



Parish - Based Catechesis

Know the Words, Know the Meaning, Know the Mystery



Liturgical Catechesis No. 20, June 2011

[excerpt from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* of the third edition of the *Roman Missal*, Chapter V, see document for notes]

Liturgical Architecture

The People of God, gathered for Mass, has a coherent and hierarchical structure, which finds its expression in the variety of ministries and the variety of actions according to the different parts of the celebration. The general ordering of the sacred building must be such that in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly and allows the appropriate ordering of all the participants as well as facilitating each in the proper carrying out of his function. [...] Indeed, the character and beauty of the place and all its furnishings should foster devotion and show forth the holiness of the mysteries celebrated there.

The Sanctuary

The sanctuary is the place where the altar stands, where the word of God is proclaimed, and where the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers exercise their office. It should suitably be marked off from the body of the church either by being somewhat elevated or by a particular structure and ornamentation.

The Altar and the Cross

The altar on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present under sacramental signs is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is called together to participate in the Mass, as well as the center of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist in a sacred place is to be carried out on an altar [...] always with the use of a [white] cloth, a corporal, a cross, and candles. The altar should be built apart from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is desirable wherever possible. The altar should, moreover, be so placed as to be truly the center toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns.

There is also to be a cross, with the figure of Christ crucified upon it, either on the altar or near it, where it is clearly visible to the assembled congregation. It is appropriate that such a cross, which calls to mind for the faithful the saving Passion of the Lord, remain near the altar even outside of liturgical celebrations.

The Ambo

The dignity of the word of God requires that the church have a place that is suitable for the proclamation of the word and toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word. It is appropriate that this place be ordinarily a stationary ambo and not simply a movable lectern. [...] From the ambo only the readings, the responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation are to be proclaimed; it may be used also for giving the homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it.

The Chair for the Priest Celebrant

The chair of the priest celebrant must signify his office of presiding over the gathering and of directing the prayer. Thus, the best place for the chair is in a position facing the people at the head of the sanctuary, unless the design of the building or other circumstances impede this (for example, if the great distance would interfere with communication between the priest and the gathered assembly, or if the tabernacle is in the center behind the altar). The seat for the deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant.

The Places for the Faithful

Places should be arranged with appropriate care for the faithful so that they are able to participate in the sacred celebrations visually and spiritually, in the proper manner. [...] Moreover, benches or chairs should be arranged, especially in newly built churches, in such a way that the people can easily take up the postures required for the different parts of the celebration and can easily come forward to receive Holy Communion.

The Place for the Choir and the Musical Instruments

The choir should be positioned with respect to the design of each church so as to make clearly evident its character as a part of the gathered community of the faithful fulfilling a specific function. The location should also assist the choir to exercise its function more easily and conveniently allow each choir member full, sacramental participation in the Mass. The organ and other lawfully approved musical instruments are to be placed in an appropriate place so that they can sustain the singing of both the choir and the congregation and be heard with ease by all if they are played alone.

The Tabernacle

In accordance with the structure of each church and legitimate local customs, the Most Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer. The one tabernacle should be immovable, made of solid and inviolable that is not transparent, and be locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is prevented to the greatest extent possible. [I]t is preferable that the tabernacle be located, according to the judgment of the diocesan Bishop:

a) either in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration, in a form and place more appropriate, not excluding on an old altar no longer used for celebration;

b) or even in some chapel suitable for the faithful's private adoration and prayer, and which is organically connected to the church and readily visible to the Christian faithful.

In accordance with traditional custom, near the tabernacle a special lamp, fueled by oil or wax, should be kept alight to indicate and honor the presence of Christ.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does the arrangement of the church as described above assist your participation in the Sacred Mysteries?
2. How can you deepen your appreciation of the significance of the altar in the celebration of the Lord's saving Sacrifice?
3. What connections do you make between the ordering of areas in the church—for example, a place for the priest and a place for the faithful—with the Church as a manifestation of the Body of Christ, Head and members?

Prayer:

Father,
guide and protector of your people,
grant us an unfailing respect for your name,
and keep us always in your love.

Grant this through our Lord
Jesus Christ, you Son,
who lives and reigns with you and
the Holy Spirit
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.