

Understanding the Mass

The Altar

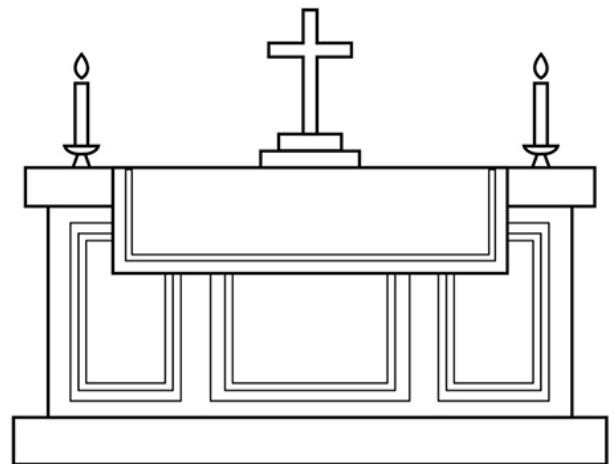
Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

*Today our topic is **The Altar**.*

Altar is a very old word that comes from the Latin word *altare*, which was influenced by two other words: *adolere* (“burn” or “burning place”), and *altus* (“high”).

The altar in Old Testament times was a place of sacrifice. People offered up their best animals and food as a sacrifice to God to pay for their sinfulness against His commands. These Old Testament sacrifices looked ahead to the time when God would send the promised “once for all” sacrifice—His Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Today in our church, the altar is where we celebrate the Mass. It is at the very front of the church, and is often raised higher than the rest of the church so everyone can see it, and it is a symbol of the once-for-all and final sacrifice for all sins offered by Jesus Christ on the cross.



Many altars have the relics (often small pieces of bone) of one or more martyrs. The use of these “relics” comes from the time of the early Christians who, at times of persecution, used to celebrate Mass in the catacombs on the tombs of the martyrs.

The **altar cloth** dates back to the earliest days of the Church, when the early Christians lived in a part of the world where fine linen, especially linen from Egypt, was very valuable. Today, we still use a white cloth covering the altar for the celebration of Mass.

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C	D	E	O	F	H	G	L	I
H	I	A	V	J	U	M	O	N
C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	E
R	K	T	L	M	C	S	H	N
O	N	A	O	P	H	S	Q	R
S	T	R	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
S	A	C	R	I	F	I	C	E