



North Thompson Catholic Parishes

Roman Catholic Diocese of Kamloops

The Holy Eucharist

Reference from Catechism of the Catholic Church

CHAPTER V

The Arrangement and Furnishing of Churches for the Celebration of the Eucharist

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

288. For the celebration of the Eucharist, the people of God normally are gathered together in a church or, if there is no church or if it is too small, then in another respectable place that is nonetheless worthy of so great a mystery. Churches, therefore, and other places should be suitable for carrying out the sacred action and for ensuring the active participation of the faithful. Sacred buildings and requisites for divine worship should, moreover, be truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities.[\[108\]](#)

289. Consequently, the Church constantly seeks the noble assistance of the arts and admits the artistic expressions of all peoples and regions.[\[109\]](#) In fact, just as she is intent on preserving the works of art and the artistic treasures handed down from past centuries[\[110\]](#) and, insofar as necessary, on adapting them to new needs, so also she strives to promote new works of art that are in harmony with the character of each successive age.[\[111\]](#)

On account of this, in commissioning artists and choosing works of art to be admitted into a church, what should be required is that true excellence in art which nourishes faith and devotion and accords authentically with both the meaning and the purpose for which it is intended.[\[112\]](#)

290. All churches should be dedicated or, at least, blessed. Cathedrals and parish churches, however, are to be dedicated with a solemn rite.

291. For the proper construction, restoration, and remodeling of sacred buildings, all who are involved in the work are to consult the diocesan commission on the sacred Liturgy and sacred Art. The diocesan Bishop, moreover, should use the counsel and help of this commission whenever it comes to laying down norms on this matter, approving plans for new buildings, and making decisions on the more important issues.[\[113\]](#)

292. Church decor should contribute toward the church's noble simplicity rather than ostentation. In the choice of materials for church appointments there should be a concern for genuineness of materials and an intent to foster the instruction of the faithful and the dignity of the entire sacred place.

293. A proper arrangement of a church and its surroundings that appropriately meets contemporary needs requires attention not only to the elements related more directly to the celebration of the sacred actions but also to those things conducive to the appropriate comfort of the faithful that are normally forthcoming in places where people regularly gather.

294. The People of God, gathered for Mass, has a coherent and hierarchical structure, which finds its expression in the variety of ministries and the variety of actions according to the different parts of the celebration. The general ordering of the sacred building must be such that in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly and allows the appropriate ordering of all the participants, as well as facilitating each in the proper carrying out of his function.

The faithful and the choir should have a place that facilitates their active participation.[\[114\]](#)

The priest celebrant, the deacon, and the other ministers have places in the sanctuary. Seats for concelebrants should also be prepared there. If, however, their number is great, seats should be arranged in another part of the church, but near the altar.

All these elements, even though they must express the hierarchical structure and the diversity of ministries, should nevertheless bring about a close and coherent unity that is clearly expressive of the unity of the entire holy people. Indeed, the character and beauty of the place and all its furnishings should foster devotion and show forth the holiness of the mysteries celebrated there.

II. ARRANGEMENT OF THE SANCTUARY FOR THE SACRED SYNAXIS (EUCCHARISTIC ASSEMBLY)

295. The sanctuary is the place where the altar stands, where the word of God is proclaimed, and where the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers exercise their offices. It should suitably be marked off from the body of the church either by its being somewhat elevated or by a particular structure and ornamentation. It should, however, be large enough to allow the Eucharist to be celebrated properly and easily seen.[\[115\]](#)

The Altar and Its Appointments

296. The altar on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present under sacramental signs is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is called together to participate in the Mass, as well as the center of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist.

297. The celebration of the Eucharist in a sacred place is to be carried out on an altar; but outside a sacred place, it may be carried out on a suitable table, always with the use of a cloth, a corporal, a cross, and candles.

298. It is appropriate to have a fixed altar in every church, since it more clearly and permanently signifies Christ Jesus, the living stone (1 Pt 2:4; cf. Eph 2:20). In other places set aside for sacred celebrations, the altar may be movable.

An altar is called “fixed” if it is attached to the floor so as not to be removeable; otherwise it is called “moveable.”

