

VISITING THE CHURCH

Your church is the special place where people in your parish gather to pray to God and worship each Sunday. It is very important that you attend Sunday Mass, and gather with all the people of your parish community to praise and thank God.

Discussion

Do you know the name of your parish church?

What do you notice about the church from the outside as you look at it?

Has it got a steeple?

Has it got a bell tower?

What do you notice about the windows?

The holy water font

The holy water fonts are placed at the entrances to the church. People bless themselves with holy water when they enter and leave the church as a reminder of their baptism. We are reminding ourselves that we all belong to God's family.

The baptismal font

Water is used as a sign of new life. During Jesus' time people were baptised in rivers, like John the Baptist baptised Jesus in the river Jordan. Today water is poured on the head of the person being baptised in the baptismal font. The large candle beside the font is the Paschal Candle (*Easter Candle*). The Paschal Candle is always lit for a baptism and a funeral. It reminds us that we belong to God. We come from God and we return to God.

The sanctuary

This is the area at the top of the church and usually it is raised by a few steps. Some churches have rails around it. The sanctuary has some very special items within it; such as the altar, the ambo, the lectionary, the tabernacle, the priest's chair and the cross.

The altar

The table of the Lord is where we celebrate the Eucharist/Mass. We offer our gifts of bread and wine on the altar. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they become the body and blood of Jesus. When you share in the mass/Eucharist, you are sharing in the Bread of Life; the Risen Jesus.

The ambo

As you look at the altar, the ambo is to your left. This is where the reader (*or lector*) proclaims the Word of God. The reader proclaims the first and second readings during Mass. The priest reads the Gospel from the ambo during Mass and gives a homily/sermon.

The lectionary

The Lectionary is the book of readings from the Bible that we hear at Mass. The Lectionary is always placed on the ambo. When the reader reads the Word of God, it is different to reading a story, or reading in class. The Word of God is very special. The reader and the priest prepare themselves to read these stories to us by praying

about them before they come to Mass. Proclaiming the Word of God is a very special ministry. It is one of God's ways of communicating with us.

The tabernacle

The Holy Communion, the Bread of Life, is kept in the tabernacle. The tabernacle is the gold box set into the wall. The sanctuary lamp is always lit next to the tabernacle, reminding us that God is always with us. Usually, people genuflect or bow to show reverence and respect for Jesus in the Holy Communion. The Bread of Life is kept in the Tabernacle so that people can come and pray and be near Jesus. The Bread of Life (*Holy Communion*) is also reserved in the tabernacle so that the priest can bring it to people who are sick in hospital or in their own home.

The cross

A cross shows Jesus' body on it. The cross reminds us of Jesus' great love for us and the great sacrifice he made to show us that love.

The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross are hanging on the walls of the church. There are 14 Stations of the Cross – one for each event of the day Jesus died. They remind us of the journey Jesus made to Calvary. You can journey with Jesus on the road to Calvary also, when you pray the stations. Many people pray the Stations of the Cross during Lent and especially on Good Friday.

The windows

The windows are usually stained glass. They often show images of Jesus, Mary or some of the Saints. Look at the windows in your church and see what images they show.

The kneelers and seats

The kneelers and seats are there for us. We sit to listen to God's Word. We stand to hear the Gospel. Standing means we are respecting the Gospel, just as we stand for the National Anthem, the President etc. We kneel to pray at the important parts of the Mass, especially at the consecration and Communion time.

Why genuflect?

We genuflect when we enter the church as a sign of love and respect for the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle. It is a very special and sacred gesture of love and respect. Generally, people say a little prayer on doing so. For example, "Jesus, I adore you," or "Jesus, I love you," or "Jesus, I worship you." or "My Lord, and my God."