

The Role of the Altar

As many of you know our 2021 project with the Jim Click tickets is the purchase of an altar and ambo (pulpit) for our worship space. Some of you have wondered what the deal is about an altar. After hearing this I decided to do a little research and reflect with you what an altar is all about.

Every parish in the Catholic tradition centers their worship around a table or altar. The altar is seen in Catholic theology as the central point of our worship and celebration. It is special and sacred. Whenever a parish receives a new altar, it is consecrated by the bishop as a recognition of the role that special table will play in our worship. It's not just a table, it is part of our identity as a Eucharistic community.

In the bible a table and sacred meal was central to the faith community's understanding of their relationship with God. In the Old Testaments we see reference to the table as the Israelites prepared to leave bondage in Egypt. The table was the sacred place where the Passover was celebrated and remembered. In the New Testament we see Jesus reclining at table as the center of social gatherings and hospitality.

In the New Testament we see Jesus celebrating the last supper and commanding his disciples to "do this in memory of me." For the church this made the table a sacred space that had a special position in the life of the community. As the church became legal the term table changed to altar. In the ancient Roman tradition, the altar was the central place for offerings to the gods. Christians made the altar the offering of the consecration of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

Through the years the church learned that the place of the altar was so sacred and central to worship that it had to be "set aside" for its special purpose as the location of the supreme worship of the community. Through the years special rules and requirements were made that concretized this important role of the altar. Sometimes however, allowances had to be made due to the reality of the faith community's local situation. For example, temporary spaces with multi – purpose activities.

When MHT was formed we found ourselves in one of those temporary space situations. Thus, we had what is called a portable altar. As we grew and developed a permanent worship space, we did not change the altar to reflect that reality. We continued to use a temporary portable altar. Our situation has changed to such a point that we need to upgrade our worship space to reflect that reality.

Because of this we have decided that a permanent altar is now required. The new altar is being designed by Mr. Art Flores, owner of the Tumacacori Mesquite Sawmill. Mr. Flores has produced a number of beautiful altar tables for local parishes including the redesigned Mary's chapel at the cathedral. His work is renowned throughout Arizona and the Southwest. He is presently hoping to have the altar and accompanying ambo (pulpit) ready sometime in the fall. If you are purchasing Jim Click tickets you can see a photo of a similar altar that he made for another church.

This new altar and ambo are a fitting reminder of where we have come from and where we want to go in our worship. It will enhance our beautiful space while reflecting the rich Southwest heritage that is so much of who we are. The old portable altar will still be used during those times of special celebrations where more than one mass is celebrated at a time or when we want to use it in the hall. Nothing goes to waste at our parish. I hope you will join me in supporting this beautiful project by purchasing Jim Click tickets or making a donation directly to the project. Thank you for your support and prayers as we continue to move forward as a parish, walking in the footsteps of the Lord.

Yours in the Savior,
Fr. Tom