299. The altar should be built apart from the wall, in such a way that it is possible to walk around it easily and that Mass can be celebrated at it facing the people, which is desirable wherever possible. The altar should, moreover, be so placed as to be truly the center toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns.[\[116\]](#) The altar is usually fixed and is dedicated.

300. An altar whether fixed or movable is dedicated according to the rite prescribed in the Roman Pontifical; but it is permissible for a movable altar simply to be blessed.

301. In keeping with the Church's traditional practice and the altar's symbolism, the table of a fixed altar is to be of stone and indeed of natural stone. In the dioceses of the United States of America, however, wood which is worthy, solid, and well-crafted may be used, provided that the altar is structurally immobile. The supports or base for upholding the table, however, may be made of any sort of material, provided it is worthy and solid.

A movable altar may be constructed of any noble and solid materials suited to liturgical use, according to the traditions and usages of the different regions.

302. The practice of placing relics of Saints, even those not Martyrs, under the altar to be dedicated is fittingly retained. Care should be taken, however, to ensure the authenticity of such relics.

303. In building new churches, it is preferable to erect a single altar which in the gathering of the faithful will signify the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church.

In already existing churches, however, when the old altar is positioned so that it makes the people's participation difficult but cannot be moved without damage to its artistic value, another fixed altar, of artistic merit and duly dedicated, should be erected and sacred rites celebrated on it alone. In order not to distract the attention of the faithful from the new altar, the old altar should not be decorated in any special way.

304. Out of reverence for the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and for the banquet in which the Body and Blood of the Lord are offered on an altar where this memorial is celebrated, there should be at least one white cloth, its shape, size, and decoration in keeping with the altar's design. When, in the dioceses of the United States of America, other cloths are used in addition to the altar cloth, then those cloths may be of other colors possessing Christian honorific or festive significance according to longstanding local usage, provided that the uppermost cloth covering the *mensa* (i.e., the altar cloth itself) is always white in color.

305. Moderation should be observed in the decoration of the altar.

During Advent the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this season, without expressing prematurely the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. During Lent it is forbidden for the altar to be decorated with flowers. Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), solemnities, and feasts are exceptions.

Floral decorations should always be done with moderation and placed around the altar rather than on its *mensa*.

306. Only what is required for the celebration of the Mass may be placed on the *mensa* of the altar: namely, from the beginning of the celebration until the proclamation of the Gospel, the *Book of the Gospels*; then from the Presentation of the Gifts until the purification of the vessels, the chalice with the paten, a ciborium, if necessary, and, finally, the corporal, the purificator, the pall, and the Missal.

In addition, microphones that may be needed to amplify the priest's voice should be arranged discreetly.

307. The candles, which are required at every liturgical service out of reverence and on account of the festiveness of the celebration (cf. no. 117), are to be appropriately placed either on or around the altar in a way suited to the design of the altar and the sanctuary so that the whole may be well balanced and not interfere with the faithful's clear view of what takes place at the altar or what is placed on it.

308. There is also to be a cross, with the figure of Christ crucified upon it, either on the altar or near it, where it is clearly visible to the assembled congregation. It is appropriate that such a cross, which calls to mind for the faithful the saving Passion of the Lord, remain near the altar even outside of liturgical celebrations.

The Ambo

309. The dignity of the word of God requires that the church have a place that is suitable for the proclamation of the word and toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word.[\[117\]](#)

It is appropriate that this place be ordinarily a stationary ambo and not simply a movable lectern. The ambo must be located in keeping with the design of each church in such a way that the ordained ministers and lectors may be clearly seen and heard by the faithful.

From the ambo only the readings, the responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*) are to be proclaimed; it may be used also for giving the homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it.

It is appropriate that a new ambo be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual[118] before it is put into liturgical use.

