

Focal Points

WORSHIP FORMING US

The altar is where all the action happens. We have a tendency to talk about the sanctuary area of the worship space as "The Altar". The danger is that by doing so, we group together the Ambo, the credence table, the drapes, the presiders chair, the microphone and just about anything else that fits on "The Altar".

I encourage you in the coming months to think about the worship space by giving specific attention to focal points that are central to any Liturgy. While we continue to recognize the importance of the action that takes place by the Liturgical ministers (The preaching, the proclaiming, the blessing, the breaking) I ask you to consider with equal importance the physical space and the hardware that is used. Today I want to focus on the Altar table.

The Altar at CHS is the wooden structure upon which our salvation is ministered during the celebration of Mass. It is where Christ specifically becomes present in the form of Bread and Wine. The Altar is therefore the foremost symbol of Christ during any Liturgical celebration.

You will notice that ministers make a reverence in the direction of the altar, for example, when lectoring. Some, I notice, in fact, reverence the crucifix. The correct focus is the altar, which symbolizes the Body of Christ around which we gather and become. So, we bow to the altar. Let us take care of the symbols and in this way, the signs will take care of themselves.



A cloth covers the altar

Did you know...

.....**"Altar"** means **"High"** - long before Christianity, an elevated table was used to make sacrifices to God. The thought being that the higher we elevate the table, the quicker the sacrifice will rise to the heavens.

...**Early Christians celebrated Mass on the tombs of Martyr Saints in Rome.** For this reason the custom of each altar having relics of the saints embedded within the table, is something quintessentially Catholic.

...**the priest kisses the Altar** at the start and end of Mass because the altar is seen as the symbol of Christ Himself. In a similar way, on occasion, incense is used at the altar.

....**The altar should be a fixed and permanent structure.** This adds spiritual value to the liturgical celebration. Jesus is a permanent feature in the hearts of believers. A structure that cannot move reinforces that reality.

..... **Only essential items** for the celebration of Mass should be placed on the "mensa" (top surface) of the altar. Flowers, statues, visible microphones and even candles, can detract from the altar as being a sacred object and which is due our reverence and care.

One small change that I would like to make in the coming weeks, is to replace the cloth on the altar with a new linen-rich covering that will expose more of the table. I also intend to use a cover to keep the "mensa" (the flat surface area) of the altar, clean, when not in use. I will require the help of all Mass Coordinators to make this happen.

The picture below will show you how the altar will look. The minimized altar cloth will enhance the visual dignity of the altar and draw us to see it for what it is: the table of the Lord upon which His sacrifice of praise is reenacted.



The new cloth brings into view the artistic and architectural value of the altar structure. We can now see the altar as the prime symbol of Christ who invites us to gather at His table. The altar is not just any old table. It is the place where miracles happen.

What you can do to help.

Before Mass, please ensure the altar cover is removed, and after Mass, ensure that the cover is replaced. See the illustration below



The altar cover can be stored in the sacristy during a liturgical celebration.

On Sundays, the cover can remain off from the 8am Mass until the end of the 12pm Mass.

We never stop learning about our Faith. And Liturgy is a prime example. The more we learn, the more we need to learn.

Our faith life as a community is organic and dynamic. Pastoral situations change in parish life that require we be ready to renew our sense of who we are and how we pray.

Today I bring before you the focal point of the Altar. I thank all those who are dedicated to service at the altar here at CHS. Your example inspires all of us.

In coming instalments I will explore other elements of Liturgical Prayer. If you have suggestions, do not hesitate to email me at Jeremy.T@churchoftheholyspirit.org.

Be Joyful, Keep the Faith!

Fr Jeremy



The Sacrament of Confirmation 2020