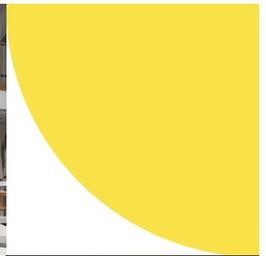


This is the first bulletin insert in a series as we focus on aspects of our church and the Mass as part of our *Celebrate the Sacraments...* A New Beginning for the Family campaign.

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



## ALTAR

This week we begin our series with a look at the importance and meaning of the altar in the church. The altar serves as the focal point of our sanctuary, where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass takes place every day of the week.

*The altar has served as the place where man meets God since the earliest beginnings of salvation history.*

The first person to build an altar to God was Noah (Gen 8:20). God was pleased with the sacrifices offered there, and immediately after Noah's offering of thanksgiving, God established the first covenant with mankind. Again and again we see in the Old Testament that the patriarchs, prophets and kings of Israel use altars when making sacrifices of petition or thanksgiving to God. The Temple in Jerusalem had several altars of varying importance and purpose where different types of offerings were made.

With the death of Jesus on Good Friday, a new and perfect sacrifice was offered—God's only Son, offered up as remission for our sins. Because of this perfect sacrifice, the symbol of the cross became an altar, since it was the "table" upon which Jesus was offered.

The altar in a Catholic church serves as the place where we remember Jesus' perfect sacrifice – first the offering of His Body and Blood to his disciples at the Last Supper, and then the completion of that offering on Calvary. But we are reminded in one of the Eucharistic Prefaces used during the Easter season that Jesus is "priest, altar, and lamb." How can this be?

The altar is a symbol of our Lord for several reasons. Usually, an altar is made of stone, which recalls St. Paul's statement that Jesus is the "supernatural Rock" that offered sustenance to the Israelites in the desert (1 Cor 10:4). Both Sts. Peter and Paul identify Christ as the "cornerstone," and Jesus Himself uses similar language when describing His role in our lives ( Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6, Lk 118). This image of the cornerstone is also found in Psalm 118, which the people of Israel sang when Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly.

During Mass, bread and wine are brought to the altar on behalf of the congregation. The altar becomes a place of sacrifice, in part because our sacrifices have produced this bread and wine. These gifts are so simple, and yet what they become during the Mass is nothing short of miraculous – our Lord's body and blood, to nourish and sustain us in living out the life He has called us to.

As you can see, the altar is no mere table! It is the physical center of all that we do and are as a church, because it is at the altar that we participate in the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our lives as Christians. Our vision is to install an altar that is worthy of this reality—one that is beautiful and gives honor to the Blessed Sacrament which sustains us.