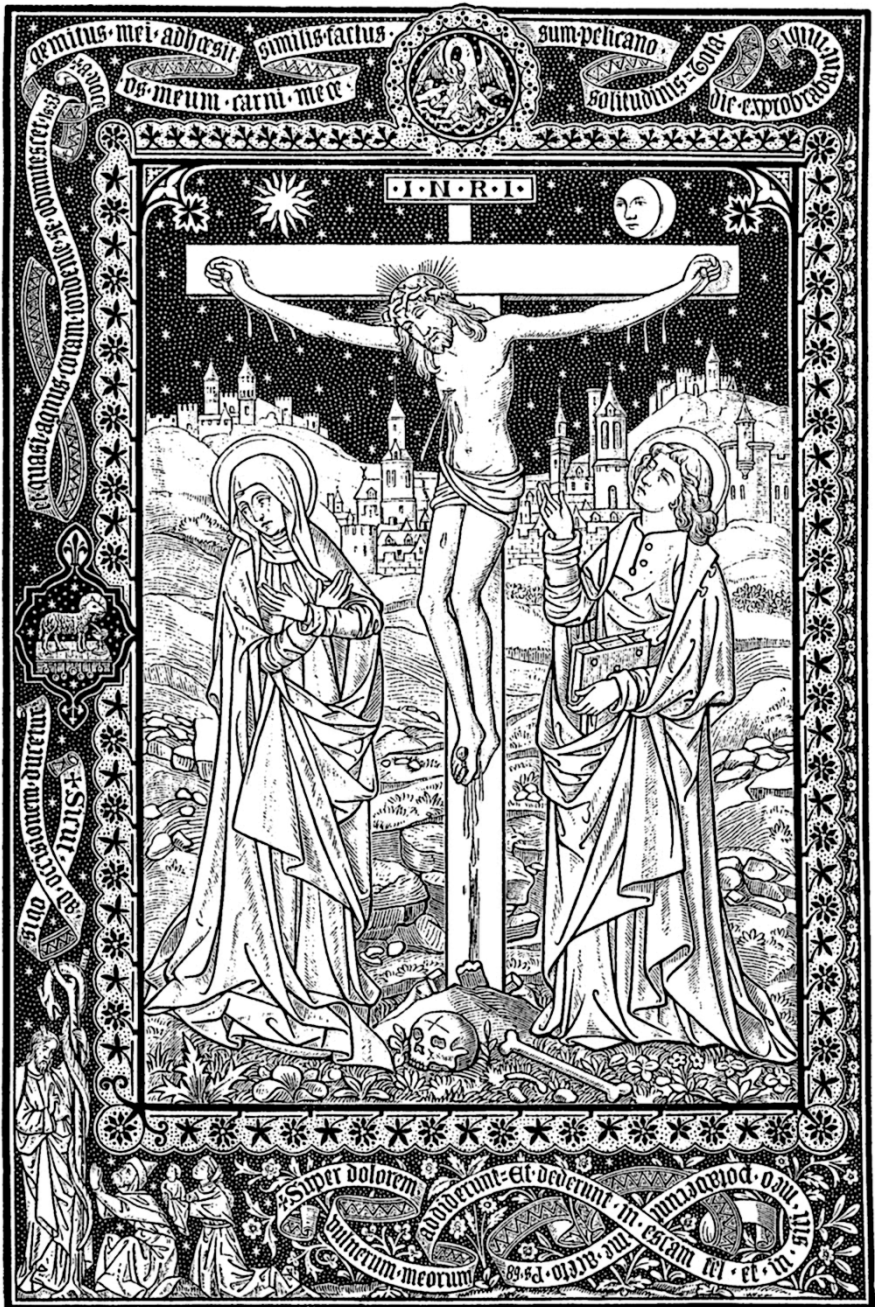


What Will I See in a Catholic Church?



What Happens in the Church?

The church building is used for many different types of prayer, public and private.

1) The church is primarily used for the celebration of the *sacred liturgy*, the official public prayer of the Church:

The Sacrifice of the Mass.

Other sacraments, e.g., Baptism, Confession, and Matrimony.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction.

Funeral Rites.

Blessings.

The Celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.

