



FAITH FORMATION NEWSLETTER



February 2026

SACRED SPACE AND THE HOLY MASS!

Last month we discussed the importance of our regular attendance and participation in the Mass. Now that we're in the church building, and before we prayerfully prepare ourselves for the Celebration of the Holy Mass, let's take a look around and note some of the uniquely Catholic architecture, objects, statues, and icons.

The entry and gathering space areas are called the vestibule (between the two sets of double doors) and the **narthex**. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably. Here in the narthex we are warmly greeted and welcomed to our parish for celebration of Mass. The community and family feeling that we experience in the narthex help us transition from the secular world to the sacred space of worship, and begin our encounter with God and Christ's Church. This space also holds bulletins, pamphlet racks, bulletin boards, and other books or information for sharing.

When we enter the larger church seating area, we're in the **nave**. Nave is from the Latin word *navis*, meaning "ship". Like St Peter's boat and Noah's Ark, the Church is a vessel carrying the faithful safely through life's floods and stormy seas to salvation. This is a sacred space and, while we are asked to sing and prayerfully participate fully in all aspects of the Mass, we are reminded to please maintain a reverent and respectful attitude, tone, and behavior. Entering the nave, we see the **Baptismal Font** or Holy Water Font. We dip the tips of our fingers in and then make the sign of the cross, thus blessing ourselves and reminding ourselves of our Baptism and our Baptismal promises to reject Satan and sin, love and embrace the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, love God and neighbor, and spread the Gospel by our actions and words. Near the Baptismal and Holy Water Font, there is our larger holy water reservoir. Through a recent generous donation, we have a small stand with holy water bottles for parishioners to take home. You are welcome to refill bottles from the reservoir anytime.

We see the **Easter or Paschal Candle** standing tall and prominently near the Baptismal and Holy Water Font. This sacred candle is blessed and lit during the Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday night) to symbolize the risen Christ – the Light of the World. The candle's cross, current year, and Alpha and Omega symbols all remind us of Christ's salvific Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We see this candle burning brightly during the Easter Season, during Baptisms (new life in Christ), and during funerals (hope in the resurrection).

We also see the 14 **Stations of the Cross** (Way of the Cross) on the outside walls of our nave – another beautiful Catholic prayer and reminder of Christ's passion and death. We can walk with Him from condemnation to burial. **The Reconciliation room** is in the back of the nave, and the **Sacristy**, the room where Father gets dressed and prepares for Mass, is behind the statues of Mary and Joseph at the front. We often see St Mary to the left of the Altar and St Joseph to the right. We see the large picture of the Divine Mercy Jesus in the front. Statues, pictures, and icons in our church building are not for worship. We only worship the Triune God. These other items remind us that we are part of the Communion of Saints, and that these holy men and women are constantly praying for us, encouraging us, and joining us at every Mass. The **Communion of Saints** includes the Church Triumphant – those holy men and women who have gone before us and now enjoy eternity in Heaven experiencing the Beatific Vision





FAITH FORMATION NEWSLETTER



of God; the Church Penitent – the souls of those who died in God's friendship but are being further purified in Purgatory; and the Church Militant – Christians on earth still battling to resist temptation and sin, and walk in the way of Christ so that we might be in Heaven one day too.

As we look to the front, we see the elevated sacred **Sanctuary**. The Sanctuary holds the Altar as the central consecrated table for both the Sacrifice and the Banquet of our Holy Mass. We remember and we re-present ("Do this in memory of Me" Lk 22:19) Christ's once-and-for-all supreme sacrifice on Calvary, and the banquet of communion for the faithful. Christ freely sacrificed Himself for our sins and He provides Himself as living food for our journey. We'll discuss this more in the future.

Prominently displayed In the Sanctuary area is the **Crucifix**. A crucifix is distinct from a cross because it holds the corpus, or Christ's body. With the crucifix, we are reminded that Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension together opened the gates of Heaven and offered salvation to those who choose to accept, love, and live in Christ. Christ didn't come to just rise from the dead for us, so displaying an empty cross is not sufficient. He came to suffer, die, rise, and ascend for us. Catholics remember that we cannot celebrate the joy of Easter Resurrection each Sunday without always being mindful and grateful for Christ's suffering and death. It's a holistic approach to Christian faith when we remember Christ's suffering, sacrificial love, the price of our salvation, and the glory of His resurrection and ascension to Heaven.

In the Sanctuary, we also see the **Ambo** from which the Word of God is proclaimed and Homilies are delivered; the **Lectern** (even if it's just a microphone and a music stand) is near the choir area for music and announcements; the **Presider's Chair**, the seat for the priest; the **Tabernacle**, an ornate and lockable gold metal cabinet for holding and storing the Blessed Sacrament/consecrated host, i.e. the Eucharist; the **Sanctuary Lamp** (eternal red candle), to remind us that the real presence of Jesus (body, blood, soul, and divinity) in the Eucharist is always in the church; and the **Ambry**, the wooden and glass cabinet that holds the Holy Oils. We have Oil of the Sick (oleum infirmorum), Oil of the Catechumens (oleum catechumenorum), and the Sacred Chrism (sanctum chrism). These were blessed at the annual Holy Chrism Mass just before or during Holy Week by the Bishop. This Chrism Mass also serves as an annual demonstration of the unity of the priests with their Bishop. Those people seeking entry and full communion in the Catholic Church are often given the opportunity to participate in bringing the Holy Oils back to our parish after the Chrism Mass. We use the Oil of the Sick for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens for Baptism, and Sacred Chrism for Baptism and Confirmation (also used for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and consecrating our churches and altars).

Now that we're more familiar with the church building, and some of those meaningful elements that make us uniquely Catholic Christians, we can quietly prepare ourselves for the Mass.

Next month: Our prayerful preparation for Mass, what's Father wearing and why, the Procession, and the Introductory Rites.

Ed Anderson – Director of Faith Formation