The Chair for the Priest Celebrant and Other Seats

310. The chair of the priest celebrant must signify his office of presiding over the gathering and of directing the prayer. Thus the best place for the chair is in a position facing the people at the head of the sanctuary, unless the design of the building or other circumstances impede this: for example, if the great distance would interfere with communication between the priest and the gathered assembly, or if the tabernacle is in the center behind the altar. Any appearance of a throne, however, is to be avoided. [119] It is appropriate that, before being put into liturgical use, the chair be blessed according to the rite described in the *Roman Ritual*. [120]

Likewise, seats should be arranged in the sanctuary for concelebrating priests as well as for priests who are present for the celebration in choir dress but who are not concelebrating.

The seat for the deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant. Seats for the other ministers are to be arranged so that they are clearly distinguishable from those for the clergy and so that the ministers are easily able to fulfill the function entrusted to them.[\[121\]](#)

III. THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE CHURCH

The Places for the Faithful

311. Places should be arranged with appropriate care for the faithful so that they are able to participate in the sacred celebrations visually and spiritually, in the proper manner. It is expedient for benches or seats usually to be provided for their use. The custom of reserving seats for private persons, however, is reprehensible.[\[122\]](#) Moreover, benches or chairs should be arranged, especially in newly built churches, in such a way that the people can easily take up the postures required for the different parts of the celebration and can easily come forward to receive Holy Communion.

Care should be taken that the faithful be able not only to see the priest, the deacon, and the lectors but also, with the aid of modern technical means, to hear them without difficulty.

The Place for the Choir and the Musical Instruments

312. The choir should be positioned with respect to the design of each church so as to make clearly evident its character as a part of the gathered community of the faithful fulfilling a specific function. The location should also assist the choir to exercise its function more easily and conveniently allow each choir member full, sacramental participation in the Mass.
[\[123\]](#)

313. The organ and other lawfully approved musical instruments are to be placed in an appropriate place so that they can sustain the singing of both the choir and the congregation and be heard with ease by all if they are played alone. It is appropriate that, before being put into liturgical use, the organ be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual.[\[124\]](#)

In Advent the organ and other musical instruments should be used with a moderation that is consistent with the season's character and does not anticipate the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord.

In Lent the playing of the organ and musical instruments is allowed only to support the singing. Exceptions are Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), solemnities, and feasts.

The Place for the Reservation of the Most Holy Eucharist

314. In accordance with the structure of each church and legitimate local customs, the Most Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer.

[\[125\]](#)

The one tabernacle should be immovable, be made of solid and inviolable material that is not transparent, and be locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is prevented to the greatest extent possible.[\[126\]](#) Moreover, it is appropriate that, before it is put into liturgical use, it be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual.[\[127\]](#)

315. It is more in keeping with the meaning of the sign that the tabernacle in which the Most Holy Eucharist is reserved not be on an altar on which Mass is celebrated.[\[128\]](#)

Consequently, it is preferable that the tabernacle be located, according to the judgment of the diocesan Bishop,

- Either in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration, in a form and place more appropriate, not excluding on an old altar no longer used for celebration (cf. no. 303);
- Or even in some chapel suitable for the faithful's private adoration and prayer[\[129\]](#) and organically connected to the church and readily visible to the Christian faithful.

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316. In accordance with traditional custom, near the tabernacle a special lamp, fueled by oil or wax, should be kept alight to indicate and honor the presence of Christ.[\[130\]](#)

317. In no way should all the other things prescribed by law concerning the reservation of the Most Holy Eucharist be forgotten.[\[131\]](#)

Sacred Images

318. In the earthly Liturgy, the Church participates, by a foretaste, in that heavenly Liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which she journeys as a pilgrim, and where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; and by venerating the memory of the Saints, she hopes one day to have some part and fellowship with them.[\[132\]](#)

Thus, images of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Saints, in accordance with the Church's most ancient tradition, should be displayed for veneration by the faithful in sacred buildings[\[133\]](#) and should be arranged so as to usher the faithful toward the mysteries of faith celebrated there. For this reason, care should be taken that their number not be increased indiscriminately, and that they be arranged in proper order so as not to distract the faithful's attention from the celebration itself.[\[134\]](#) There should usually be only one image of any given Saint. Generally speaking, in the ornamentation and arrangement of a church as far as images are concerned, provision should be made for the devotion of the entire community as well as for the beauty and dignity of the images.