek letter shaped “H” is equivalent to an E in Latin and English. The Greek letters IHS, then, are read “IES” in Latin or “JES” English. They are the first three letters of the name Jesus. These symbolic letters recall the conversion of the emperor who helped spread the Christian faith, as well as the very name of Son of God

**Kneelers**— Most Catholic churches have cushioned kneelers attached to the back of one pew for the use of those seated in the pew behind. Some churches have floor cushions. Others have wooden kneelers without cushions. Still others have people kneel on the floor. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal asks people to kneel at times during the Mass, but it never says on what they kneel. Most churches use kneelers. Kneelers are hinged. Up, they create more room when you enter, sit, or exit. Down, they help you kneel comfortably. Some people grab the kneeler; others tip it down or up with their toe. One kneeler may accommodate several people. One person can move it on behalf of those who share it, but others may assist. There are no rules governing kneelers, but several customs have evolved. Kneelers are usually up before Mass. Catholics enter, take their place, lower a kneeler, and pray privately to prepare for Mass. Then they sit down and put the kneeler up. During Mass in the United States, people kneel after the Holy, Holy, Holy. Some raise the kneelers when they stand after the Great Amen. Others leave them down because in the United States people are usually asked to kneel again after the Lamb of God. At Communion people usually raise the kneelers so that worshipers can safely exit the pew and return to their places. Upon returning, many worshipers lower the kneeler again for private prayer. Then they usually sit and put the kneeler up. In some places, people stand throughout Communion, sitting down together only after all have received. There, kneelers are not needed for Communion. When lifting and lowering kneelers, courteous worshipers try not to make much noise.

**Mensa** —The top of the altar used at Mass is called the mensa, the Latin word for “table.” A more precise translation would be “tabletop.” When a new altar is first put into use, the bishop anoints the mensa with Chrism. It becomes holy, and it is to be respected at all times. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says the mensa is traditionally made of stone, but in the United States wood may be used (301). It should be covered with a white cloth (304), and the only objects set on top of it are to be the books, vessels, and linens necessary for the Mass (73, 306). Even floral decorations should be set around the altar, not on top of it (305). And when the collection is brought forward at a typical Sunday Mass, it is to be set near the altar, but not on the mensa (73). This piece of furniture is called both altar and table (296). It is the altar of sacrifice and the table of Communion. The liturgy also speaks of people being fed at the table of God’s Word (28, 57, 355). Just as we share Communion at the altar, so we feast on God’s holy Word proclaimed from the ambo. The readings from Scripture are a second mensa at the Mass. Sometimes Mass is celebrated outside a consecrated church—in nursing homes, hospitals or prisons, for example. In those cases, another table may serve as the altar, even though a bishop has not consecrated it (297). Nevertheless, the mensa should be suitable for its purpose: the table of Communion with one another and with God



**The Paschal Candle** —The first sound of Easter Time is the crackling of new fire. Even before the presider greets the people, the Easter flame burns to warm the hearts of believers and to fascinate our eyes, which long to behold the glory of God. The Paschal candle that leads the procession into the church at the Easter Vigil becomes a dominant symbol for the season. Tall, bright, decorative, stately, it creates the first light for the faithful and dispels the darkness that belies our sins. The Paschal candle first announces the news of the Resurrection, followed by the Glory to God, the Alleluia, the Gospel, the homily, and, of course, the Eucharist. All join to make the same proclamation. Christ is risen! So big is this message that it takes fifty days to celebrate. That Paschal candle burns in our churches every day during those seven weeks, proclaiming: Christ is risen, and we too may rise! The Paschal candle appears in our liturgy on two other very significant occasions: Baptisms and funerals. Whenever infants are baptized, we light the Paschal candle. The Resurrection of Christ foreshadows our own resurrection. Baptism incorporates us into the Body of Christ and gives us a share in his Resurrection.