2) The church is also used for the celebration of *devotions*, public or private expressions of prayer accepted and endorsed by the Church:

The Rosary.

The Stations of the Cross.

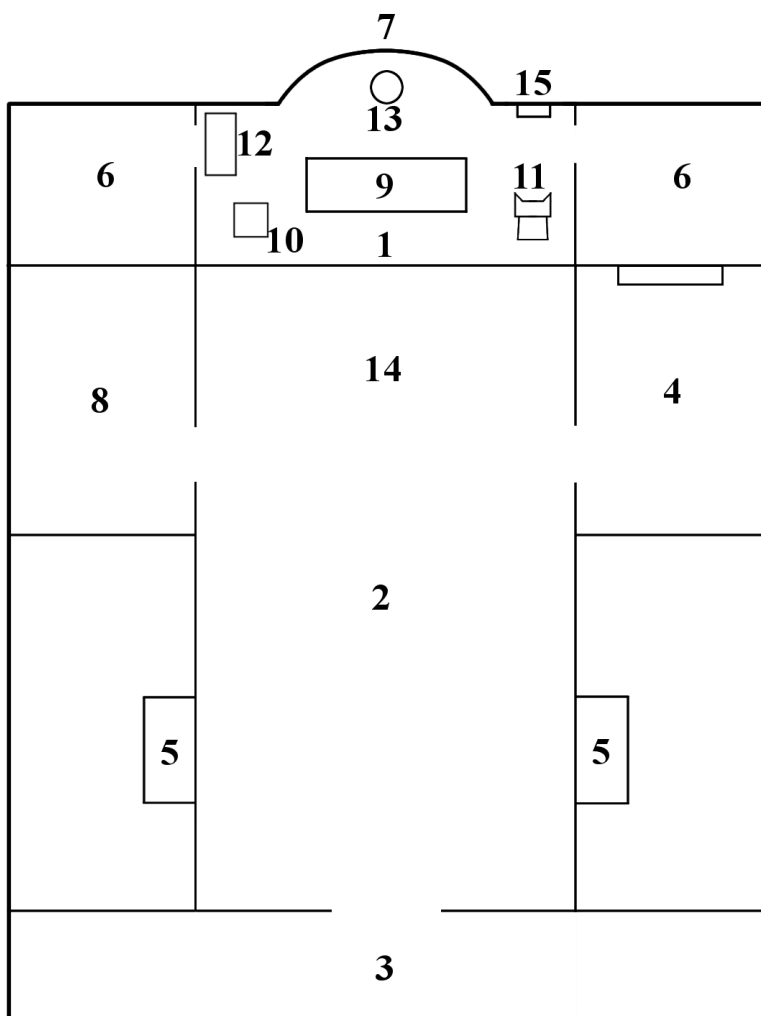
Prayer in front of sacred images and statues.

3) Finally, the church is available for people to come for *private prayer* before the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle.

The layout of the church building and the sacred objects and furnishings found within the church exist to serve these different types of prayer.

The church building itself can be considered the *house of God* and the *house of the Church*, God's holy people, a spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:4–5).

A Typical Church Layout



1. Sanctuary
2. Nave
3. Narthex
4. Blessed Sacrament Chapel
5. Confessional
6. Sacristy
7. Apse
8. Cry Room
9. Altar
10. Ambo
11. Presider's Chair
12. Credence Table
13. Tabernacle
14. Pews
15. Ambry

The Sanctuary: The elevated portion of the church where the clergy and other ministers perform their proper functions in the worship of God. The sanctuary symbolizes heaven.

The Nave: The main body of the church where the congregation gathers.

The Narthex: The lobby or “gathering space” outside of the church proper.

The Blessed Sacrament Chapel: The chapel where the tabernacle is located for the faithful to come and pray.

The Sacristy: The room where the sacred vestments, vessels, and other items used in the celebration of the liturgy are stored and prepared.

The Apse: The curved area behind the altar where the tabernacle is located in many churches.

The Altar: The sacred table on which the sacrifice of the Mass is offered to God; the table from which the faithful receive the Blessed Sacrament.

The Ambo: The lectern from which the readings are proclaimed.

The Presider's Chair: The chair on which the priest sits during Mass.

The Credence Table: The table on which objects are kept during the celebration of Mass.

