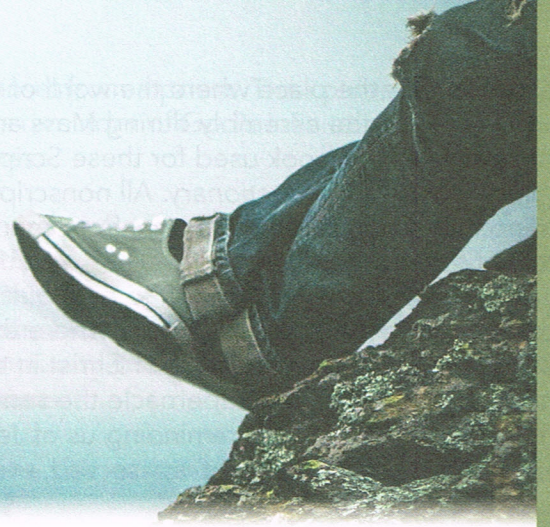


# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Everything in the church carries meaning.
- Sacred objects hold significance for Catholics.
- When we gather in church, Christ is there.



## Let's look inside a parish church

The first time you step inside a Catholic church, it's natural to feel a little confused or overwhelmed if you are unfamiliar with the symbols. The Church has a rich tradition of using art and symbols (we call this liturgical art) to sanctify the worship space. Everywhere you look in the parish church, there are reminders of God.

When you walk in the door, you will see a bowl of water near the door or a **baptismal font** (1) near the church entrance. These contain **holy water** (2), blessed water used by Catholics to make the sign of the cross as a reminder of their baptism and used in blessings as a sign of God's loving care. The tradition of blessing oneself upon entering the church began centuries ago when basins were kept at the entrances of people's homes and at special places of worship. Visitors would wash their hands and faces before entering another's home or a sacred place. This symbolic cleansing is still with us today.

The **sanctuary** (3) is the area in the front or near the center of the church where the altar, lectern, tabernacle, and sometimes baptismal font are located.

The **altar** (4) is the central table on which the Communion bread and the cup of wine are offered. The book of Mass prayers, called the **Roman Missal** (5), is also used at the altar. Altars are made of precious materials such as stone, marble, or fine wood. The altar itself is a symbol of Christ. Candles on the altar symbolize Christ's presence and light.

## Places in a Catholic Church

- *Do you have a special place you consider holy—a place where you can really feel the presence of God? Perhaps it's a place that makes you feel at peace or a place where you feel safe and comfortable. Briefly describe your holy place.*



Catholics have many places they feel they can go to encounter God, but the place most important to Catholic worship is the building we call the parish church. A **parish** church usually has territorial boundaries, meaning it serves a specific geographic area or neighborhood. A few parishes do not have boundaries but were built to serve Catholics with specific needs, such as groups of immigrants who speak languages other than English.

Catholic churches are named in honor of one or all persons of the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, one of the saints, or events that are important to our faith (such as the Assumption or the Nativity).

- *Who was your parish dedicated to? Do you know why?*



The **ambo** (6) is the place where the word of God is proclaimed to the assembly during Mass and at other services. The book used for these Scripture readings is called the *Lectionary*. All nonscriptural reading and song-leading happens from the **lectern** (7).

The **tabernacle** (8) is a special place where the consecrated Eucharist (the body of Christ in the form of hosts) is kept. Near the tabernacle the **sanctuary lamp** (9) burns continually, reminding us of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist that is reserved, or kept, there.

In older churches, the baptismal font may be in an area in the rear of the church. In newer churches, it is usually in or near the sanctuary. In churches where baptism is performed by immersion (when a person's entire body is submerged in the water), the pool is often located at the church entrance so that all who enter the church are reminded of and can actually renew their baptismal vows as they make the sign of cross with the holy water.

The church sanctuary also contains a **crucifix** (10)—a cross with the image of Jesus on it—representing his suffering and death. Usually the crucifix is permanently hung in a prominent place near the altar. Or it may be brought in during the procession at the beginning of Mass and ritually placed in the sanctuary.