Whenever the Baptismal waters are poured, the Paschal candle burns bright. Parents and godparents light a Baptismal candle from the Paschal candle. They accept the responsibility of keeping the flame of faith alive in the heart of the newly baptized. Parents carry this candle home, where it may shine on Baptismal anniversaries to symbolize the first news of the risen Christ. We also light the Paschal candle at funerals. In the midst of our grief, we call upon the symbols that enliven our faith. Several images of Baptism reappear at the funeral: the sprinkling with holy water, the placing of a white pall (like a white garment) over the coffin, and the lighting of the Paschal candle. Christ rose from the dead so that we too might pass



**Presider’s Chair** —A chair is more than a piece of furniture. It can also symbolize the person who sits there. In many homes, a family member has a preferred chair, and others won’t sit there out of respect. In offices, in boardrooms, and even at the dining room table, some seats are just sacred. At church, the presider’s chair is more than a chair. It symbolizes the priest. He doesn’t just sit there. He stands there to lead the assembly in prayer. The priest who presides at Mass, stands at the chair for the Introductory Rites, sits in the chair for the Scripture readings, and may stand at the chair again for the Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rites. He may also preach from the chair if he wishes. A typical sanctuary contains three distinct areas designated by furniture: the altar, the ambo, and the chair. The altar gathers us together for the Eucharistic Prayer, the heart of the Mass. The ambo holds the Scriptures for the Liturgy of the Word. The presider’s chair focuses our attention at the beginning and at the end of Mass because it establishes the role of one who leads us in

prayer. In the early Church, the chair was positioned in the apse behind the altar. When the altar was moved to the back wall, the chair was relocated to one side of the sanctuary, facing the opposite side. Today the presider faces the assembly from the chair. It may be placed against the back wall. In churches where the tabernacle occupies that space, the chair should stand to the side. The presider’s chair should not seem too remote from the assembly because the priest is not a performer to be watched, but a leader engaged with all those gathered together. Ideally, the position and structure of his chair identifies the priest as one with the people, yet also as their leader

**Sacramentary and the Roman Missal** —In the United States, Sacramentary was the English title of the principal book used for the celebration of the Mass after the Second Vatican Council. It was the first translation of a post Vatican II book called *Missale Romanum* in Latin. Some other English-speaking countries have been calling the very same book “Roman Missal” ever since the council and many other vernacular languages also gave the title of the book a more literal translation. The book was called a Sacramentary in the United States because it resembled books of that title from the Middle Ages. Celebrating the Eucharist has always required a small library of books. The readings were in one book. The music was in another. The prayers of the priest appeared in yet another. In the Middle Ages, these appeared in separate books, but they were ultimately combined into a single volume called the *Missale Romanum*. After the Second Vatican Council, the readings were published separately, partly because the number of selections greatly increased. Those volumes have been called the *Lectio-nary for Mass*, but they are still part of the “Roman Missal”— the library of books required for the Eucharist. The main altar book still includes the prayers and antiphons. The medieval Sacramentaries did not include the words of the antiphons or the music for the dialogues. So what we have called “Sacramentary” in the United States is not completely the same as the medieval book of the same name. The title of the book has changed from Sacramentary to *The Roman Missal* for greater consistency with the Latin original and the books used in many other countries. The words inside the Missal have undergone a new translation, but the contents remain those that were established after the Second Vatican Council.



**Sacrarium**—The sacrarium is a special sink found in the sacristy of most Catholic churches. The first time you see one it looks like someone made it wrong. The drain opens into a pipe that by-passes the sewer and runs straight down into the earth. The basin often hides beneath a hinged cover. The sacrarium provides for the proper disposal of sacred substances. Most notably, after Mass the vessels that held the Body and Blood of Christ are rinsed and cleansed there. In this way, any remaining particles of Communion are washed into the earth. The sacrarium has also been used for the disposal of other substances: old Baptismal water, leftover ashes, and last year’s holy oils. There was a time in history when the leftover consecrated wine was poured down the sacrarium, but today the Blood of Christ must be consumed by the faithful, not discarded. If the consecrated wine is ever spilled during the Mass, it is to be cleaned up with care. Accidents happen, and the instructions for Mass offer this procedure: The area should be washed, and the water poured down the sacrarium. The presence of the sacrarium shows our reverent care for holy things. When materials designated for a sacred purpose have completed their service, we honor them even in their disposal. By returning our sacred substances to the earth beneath the church building, we honor them, the ground over which we worship, and the God who created them and consecrated them to nourish our faith



