

TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2026

Since the Lord Jesus' Sacrificial Death and Glorious Resurrection, the worship of the Christian People has not been the bloody sacrifice of animals at the Temple, but two forms of unbloody sacrifice, the sacrifice of our bodies by using them rightly to give praise and thanks to God, and the communal Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving the Lord Jesus gave His Church at the Supper before His Passion, when He offered bread and wine in solemn Thanksgiving, changed that bread and wine mystically into His Body and Blood, and gave the command "Do This in memory of Me."

St. Paul tells us in today's second reading, from his Epistle to the Romans, that using our bodies faithfully and charitably is a form of worship. "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1) For human beings, spirit and flesh are equally important. Our thinking, and indeed even our prayer, are simultaneously spiritual and physical events, involving intellectual concepts and spiritual entities, but also involving quite specific physical phenomena in different parts of the brain. St. Thomas Aquinas regarded it as a truism that there is nothing in our minds that wasn't first in some way present to our physical senses, even if the relationship is often a complex one. St. Irenaeus of Lyons taught that "the flesh is the hinge of Salvation", namely the Flesh of the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, assumed for our Salvation, offered in Sacrifice for our Salvation, raised in glory for our Salvation, and mystically fed to us for our Salvation. To be a human being is to be an intimate and integral union of body and soul, such that, although the body is mortal and the soul immortal, our salvation is not complete until our bodies are recreated by divine power in the full glory of the Resurrection.

Do not despise the body! There have always been idealistic Christians who do so; yet how dare a Christian despise that which God created, that which God the Son assumed in the wonder of the Incarnation, and that which was raised up in the divine Resurrection? I may have gone a bit too far in my distant bodybuilding days, that was only an excess, not the rank heresy of despising the body. That is a horrid heresy, and one that gets me fighting mad. I have been reading about how some of Russia's leaders, including the Tsar and Tsarina, were taken in by the scrawny and stinky Russian heretic Rasputin. They couldn't have fallen for him if they hadn't first imbibed a false spirituality that equated neglect of the body with holiness. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus told His disciples to wash their faces and have a decent appearance, even when they were fasting. On the contrary, the great Apostle Paul tells us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, our spiritual worship. We do this by taking proper and moderate care of them, by presenting an appearance that says "thank you " to God for them, by using them chastely and charitably, and by praying with them.

An essential Catholic conviction is that we do truly pray with our bodies. Indeed, when the Lord Jesus gave His Church her supreme worship, with His command "do this in memory of Me," He did not command the thinking of deep, mystical thoughts, but the physical ritual of the Lord's Supper. There is a place for deep mystical thoughts, but they only genuinely link us to God when they are grounded in the Church's physical, public worship. As St. Teresa of Avila, the great authentic mystic, once exclaimed, "I would die for the Church's smallest rite."

Some of the Church's rites are more important than others, and the most important is the Holy Eucharist. With the anniversary of St. Barbara's dedication on 31 August, it seems

appropriate to note briefly what are the most essential aspects of the physical setting for the Roman Catholic Mass.

1. The Altar, on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present under the Sacramental forms of Bread and Wine. Whenever possible, the Altar is to be immovably attached to the floor, thereby permanently signifying Jesus Christ, the Living Stone (1 Peter 2:4). Whenever possible, it is to be built apart from the wall, so that the priest can celebrate Mass facing the people. Whenever possible, it is to be stone. It is to have at least one white cloth on top, and may have a colored cloth in front. It may have flowers near it, but never on it.
2. The Ambo, from which the word of God is proclaimed. Whenever possible, it should be solid and stationary, and not simply a movable lectern. Now that I re-read the instructions in the Roman Missal, I see that we will have to change one thing in how we use the Ambo. Only the Scriptural readings, the homily, and the Prayers of the Faithful should be spoken from the Ambo. It seems that we will have to start making all other announcements and invitations from the movable lectern on the other side of the sanctuary.
3. The chair for the Presider/Celebrant of Mass. That chair is not to be at all throne-like, of course, but it is to allow the Presider/Celebrant to direct effectively the celebration of the Liturgy. Now that I re-read the instructions in the Roman Missal, it is clear that the Presider/Celebrant's chair should face the people. Honestly, I find that this makes it a little difficult for me to communicate with the Altar servers during Mass, since they end up being basically behind me; but there it is in black and white. When a deacon is present, his chair should be next to the priest's chair, but altar servers, readers, and other ministers should be seated separately from the priest.
4. Places for the people at Mass that allow them to see and hear as clearly as possible what is going on, and easily come forward to receive Holy Communion.
5. A place for the cantor and choir that allows them to perform their functions efficiently and to receive Holy Communion appropriately.
6. A Tabernacle to reserve the Most Blessed Sacrament. It should be noble and easily visible. It should also be solid and immovable, and honored by a special lamp.

All of these things are physical, of course; but don't say "merely physical." We are physical and spiritual beings at the same time, and our worship is physical and spiritual at the same time. All of these physical things are part of offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, our spiritual worship.