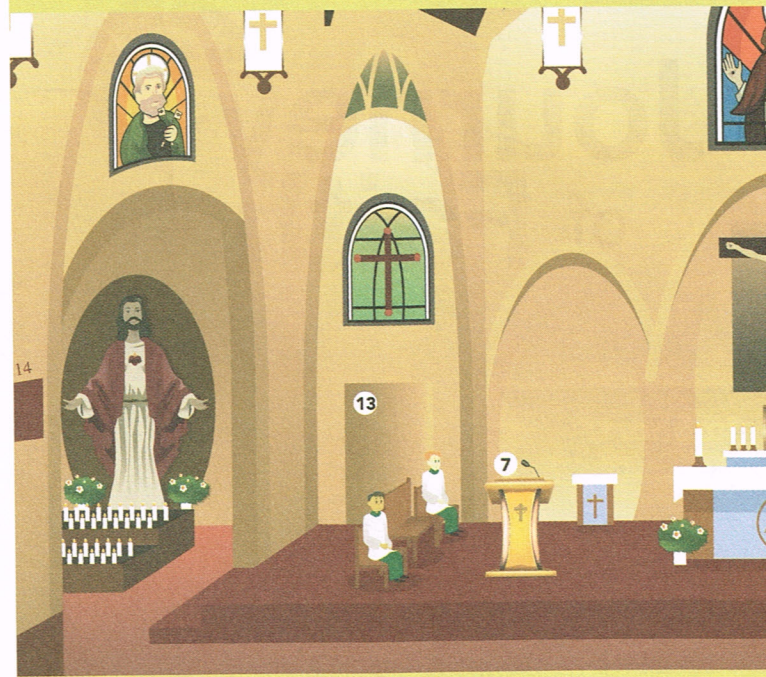
### Why do Catholics have a Crucifix?

The Catholic practice of honoring, or venerating, the crucifix is a declaration of our faith in the complete love of God that was shown to us in the death of Jesus Christ.

The image of the crucifix is a symbol of Christ's victory over death and a reminder of his suffering. When looking upon the crucifix, Catholics should be drawn to reverence Christ and thank him for sacrificing himself for our sins. While not all Christian churches use the symbol of the crucifix, many use a cross as a reminder of our salvation through Jesus.

Another very important symbol found in the Catholic Church is the **Easter (paschal) candle** (11). The Easter candle is a large decorated white candle, symbolic of the risen Christ. It is blessed and lighted during the annual Easter Vigil liturgy (held in the late evening on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday). It is placed near the altar, baptismal font, or pulpit.

## Things and Places in the Catholic Church



1. Baptismal font 2. Holy water 3. Sanctuary 4. Altar 5. Ambo 6. Lectern 7. Pulpit 8. Tabernacle 9. Sanctuary lamp 10. Crucifix 11. Easter (paschal) candle 12. Stations of the Cross 13. Chair

During the Easter season (the weeks following Easter), the Easter candle burns at every liturgy. During the rest of the liturgical year, it is placed near the baptismal font to symbolize our entering into the death and resurrection of Christ at our baptism. At Catholic burial services, the Easter candle is positioned near the casket to symbolize the deceased person's new life with the risen Christ.

Often the sanctuary and worship space of a church are adorned with liturgical art such as banners and tapestries that contain the symbols and colors of the particular liturgical season (Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, and Easter). Sundays and special feast days usually include the use of flowers or other greenery that help us to connect the seasons of the Church year with the seasons of God's magnificent creation.

Churches also have the **Stations of the Cross** (12), a series of fourteen pictures, carvings, or plaques representing events in the suffering and death of Jesus. These are used for prayer and meditation, especially during the season of Lent. The Stations of the Cross are usually found along the inside walls of the church.

Some churches, especially older churches, contain rows of small votive candles. People who offer special prayers of thanksgiving or of petition (asking)



5. Roman Missal 6. Ambo 7. Lectern 8. Tabernacle  
9. Chalice 10. Cross 11. Candelabrum 12. Stations of the cross 13. Sacristy

light candles as a physical representation of those prayers. The burning of the wick in a votive candle and the rise of smoke symbolize our prayers rising to heaven.