**Tabernacle** —Start up a discussion about the tabernacle and be prepared for strong feelings. It ranks right up there with topics like a balanced budget and the designated hitter rule. The reason is simple. The tabernacle houses the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus Christ is God. Catholics before a tabernacle quickly find themselves at the nucleus of their faith. Tabernacles got their start for a very practical reason. Christians prized the Eucharist, so central to their faith. If some member was unable to participate in the weekly gathering because of illness, the healthy community sent a representative to the home to bring part of the sacred meal to its ailing member. We continue this custom today when Communion ministers bring Communion to the sick. To make the idea work, it became necessary to create a place to store the Eucharist. The tabernacle was born. Earlier, the community simply consumed the Body and Blood of the Lord at every Eucharist, except for what they brought immediately to the sick. Later, as Christians realized that the tabernacle housed the most precious object of our faith, a devotion grew up around the tabernacle itself as a place for divine worship. It made sense, but

the original idea was to reserve Communion for the sick, not to foster adoration. Gradually, the tabernacle began to serve a further function. It provided extra hosts for Mass. When Communion time came, the priest could always rely on the reserves in the tabernacle. First, a storehouse for the sick, then an object of adoration, now it became a source of feeding the community gathered for Mass. To bring it down home, the tabernacle began as a medicine chest, became an heirloom, and ended up as a refrigerator. No wonder people disagree about where it should be placed in the church. Its primary purpose remains the same—to keep Communion for the sick. Secondly, it deserves our devotion, but apart from the celebration of Mass. We should avoid feeding the faithful who attend Eucharist from the contents of the tabernacle (see GIRM, 85). The tabernacle serves the sick at home; the altar serves the assembly at church.

**Tabernacle Key** —The tabernacle, which houses the Blessed Sacrament, is kept locked when not in use. After the distribution of Communion during the celebration of the Eucharist, leftover consecrated breads are gathered into a ciborium, to be set inside the tabernacle, which is then locked. The key is to be kept in maximum safekeeping, according to the Code of Canon Law (can. 938 §5). The purpose of locking the tabernacle is to protect the Blessed Sacrament from profanation (can. 938 §3). Priests, deacons, sacristans, and Communion ministers usually share knowledge of the key's location. The key is probably concealed, but accessible for those who need to open the tabernacle, especially to bring Communion to the sick. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal never envisions that the tabernacle will be opened during the course of the Mass, even though this is commonly practiced during the Lamb of God. Ideally, the faithful should receive Communion from the bread consecrated on the altar, not reserved in the tabernacle (85). In this way, they signify their participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. However, for many years in the past the priest consecrated one host for himself and distributed previously consecrated bread to the faithful at Communion. This is now strongly discouraged. The key, therefore, used to be placed on top of the chalice, purificator, paten, pall, and corporal before the beginning of Mass, so that the priest could open the tabernacle for the Communion of the faithful. The GIRM makes no mention of the tabernacle key. It is a far better practice to prepare a sufficient quantity of bread for Communion before Mass begins. The key could be inserted into the tabernacle's lock, rather than on top of sacred vessels, long before the Gathering Song.