The Tabernacle: (Latin: *tabernaculum*, “tent”) The golden container in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The name derives from the Old Testament tent in which God dwelt among his people.

The Pews: The benches on which the congregation sits.

The Ambry: The cabinet in which the three holy oils are kept.

Offices and Roles

The liturgy (official public worship) of the Church is essentially *hierarchical*, that is, everything is ordered, and “in liturgical celebrations each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.”¹

Bishop: The bishop has the fullness of the priesthood. The essence of the priesthood is to offer sacrifice as a mediator between God and man.² The bishop, moreover, is a source of unity for his diocese.³

Priest: The priest has the lower degree of the priesthood.

Deacon: The deacon is the lowest-ranking cleric. He shares in Christ's servanthood. At Mass, he assists the bishop or the priest, chants or proclaims the Gospel, and gives instructions to the congregation, such as “Let us offer each other the sign of peace,” or “The Mass is ended, go in peace.”

Acolyte: The instituted acolyte⁴ (rarely found in America) assists the priest and the deacon at the altar.

Lector: The instituted lector (rarely found in America) proclaims the readings except for the Gospel. In most parishes in America, this function is performed by other lay persons.

Altar Server: The server assists the priest and deacon (and acolyte) at the altar. In the older form of Mass, the servers were responsible for making the responses on behalf of the entire congregation.

1 Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, n. 28.

2 Hebrews 5:1: “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

3 Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107), *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*: “Apart from the bishop, let no one perform any of the functions that pertain to the Church. Let the Eucharist be held valid which is offered by the bishop or by one to whom the bishop has committed this charge. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

4 For information on the instituted acolyte and lector, see Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam* (1972).

Congregation: The congregation consists of the lay faithful of the local Church who have gathered for the worship of God. “It is, therefore, desirable ... that all the faithful should be aware that to participate in the eucharistic sacrifice is their chief duty and supreme dignity, and that not in an inert and negligent fashion, giving way to distractions and day-dreaming, but with such earnestness and concentration that they may be united as closely as possible with the High Priest, according to the Apostle, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.' And together with Him and through Him let them make their oblation, and in union with Him let them offer up themselves.”⁵

Sacristan: The person who prepares the requisite materials for the celebration of Mass.

Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion: The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (so-called to distinguish from the “ordinary” ministers of Holy Communion, i.e., the bishop, priest, and deacon, who have this function because of their role in the Church) is a duly-delegated lay person who assists in distributing Holy Communion due to grave necessity, “when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.”⁶

The Sacred Vessels and Other Vessels

The chalice: The vessel which holds the wine that becomes the Precious Blood of Christ.

The paten: The golden “plate” that holds the bread that becomes the Sacred Body of Christ.

The Communion paten: The golden “plate” that is used at the

5 Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* (1947), n. 80.

6 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (25 March 2004), n. 158.

Communion of the faithful to catch any particle of the Host that may accidentally fall at that time.

The ciborium: A golden vessel with a lid that is used for the distribution and reservation of Hosts.

The pyx: A small, closing golden vessel that is used to bring the Blessed Sacrament to those who cannot come to the church.

The monstrance: An ornate vessel used to display the Blessed Sacrament for public adoration.

The ablution cup: A small container of water that sits near the tabernacle or on the credence table for the priest to wash his fingers of any particles of the Host after the distribution of Holy Communion.

The cruets: The cruets hold the wine and the water that are used at Mass.

The lavabo dish: The dish that is used for washing the priest's hands. Its name comes from the psalm (Ps. 26:6: *Lavabo* = "I will wash") that was recited in the older form of Mass during the washing of the hands.

The aspersorium: The bucket used to carry holy water for sprinkling.

The aspergillum: The sprinkler for casting holy water on people, places, or objects.

The Altar Linens

The corporal: The corporal (Latin: *corporale* from *corpus*, "body") is a square cloth placed on the altar beneath the chalice and paten. It is folded so as to catch any particles of the Host that may accidentally fall.

The purificator: The purificator (Latin: *purificatorium*) is a small

rectangular cloth used for wiping the chalice.

The pall: The pall (Latin: *palla*, “cover”) is a stiff square cloth used to cover the chalice during Mass to prevent dust from settling in it or anything from falling into it.

