

## DEVOTIONAL SPACES & SACRED IMAGES

Devotional spaces and sacred images are an important part of our Catholic tradition. Devotional spaces are places for private prayer. Sacred images include the crucifix, stations of the cross, statuary and icons.

### RESERVATION OF THE EUCHARIST

#### HISTORY

In the Early Church, bread from the Eucharist was taken home by individuals to be consumed during the week, given to the sick, those unable to attend Eucharist, or as Viaticum to the dying. In his book, From Age to Age, Fr. Edward Foley recalls that “From the beginning of Christianity, the bread used at Eucharist was similar to that used for ordinary meals. After the 9<sup>th</sup> century, unleavened bread became customary, and eventually mandatory in the Christian West. There was an ancient tradition for making Eucharistic bread in the shape of flat disks. Bread stamps of the period indicate that these disks were larger and thicker than hosts of a later era.” (p. 83)

In following centuries the consecrated bread was kept in the church in a container often called a tabernacle which was stored in the sacristy. Again the purpose for keeping the bread was for the sick and dying. When Eucharistic bread changed to the flat, unleavened hosts we are familiar with, the reserved sacrament was stored in a portable container called a pyx. These were sometimes in the shape of a dove, and were suspended over the altar in the late Middle Ages.

From the 11<sup>th</sup> century on more secure places for public reservation of the Eucharistic bread were developed. The Fourth Lateran Council stated that “in all churches, chrism and the eucharist should be reserved under the reliable protection of lock and key.” (#137) In Italy permanent wall tabernacles were in use by the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In northern Europe the eucharist was reserved in “sacrament houses” which were large, towering structures, sometimes in the shape of cathedral spires, placed in the sanctuary.

It was not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Italy that it became common for the eucharist to be reserved on the altar. The directive applicable in Italy was proposed, but not imposed on, the universal church, and in other parts of Europe wall tabernacles and sacrament houses continued to be common practice. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it became the norm to have tabernacles built into the church’s high altar. According to Fr. Foley, “This transformed the tabernacle from an independent Eucharistic vessel to a part of the architecture.” (p. 135) This remained the norm until Vatican II.

#### CURRENT NORMS

According to the bishops’ document, Built of Living Stones, “The Second Vatican Council led the Church to a fuller understanding of the relationship between the presence of the Lord in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist and in the reserved Sacrament, and of the Christian’s responsibility to feed the hungry and to care for the poor. As the baptized grow to understand their active participation in the Eucharist, they will be drawn to spend more time in quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle, and be impelled to live out their relationship in active charity.” (BLS #71)

In paragraph 72 the bishops go on to say “The general law of the Church provides norms concerning the tabernacle and the place for the reservation of the Eucharist that express the importance Christians place on the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The *Code of Canon Law* directs that the Eucharist be reserved in a part of the church that is “distinguished, conspicuous, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer.”

According to BLS and the Policies of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, the tabernacle can be located in a separate chapel suitable for adoration and for private prayer or in the sanctuary apart from the altar of celebration.

With St. Cecilia's practice of adoration, it is important to have a separate chapel for reservation and adoration which is in accord with #78 of BLS which quotes the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments saying that exposition "take place in a separate chapel that is 'distinct from the body of the church so as not to interfere with the normal activities of the parish or its daily liturgical celebration.' "

The Reservation Chapel is to be placed and designed to foster reverence or quiet for personal prayer (#77) and should allow for easy access to the tabernacle for people in wheelchairs or with other disabilities. The diocesan policy states that "The chapel should be accessible from inside and outside of the church building to allow opportunity for prayer and adoration even when the church is locked," (16.C) and that the chapel "should never be used for any other purpose, i.e. as a storage area, rehearsal space or cry room." (16.D)

## **SACRED IMAGES**

"Throughout history and among widely differing cultures, a rich heritage of popular devotions honoring Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints has developed in the Church. Popular devotions 'express and nourish the spirit of prayer' and are to be encouraged when they are in conformity with the norms of the Church and are derived from and lead to the liturgy." (BLS #130)

"Sacred images are important not only in liturgical prayer but also in devotional prayer because they are sacramentals that help the faithful to focus their attention and their prayer. The design of the church building can do much to foster devotions and to ensure that they enhance and reinforce rather than compete with the liturgical life of the community." (BLS #131)

**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 document says there is to be only one crucifix in the worship space which can be hung, wall mounted or incorporated into a large processional cross.

**STATIONS OF THE CROSS:** This devotion originated early in the church when, in order to enter more fully into the passion and death of the Lord, pilgrims followed the way walked by Christ from Pilate's House to Calvary. Their desire to continue this devotion when they returned home led to the development by the Franciscans of the images of the Way of the Cross. An important part of this devotion is that the stations be placed so that movement/journey takes place from one station to the next.

**STATUARY & ICONS:** "Reflecting the awareness of the Communion of Saints, the practice of incorporating symbols of the Trinity and images of Christ, the Blessed Mother, the angels and the saints into the design of a church creates a source of devotion and prayer for a parish community and should be part of the design of the church. Since the Eucharist unites the Body of Christ, including those who are not physically present, the use of images in the church reminds us that we are joined to all who have gone before us, as well as to those who now surround us." (BLS #135)

The bishops say that there should be "restraint in the number and prominence of sacred images" in order "to help people focus on the liturgical action that is celebrated in the church." (BLS #137) They also state that it is particularly desirable that a "significant image of the patron of the church" as well as an image of Mary be fittingly displayed.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

What elements make a space conducive to private prayer for you?

What sacred images are of special significance to St. Cecilia's Parish?