**Tabernacle Veil** —The front of the tabernacle in a Catholic church may be covered with a veil. The practice is not universal, nor is it required. However, something should indicate that the tabernacle holds the Blessed Sacrament. Above it, a baldachin may be decorated with a cloth that is white or the color of the liturgical day (Sacred Congregation of Rites, 3 July 1965, Prot. N. 33/65). Some other effective means prescribed by the competent authority may replace the veil (Eucharisticum mysterium, 57). In some churches, the tabernacle's decoration itself may suffice. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal is silent about the tabernacle veil, perhaps suggesting its secondary significance. No legislation governs its color, but traditionally it is white, gold, or the color of the vestments for the day or season. The veil recalls the instructions in the Book of Exodus for the tabernacle housing the Ark of the Covenant, which contained, among other items, some manna, the bread from heaven (Hebrews 9:4). A veil separated the Holy of Holies, where the Ark was kept, from the adjacent space (26:31–37; 40:3). At the death of Jesus, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two (Matthew 27:51), and the Letter to the Hebrews says that we have entrance into the heavenly sanctuary through the veil, which is the flesh of Jesus (10:20). In Catholic tradition, the sacred box for the consecrated bread remaining after a Mass is called a tabernacle. It contains the Bread of Life, come down from heaven, which gives life to the world, and which Jesus proclaimed was his very self (John 6:32–35). The tabernacle veil suggests that what lies behind is very different from what is in front. It conceals the holiest of holy places.

**Third Edition of the Roman Missal** —The Roman Missal is the official book of texts for the Mass in the Roman Catholic Church. The first book to bear the title came out in 1474. After the Second Vatican Council, the Scripture readings were removed from the Missal and bound in separate lectionaries. The rest was called the Sacramentary in English, but its Latin title has always been *Missale Romanum*. The heart of The Roman Missal is the Order of Mass, the words and rubrics (instructions) that pertain to every Mass from the song at the beginning to the dismissal at the end. Most of the book contains the priest's prayers that change from one Mass to the next: the Collect (Opening Prayer), the Prayer over the Offerings, and the Prayer after Communion. A new set appears every Sunday and often every day. The Roman Missal opens with a general instruction explaining how and why the Mass should go the way it does. It includes a number of appendices, including prayers the priest may say privately before and after Mass. The first edition of the post-Vatican II *Missale Romanum* came out in 1970. The second edition was released in 1975. Pope John Paul II promulgated the third edition of the Missal in 2000, the Jubilee Year of our redemption, but the Latin text was not published until 2002. In 2008, the Vatican issued an emended third edition—removing a few prayers, inserting a few more, and correcting some typographical errors. In the United States, we began celebrating Mass with the third edition of The Roman Missal on the first Sunday of Advent 2011. The contents of the Missal have been lightly expanded from one edition to the next. Each new edition contains clarifications to the rubrics and additional prayers. Each was promulgated on a Holy Thursday. The Missal stands in the deep tradition of the Eucharist that we celebrate at the command of Jesus on the night before he died.

**Stained glass**— For many people, stained glass windows make church buildings distinct. Their shape, size, and imagery set churches apart from other structures, even those that put stained glass to secular usage. No Catholic church building is required to have stained glass, but it remains a popular choice for decoration. Perhaps the greatest effect of stained glass is the way it changes the believer's perception of walls. People who step inside a church cross over a threshold that ushers them into sacred space. They think differently about the world around them, as they place themselves at the portal of heaven. Heavy church walls can make the interior seem completely removed from the world around it. Clear glass windows invite the outside in. Glass can help people appreciate the relationship between the church and the world, as they gather inside a place where they praise the God who created what is outside. Stained glass, however, changes the walls into something else. These windows filter the incoming light and color them. They lift the heads of worshipers to meditate on things outside normal experience. Stained glass windows acknowledge the existence of the world outside, but also of a world that is more difficult to see, a realm of more mysterious light. Some stained glass windows carry religious images. Others arrange abstract designs. They can assist catechesis, create harmony, and inspire devotion. Many of them carry the names of donors, though this can distract from the religious purpose of the windows for the assembled faithful. Churches blessed with good stained glass windows struggle to keep them clean and in good repair. Congregations that treasure them honor their heritage and prepare the next generations for the future, just as they do with their greatest treasure, their faith.