The lavabo towel (Finger towel): The towel with which the priest dries his hands after washing them during the Mass.

The altar cloth: A rectangular white cloth that covers the altar for the celebration of Mass.

Vestments

The amice: The amice (Latin: *amictus*, “garment”) is a rectangular linen cloth used by those who wear an alb if the alb does not completely cover the clothing at the neck,⁷ the reason being that in the sacred liturgy, the minister's common clothing should be completely covered since he does not act as himself but in an official capacity. The amice is called the “helmet of salvation” (cf. Eph 6:17) (it was worn even on the head in former times) and is worn with the prayer that the wearer be protected from the assaults of demons, who wish to distract his mind from attentiveness to the sacred action he is about to undertake.

The alb: The alb (Latin: *alba*, “white”) is a full-length white garment worn by the priest and deacon. In some places, it is also worn by others, e.g., servers or lectors. It symbolizes purity of heart as well as the white garment given in baptism.

The cincture: The cincture (Latin: *cingulum*, “belt”) is worn around the alb if it does not fit closely to the body.⁸ It symbolizes chastity.

The stole: The stole (Latin: *stola*, “robe”) is a long strip of fabric worn around the neck. It matches the color of the day. Priests wear the stole around the neck and over the breast. Deacons wear the stole diagonally from the left shoulder to the right side. The stole

⁷ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 336.

⁸ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 336.

indicates the office or rank of the one wearing it as well as symbolizing sanctifying grace.⁹

The chasuble: The chasuble (Latin: *casula*, “little house”) is worn by the priest over his other vestments. It symbolizes the yoke of Christ and of the priesthood.

The dalmatic: The dalmatic (Latin: *dalmatica*) is the distinctive vestment of the deacon. It seems to have developed in Dalmatia, hence the name. Unlike the chasuble, the dalmatic has sleeves.

The surplice: The surplice (Latin: *superpelliceum*, “over fur”) is a short white garment worn only over the cassock. It takes the place of an alb.

The cope: The cope (Latin: *pluviale*, “rain coat”) is a cape-like vestment that may be worn during processions and liturgical celebrations outside of Mass.

The cassock: The cassock (Latin: *vestis talaris*, “ankle-length garment”) is not a vestment but the ordinary garment worn by the clergy. The cassock varies in color according to the rank of the cleric who wears it.

Liturgical Books

The Roman Missal (Sacramentary): The book containing the ceremonial instructions and prayers for the celebration of Mass.

The Roman Gradual: The book containing all of the chants for every Mass of the year.

The Book of the Gospels (Evangelary): The book, usually ornate, from which the Gospel reading is proclaimed.

9 In the Latin Vulgate version of Luke 15:22, the prodigal son, when he is being re-instated by his father is clothed in “the best stole.” When putting on the stole, the traditional prayer calls it the “stole of immortality, which I lost in the trespass of my first parent.”

The Lectionary: The book containing the biblical readings arranged for the celebration of Mass.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Contains the general norms for the celebration of Mass.

Hand Missal: A book for the use of the congregation containing the proper prayers and readings for Mass.

Missalette: A small booklet containing the proper prayers and readings for the Masses during a given period of time.

The Roman Ritual: A series of books containing the liturgical rites for services other than Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours.

The Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office): Formerly called the *Breviary*. Contains the cycle of psalms and readings that priests and consecrated persons must pray throughout the day. Others are encouraged to pray this.

Other Things in the Church

Holy water: Water that has been blessed, a reminder of baptism and of the supernatural life of God's grace.

The Sacred Chrism: (Latin: *Sacrum Chrisma*) Olive oil, which has perfume mixed with it, consecrated by the bishop annually. Signifies strengthening in dedication to God. Used after baptism, for confirmation, in the ordination of priests, and in the consecration of bishops.

The Oil of the Sick: (Latin: *Oleum Infirmorum*) Olive oil blessed by the bishop annually. Signifies strengthening for healing. Used in the Anointing of the Sick (Jas. 5:14)

The Oil of Catechumens: (Latin: *Oleum Catechumenorum*) Olive oil blessed by the bishop annually. Signifies strengthening for repentance and turning away from evil. Used in preparation for baptism.