### What are the other rooms in a church?

The priests and other church ministers prepare for Mass and other services in a room called the **sacristy** (13). The sacristy is usually located behind or off to the side of the sanctuary. This is where priests and deacons put on their **vestments**, the symbolic garments worn during liturgical celebrations.

These vestments include an **alb** and a **stole**. An alb is a long white garment symbolic of the purity one should have when approaching God and is worn by priests, deacons, and altar servers. The **stole** is a band or sash worn by priests and deacons; deacons wear it diagonally across one shoulder whereas a priest wears it either crossed in front or down both shoulders. The priest's outer garment is called a **chasuble**, and the deacon's is a **dalmatic**. Other ministers might also prepare for Mass in the sacristy, including the lector (reader) and the acolytes (altar servers).

Churches also have **confessionals**, small rooms in which people can celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation or where they can seek advice

and counsel from a priest. The confessional is a precious reminder of God's infinite mercy and loving forgiveness.

Many churches have a large gathering space, called the **vestibule**, located just before the entrance into the worship area of the church. This space is an area where parishioners gather together for fellowship and community-building before and after liturgical celebrations.

### What are the other buildings near the parish church?

The parish center is a building or large room where parish activities are held. The **rectory** is the place where the parish priests live and work. There may also be a **convent** near your parish church, a place where religious sisters live.

### What is the difference between a church and a cathedral?

A cathedral is the official church of the bishop of a diocese. A **diocese** is a geographical area composed of many parishes under the leadership and pastoral care of a bishop.

The cathedral church of the pope, the bishop of Rome, is the basilica of St. John Lateran. St. John Lateran is considered more important than any other church, even St. Peter's in Vatican City.

Vatican City is a 108-acre area in Rome that is the worldwide headquarters of the Catholic Church and the official home of the pope. Vatican City is a recognized state and has diplomatic relations (ongoing discussions among government officials) with many other countries.

No matter what your parish church looks like, it is the heart of your own faith community, the sacred space most important to you. While a beautiful park or your own bedroom can be a holy place for you, at church you come together with the people of God to give thanks and praise to our Lord. The church is a place where believers are called to gather together and celebrate just like you would gather at someone's house or a restaurant to celebrate the holidays or a special family event. Jesus himself emphasized the importance of the Christian faith community when he said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

With a partner or by yourself, look around your parish church and find one or two of the things listed in this lesson and one or two that were not. Write down where they're located in your church, what they look like, and what they symbolize. If you don't know, ask! Share your findings with your class to create a master list.

Of all the sacred and symbolic objects Catholics use, which ones are you most attracted to? Why?

If you can, try to incorporate these objects into your personal space at home.



***Journey of Faith for Teens: Inquiry, Q11 (826337)***

*Imprimi Potest:* Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSSR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists

*Imprimatur:* "In accordance with CIC 827, permission to publish has been granted on March 29, 2016, by the Most Reverend Edward M. Rice, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of St. Louis. Permission to publish is an indication that nothing contrary to Church teaching is contained in this work. It does not imply any endorsement of the opinions expressed in the publication; nor is any liability assumed by this permission."

*Journey of Faith for Teens* © 2000, 2016 Liguori Publications, Liguori, MO 63057. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, stored, transmitted, or posted in any form by any means without prior written permission. To order, visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org) or call 800-325-9521. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit [Redemptorists.com](http://Redemptorists.com).

Text: Adapted from *Journey of Faith* © 2000 Liguori Publications. Editors of 2016 edition: Theresa Nienaber and Pat Fosarelli, MD, DMin. Design: Lorena Mitre Jimenez.

Images: Shutterstock. Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition. © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church for the United States of America* © 1994 United States Catholic Conference, Inc. — *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997 United States Catholic Conference, Inc. — *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. Compliant with *The Roman Missal, Third Edition*. Printed in the United States of America. 20 19 18 17 16 / 5 4 3 2 1. Third Edition.