

Symbolism and Design of St Joseph Church Furnishings

Christ in Signs and Symbols



The Catholic Bishops' document entitled BUILT OF LIVING STONES: ART, ARCHITECTURE AND WORSHIP, reminds us that

The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life, both for the universal Church and for the local faith community. In the liturgical assembly, Christ's presence is realized in all the baptized who gather in his name, in the word of God proclaimed in the assembly, in the person of the priest through whom Christ offers himself to the Father and gathers the assembly, in sacramental celebrations, and especially in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. (BLS #22/49)

This document also comments that
In the Christian community's place of prayer, art evokes and glorifies the transcendent mystery of God--the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ. (BLS #142)

So the components of true and worthy art in a church must be
a harmonious whole, a well-crafted work of quality and appropriateness for our Liturgical Rites. (BLS #142)

The Liturgical Rites at St. Joseph Church are woven from the signs and symbols found in our lives and our holy tradition, ensuring that great care and study have been given to the furnishings in our church.

We live in a region blessed with greenery. Among our native trees, the red oak stands resilient and abundant. It was for these reasons that red oak was chosen as the wood of choice for Altar, Ambo, Chair and Pedestal for the reserved Sacrament.



*St Joseph
Catholic Parish*

12290 Depew Road
Gulfport MS 39503

Phone: 228.832.3244
Fax: 228.832.1166

Email:
StJosephGulfport
@bellsouth.net

Web:
www.stjosephcc.com

Simplicity and strength witness to the basis for the furnishings. Each timber is attached one to the other, but maintains its individuality by the placement of each board in such a manner that spaces represent '*incised angular flutes*' (deep grooves) that display the distinction of each board but are connected one to another. St. Joseph Catholic Community is a people bound together by our common profession of faith and the symbols of our tradition that are represented here.

The Altar

*At the Eucharist,
the liturgical assembly
celebrates
the ritual sacrificial meal
that recalls
and makes present
Christ's life, death, and
resurrection,
proclaiming 'the death of
the Lord until he comes.'*

*The altar is the center of
thanksgiving that the
Eucharist accomplishes.*

*The altar is 'Christ,'
its composition should
reflect the nobility, beauty,
strength and simplicity of
the One it represents.*

(BLS #56)



The Eucharistic Table has an opening at its base, recalling the symbolic image of a “portal,” that is, a doorway. It is through this passageway, we enter into the holy mystery that is the Lord's Supper.

The “mensa” or tabletop is in the form of an abstract “pisces,” the symbolic fish and the multiplication of the loaves as found in the Gospels. The altar reflects the two dimensions of our Eucharistic Liturgy, the one and same mystery: Sacrifice and Sacrament at this Table of the Lord.

The Processional Cross

The Cross with the image of Christ crucified is a reminder of Christ's paschal mystery. It draws us into the mystery of suffering and makes tangible our belief that our suffering when united with the passion and death of Christ leads to redemption.

(BLS #91)



The processional cross with the bonded-bronze image of the Incarnate and crucified Son of God has been so crafted to reflect the three red translucent symbols of each section of the cross, representing our belief in the Holy Trinity. The woven circle with its simplicity and strength reflects an adaptation of the Celtic weave.

The Ambo

The central focus of the area in our sanctuary space in which the word of God is proclaimed is the ambo.

The design of the ambo and its prominent placement reflects the dignity and nobility of that saving word and draws the attention of those present to the proclamation of the word.

(BLS#61)

The Ambo exhibits the form of a column which throughout the history of architecture represents strength.

This cylindrical shape is also the reason for the pedestal on which the Tabernacle is placed.

The Ambo also designates a reading desk from which we are strengthened Sunday after Sunday as we listen to the Word of the Lord.



The Chair for the Priest Celebrant

The Chair of the priest celebrant stands as a symbol of his office of presiding over the assembly and of directing prayer.

The chair reflects the dignity of the one who leads the community in the person of Christ.

(BLS 1463)

The Priest's Chair is barrel-shaped from the base to the seat with the armrests that are all embracing.

The entire back of the chair is fashioned in the form of a large Celtic cross, a tribute to the priests from Ireland, who have ministered to the faithful on the Mississippi Gulf Coast for over 100 years.



The Reservation of the Eucharist

Christ present in the Eucharistic species is a treasure the Church has cherished and revered over the centuries.

The reservation of the Eucharist is for communion of the sick, for those unable to attend the Sunday celebration, and as Viaticum for the dying....and for Eucharistic adoration...

(BLS #70)



The Tabernacle is made of bronze and symbolizes an abstraction of flame and fire. It recalls the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit who comes to us in the mystery of the Incarnation and the 'epiclesis' or invoking of the Holy Spirit as the Bread and Wine are consecrated into the Body and Blood of Christ.

This 'epiclesis,' as it is called in the Liturgy, is the 'fire of the Holy Spirit' who 'transubstantiates' the Eucharistic elements and our lives by holy presence, calling us into a deeper community of love and service as Church.

The Ambry

The consecrated oil of chrism for initiation, ordination, and the dedication of churches, as well as the blessed oils of the sick and of catechumens, are traditionally housed in a special place called an ambry or repository. These oils...deserve the special care of the community to which they have been entrusted

(BLS #117)



The ambry, a place designated for the Holy Oils, highlights a free mosaic of the biblical olive tree. Made of glazed ceramic, the tree surrounds the blessed olive oils of the catechumens and of the sick and the Sacred Chrism to which a perfume has been added.

A symbol of hope and peace from the time of Noah, the olive tree may also reflect both the church and the human family, "children growing up like olive shoots around your table." Psalm 128

The liturgical concept, designs and crafting of the furnishings of St Joseph Catholic Parish, Gulfport, Mississippi, are the collaborative work of Fr. George Murphy, Pastor; Fr. Antone Lynch, Ph.D., previous pastor and liturgical scholar who has served as an educator at the college and university levels, and whose great interest is the sacred liturgy; and Mary Ott Davidson and Dr. Kenneth Davidson, founders of Davidson Artworks, nationally recognized artists, sculptors and owners of a bronze-casting foundry who reside on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Their son, Steve Davidson, is the craftsman of the wood-construction furnishings.