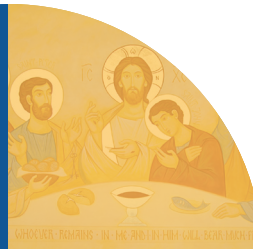


This is the sixth bulletin insert in a series as we focus on aspects of our church and the Mass as part of our *Celebrate the Sacraments...* A New Beginning for the Family campaign.

CELEBRATE  
the Sacraments...  
A NEW  
Beginning  
FOR THE FAMILY  
A Campaign for St. Mary Catholic Parish



## THE SANCTUARY AND CROSS

This week we continue our series with a look at the sanctuary of our church and the sanctuary cross.

In Exodus 36-40, we read of the making of the tabernacle, the beautifully constructed tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant during Israel's forty years of wandering. Many generations later, King Solomon would create a permanent place for Israel to worship—the Temple (1 Kings 6). Very soon after the ascension of our Lord, the Apostles and the early Christians began setting aside special places to worship. They no longer felt the need to worship in one holy place, but they still consecrated altars and churches for the celebration of the Eucharist.

The ancient Israelites reserved the most sacred portion of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, behind a large, ornate curtain. Since the Ark of the Covenant was stored there, it was believed that God's presence rested above the Ark. Only one person in all of Israel was allowed to enter this sacred space, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In contrast, the holiest place in a Catholic Church, the sanctuary, is visible to the entire congregation.

Because of the importance of the sanctuary, it is often marked in a particular way. In some Catholic churches, a Communion rail, complete with gates, may indicate the sanctuary location. In other churches, like St. Mary, the sanctuary may be elevated and reached by one or more steps. In still other churches, the floor may be made of a special material so that the sanctuary is easily visible to all. That is the case with our church.

Even the items within the sanctuary, including the altar, ambo, and tabernacle, are made of special materials to call attention to their importance in our liturgy. Throughout our history, gold, silver, bronze, marble, dressed stone and beautiful woodwork have all served one purpose—to call attention to the importance of what happens within the sanctuary. Jesus is made present to us here, and we gather around the sanctuary for the Eucharistic feast to be close to Him. It is in the sanctuary that a large crucifix is placed, to remind us of the perfect sacrifice of our Lord, and to keep always in the forefront of our minds the amazing reality that "...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Looking at the beautiful materials present in the sanctuary, it may be tempting to ask, as Judas did, "Why wasn't this... sold and given to the poor?" (Jn 12:5). This is a good question, and one that deserves a good answer! The truth is that we use precious materials in the sanctuary to show our great love for God and make known our desire to give our best to him. We might think of the beauty of the sanctuary as analogous to the beauty of a wedding ring. It is not strictly necessary that a man and woman wear beautiful gold or silver rings, but doing so is a sign that they are precious to each other. Indeed, there is nothing to stop us from giving both God and the poor our best. We are called to give God our best in the liturgy and in our interactions with other people!

It is within the sanctuary that many of our most important rituals occur. It is from the sanctuary that the Word of God is proclaimed, the Eucharist is celebrated, and couples are joined in marriage.