The thurible: The thurible (Latin: *thuribulum*, “censer”) is used for carrying and burning incense.

The incense boat: The incense boat (Latin: *navicula*, “little boat”) holds the incense before it is placed in the thurible for burning.

The processional cross: The processional cross hearkens back to the days of the Roman army when the standard-bearer would carry the insignia of a particular legion into battle. The cross is the mark of a Christian.

The crucifix (Altar cross): During the celebration of Mass, there must be a cross with the figure of Christ crucified on or near the altar.¹⁰ Like St Paul, Catholics believe that the Eucharist is a memorial of the death of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:26), and we preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23).

The Paschal candle: A new Paschal candle is prepared and blessed every year at the Easter Vigil. This light stands near the altar during the Easter Season and near the baptismal font during the rest of the year. It may also stand near the casket during the funeral rites.

The candles: Mass must be celebrated with natural candles, which signify the presence of Christ, our light.

The tabernacle lamp: A candle, often red, that burns near the tabernacle when the Blessed Sacrament is present there.

The burse: A folded cloth case which holds the corporal before and after use. Customary but no longer required.

The chalice veil: A veil that is white or the color of the day which covers the chalice before and after its use. Recommended but no longer required.¹¹

The Missal stand: A stand that is placed on the altar to hold the

10 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 117.

11 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 118.

Missal.

The Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are fourteen points of reflection that follow Jesus from his condemnation to death to his burial.

The sacrarium: A drain in the sacristy that flows directly into the earth.¹² Used for respectfully disposing of holy water, blessed ashes, the water used to wash the altar linens, etc., but *never* for the Blessed Sacrament.¹³

Colors¹⁴

White: White symbolizes light, purity, innocence, joy, and glory. It is used on certain feast days and during Christmas and Easter Season. It may also be used in Masses for the dead.

Green: Green, the natural color of life, points to the hope of life eternal. It is used in Ordinary Time.

Violet: Violet symbolizes melancholy and somberness. It is used in penitential seasons (Advent and Lent), and may be used in Masses for the dead.

Red: Red connotes both fire and blood. It is used on the feasts of martyrs, on Masses of the Holy Spirit, on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on Palm Sunday, and on similar feasts.

Rose: Rose symbolizes joy in the midst of a penitential season (rose being between violet and white). It may be worn only on two days in the year: *Gaudete Sunday* (Third Sunday of Advent) and *Laetare Sunday* (Fourth Sunday of Lent). The names of these Sundays are taken from the first words of the Entrance Antiphon for each day: *Gaudete in Domino* (“Rejoice in the Lord”) and *Laetare Ierusalem* (“Rejoice, Jerusalem”) respectively.

12 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 334.

13 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum* (25 March 2004), n. 107.

14 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 346.

Black: Black symbolizes mourning and grief. It may be used on All Souls Day and in Masses for the dead.

Gestures¹⁵

Standing: Standing shows a special level of respect and readiness, e.g., during the Gospel reading. It is also the normal posture when singing or when praying in common.

Genuflection: A genuflection is made by bending the right knee to the ground. It is given to the Blessed Sacrament when entering or leaving the church or when passing in front of the tabernacle.¹⁶ In addition, a genuflection is customarily made when acknowledging the Incarnation or the death of Christ.

Kiss: The Book of the Gospels and the altar are customarily venerated with a kiss.

Profound bow: A profound bow is made to the altar whenever one passes in front of it during Mass and during the Creed at the words that refer directly to the Incarnation: “By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.”

Bow of the head: A bow of the head is made during Mass at the name of Jesus, of the three Divine Persons mentioned together (e.g., “Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit”), of Mary, and of the saint in whose honor the Mass is celebrated.¹⁷

Sitting: Sitting signifies attentiveness, especially to the readings from Sacred Scripture or during the preparation of the altar.

Kneeling: Kneeling signifies adoration of God and humility before him. Kneeling is the proper posture for the congregation during the Eucharistic Prayer and after the *Agnus Dei* before the reception of Holy Communion.

15 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 273–275.

16 *Ceremonial of Bishops* (1984), n. 71.

17 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), n. 275.

Striking the breast: Done during the *Confiteor* and by the priest during Eucharistic Prayer I to signify acknowledgement of our sinfulness.