

The Tabernacle

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Several weeks ago, the key to our former tabernacle, which is now in the sacristy, broke as we were trying to open the tabernacle during one of our weekday Masses. After several attempts and different techniques by a locksmith to open the tabernacle failed, we had to forcibly open it in order to retrieve the Eucharist inside. This incident led to the tabernacle being damaged. Since every dedicated church must have a tabernacle with the Eucharist in it, I dusted off our old tabernacle in the sacristy and moved it into the church. I was very worried about what to do regarding purchasing a new tabernacle as it can be very expensive and out of our budget. Even more concerning, the old tabernacle does not lock properly and the Blessed Sacrament in it is not secured, which creates the danger of profanation. As your parish priest, it is my responsibility to ensure that the tabernacle is locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is prevented to the greatest extent possible.

As God would have it, one of our parishioners, who wishes to remain anonymous, contacted me and pledged to purchase a new tabernacle for our parish. About three weeks ago, the new tabernacle arrived. On behalf of our parishioners, I profoundly thank the generous donor for this precious gift to our parish community. The new tabernacle will be installed on December 1, the First Sunday of Advent.

In July, when Archbishop Sample came to our parish for a pastoral visit, one of his observations was the location of our tabernacle. He remarked that the Universal Church intends to place the tabernacle in a place of honor within a dedicated church building and give it the pride of place. Three weeks ago, when Archbishop Vlazny visited our parish, he made this same observation. Do not get me wrong, the current location of the tabernacle in our church is not bad. However, I believe that the positioning of a tabernacle in a church contributes to the recognition of Christ's Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Due to the constant traffic in and out of the sacristy, and our tabernacle being tucked away in the corner by the sacristy door, the current location of the tabernacle in our church building does not reflect a place of dignity and honor for Christ reserved in it.

Two documents of the Catholic Church, *Liturgical Norms: Reservation of the Most Holy Eucharist* and *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, give us some guidelines when they say this: "The Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer. Responsibility for ensuring these conditions are met lies with the Archbishop."

I decided not to sit up on the platform behind the altar because I believe that should be the place for Christ who is the center of our faith. In order to give the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle a more noble and prominent position in our church, I think it is appropriate to install the new tabernacle on the platform right behind the altar. I spoke with the Pastoral Council of the parish, and we plan to do this on the First Sunday of Advent.

Some have expressed to me the concern that once the tabernacle is placed in the center behind the altar, it could lead to turning the altar around and Mass being celebrated in the Extraordinary Form (where the priest would have his back to the people). First of all, **no Church document or liturgical guideline says that moving the tabernacle to the center of the sanctuary implies automatically turning the altar around.** The Church documents referenced above and the guidelines of the Archdiocese of Portland on the Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament say this: "It is more in keeping with the meaning of the sign that the tabernacle in which the Holy Eucharist is reserved not be on an altar on which Mass is celebrated. Consequently, it is preferable that the tabernacle be located, according to the judgment of the Archbishop, in the center of the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration, in a form and place of great dignity, not excluding on an old altar no longer used for celebration." Please do not worry about moving the tabernacle to the center of the sanctuary. I do not plan to turn the altar around. The altar will remain as is, and Mass will be celebrated the usual way we do. The only reason for having the tabernacle in the center of the sanctuary is to give Christ a place of honor and prominence in our church.

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May God bless you and may the Holy Spirit be your guide this week.

*--Fr. Anthony Ahamefule
Parish Priest*