

Understanding the Mass The Tabernacle

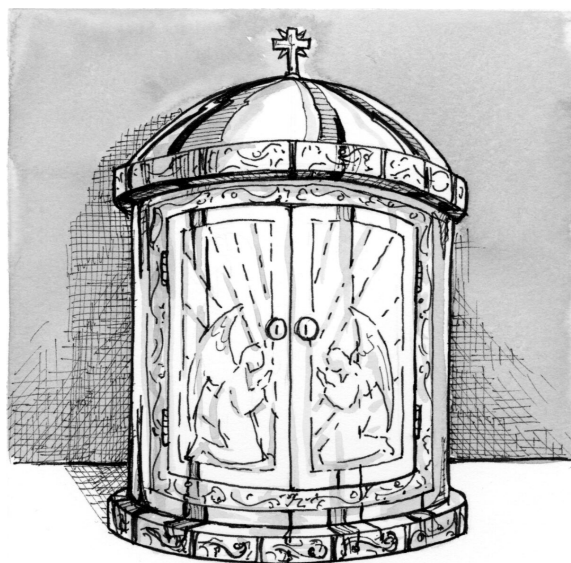
Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

*Today our topic is the **Tabernacle**.*

Tabernacle comes from the Latin word *tabernāculum*, which means “tent” or “hut”. In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was a portable tent that contained the most precious items of the Jewish people: the two stone tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments, a golden urn holding the manna God used to feed the Jewish people in the desert, and the rod of Aaron, the brother of Moses.

As Catholics, we use the word tabernacle to describe the place in the church where we keep something even more precious: the Body of Jesus (which we also call Holy Communion, the Holy Eucharist, and the Blessed Sacrament).

Jesus promised to be with us, His Church, “until the end of time” (Mt 28:20). One of the ways Jesus fulfils this promise is by being present - really and truly physically present - in Holy Communion, in the tabernacle. Throughout the world, in thousands of Catholic churches, in every tabernacle, Jesus waits for us to come to Him. He is there all day, every day.



In some churches, the tabernacle is at the very front of the church, behind the altar. In others, the tabernacle is in a small room to one side of the church. The **Sanctuary Lamp** - a red lamp placed near the tabernacle - burns all the time to show that Jesus is present.

You may notice that when people enter the church, they may make a **genuflection** (bend their right knee to the floor) or bow towards the tabernacle before they sit down.

For thousands of years, from Alexander the Great in Ancient Greece to the Byzantine Empire to the kings and queens of Europe, people would kneel or **genuflect** to other people as a sign of respect...it's why people go down on one knee when they propose!!

Because God is so much more important than any human, we genuflect to Jesus in the tabernacle when we enter the church as a sign that we believe He is really present, and as a way of showing our love and respect for Him.

Look for where the tabernacle is in your church. Once you find it, bow or genuflect (by bending your right knee all the way to floor) as a sign of love and respect for Jesus.