

Exploring the Church



- We make the sign of the cross with water as we enter the church. We take holy water from the **font**. It is called "holy" because it has been blessed by a priest. When we sign ourselves, we recall that at baptism we were welcomed into the community of faith and share in the work of Jesus.
- In the church we can see one another, but we also focus on the **sanctuary** the space where the altar is located. Church seats are long benches called **pews**.
- We believe that Jesus is truly present in the community that is assembled, people gathered around the **altar**. Jesus Christ is truly present in the word of God proclaimed by the reader and in the priest who presides at the worship. He is truly present in the consecrated ("made holy") bread and wine we receive at communion.
- The altar looks like a table, reminding us that Jesus comes to be our bread of life, and that we are sharing a sacred meal together. The altar is covered with an **altar cloth** (like a tablecloth) for this extraordinary meal.
- On the altar are **candles**, symbols of the presence of Jesus, the light of the world. There is also a large candle called the **Paschal** or **Easter candle**. it is a reminder of the risen Christ in our midst.
- The **lectern** is the special stand used to hold the **lectionary**, the book that contains the readings from the Bible. These are read by the lector, the reader, and by the priest, who usually stands at the lectern when he gives the homily (when he shares the meaning of the word of God with us).
- A **crucifix** is in the sanctuary. It is behind the altar and is there to remind us of the total love Jesus has for us.

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- Many churches have **stained glass windows**. These show pictures from the Bible or from the lives of the saints. In the Middle Ages, when many people could not read, these were like religious picture books for them.
 - Many churches have a **reconciliation room** a place for people to come to talk with the priest, to confess their sins, and to receive the sign (absolution) that their sins are forgiven by a loving God.
 - On the walls of the church there are fourteen **Stations of the Cross**. This devotion reminds us of the suffering of Jesus and the love he has for us.
 - Many Catholic churches have **statues** especially of Jesus, Mary, and the saints, perhaps St Joseph or the patron saint of the parish. We do not worship statues, but they remind us of the great faith of Mary and the saints.
 - The Blessed Sacrament chapel may be the special room where the **tabernacle** is kept. Here the consecrated hosts are reserved to bring to persons who are sick. The tabernacle also holds the ciborium with extra hosts needed for Sunday Mass. A **sanctuary light** burns to remind us that Jesus is present.
 - We as the people of God are called "Church" but church is also this special place where we come together as a community of believers who praise and thank God.