

Understanding the Mass

Nave

Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

*Today our topic is the **Nave**.*

Once you have entered the church through the vestibule (or narthex), you will find yourself standing in the **nave**, which is where the congregation prays and worships. From here you will choose where you are going to sit during the Mass.

Nave comes from the Latin *navis*, meaning “ship”, which was an early Christian symbol of the Church. In some countries (like the Nordics and the Baltics), you may see a model ship hanging in the nave of churches. In many languages - including Danish, Swedish, Dutch and Spanish - the words for nave and ship are still exactly the same.

Why would a ship be a symbol of the Church? As the people of God, we can consider ourselves to be passengers destined for Heaven, and the Church is the ship that will help us reach our destination, much like God used the ark to get Noah and his family to safety in the Old Testament.

In most churches today, the nave is filled with pews or chairs. For over 1,000 years, churches did not have seats for the congregation; the faithful mostly stood or knelt during the Mass, with men normally on the right facing the altar and women on the left.

Seating was first introduced in the Middle Ages, and could be purchased or rented by a particular person or family. Today we may donate to the church building fund, which pays for seat renovation or installation, but we don't own a particular pew - although many of us like to sit in the same spot at every Mass.

1. Where are you sitting at Mass today? _____

2. How many of each type of animal did Noah place in the Ark? _____

