

Crucifix Good shepherd Tabernacle #3

I For the past few weeks I have been preaching on the importance of the Cross, or as we sometimes say, the Crucifix, because along with the Holy Eucharist it is the center of our Catholic lives. The Crucifix is the most widely known symbol of the Catholic Church. The Crucifix and the Eucharist are directly connected. Jesus offered his life for us on the Cross and we re-present that sacrifice here on the altar every time we celebrate Mass. Not only that but on the eve of his Crucifixion he offered a sacred meal with his disciples, what we call The Last Supper, the institution of the Holy Eucharist. The sacrifice of the Cross and the sacred meal of Jesus are re-presented on this altar The Crucifix, the Eucharist and the altar are directly connected.

A. I am preaching at all the Masses this weekend to summarize the theology of the Church on the connectedness of the Crucifix, the altar and the tabernacle. They are connected in our Church theology but not visually in our church. The Parish Pastoral Council discussed this visual disconnect for over a year before reaching at 13 to 0 consensus recommending to me a change so that what our Catholic Church theology says is reflected in what we see in our church.

B. What I am presenting is not just an opinion. What I am presenting, as I have been for the past two weekends, is the teaching of the

Church as it is presented in the prayers we pray in the celebration of Mass. Here are just a few examples from the prefaces the priest prays when he goes to the altar and begins by saying the Lord be with you. Listen to the emphasis placed on the cross.

a. Preface I of the Passion of the Lord, entitled “The Power of the Cross” talks about the saving Passion of your Son, and “**the wondrous power of the Cross**” and “**the authority of Christ crucified.**”

b. Preface II, of Ordinary Time says: “**By the passion of the Cross, he freed us from unending death...**”

c. Common Preface VI: “**He stretched out His hands as he endured his Passion, so as to break the bonds of death...**”

C. In a very brief sampling of the prefaces, we see the

importance of the cross in our theology although I think we already knew that. Our prayers also connect the cross to the altar. The Votive Mass entitled “The Mystery of the Holy Cross” has this stunning phrase in the prayer over the gifts said by the priest at the altar. “May this oblation, O Lord, which on **the altar of the Cross** cancelled the offense of the whole world...” Think about that phrase, “**the altar of the Cross.**” The Cross is Christ’s altar. That is where he offered his body. The opening prayer of this Votive Mass begins “O God, who willed that your Only

Begotten Son should undergo the Cross to save the human race...” Listen to those words. These are world changing words. Jesus died on the cross to save the human race. The crucifix is our salvation. Yet, it is not here in the center of our church. As nice as the Good Shepherd statue is it is not the universal symbol of our salvation. The crucifix is.

a. Pope Francis recently made the connection of the cross to the altar in his June 29, 2022 apostolic letter on the “Liturgical Formation of the People of God.” He says “The content of the bread broken is the cross of Jesus.” The Pope refers to the Last Supper as the “ritual anticipation of his [Christ’s death].”

b. The Holy Father goes on to say “Only a few hours after the Supper, the apostles could have seen in the cross of Jesus, if they could have borne the weight of it, what it meant for Jesus to say, ‘body offered,’ ‘blood poured out.’ It is this of which we make memorial in every Eucharist.”

D. Now for the tabernacle. In the history of the Church the tabernacle has had many different placements both in the Church proper but also in a side chapel. Monasteries and large Cathedrals generally follow this latter practice. However, in parish churches the tabernacle eventually came to be placed at the center of the high altar. This became a norm for parish churches in the early

1600's and remained so for about 375 years, until the 1970's. That move of the tabernacle to the center of the high altar had a great affect; it fostered greater devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The Catholic Church of course teaches that Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament and thus the tabernacle's placement is important. Although at Mass the altar is the focus of our attention, the three together, crucifix, altar and tabernacle create a unified vision. Visualize the crucifix here on the silver flashing, the tabernacle below the crucifix and behind the altar.

F. The Good Shepherd statue deserves a prominent placement in this church since it has been here since the construction of the church. It was not however, the first object considered for this wall during the design of the interior space. The early drawings had a cross with the resurrected Christ on it. I'm told Msgr. Gribbon, God rest his good soul, wanted the Good Shepherd statue, perhaps because it reflected the farming community of Hanover. A prominent and theological placement of the Good Shepherd will be on the wall over the baptismal area, right above where babies and children are baptized, with the Good Shepherd watching over his lambs. The Good shepherd statue is not being discarded. It is staying here in the church in a very visible position.

G. The niche where the tabernacle now is has the votive candles in it. They will remain there along with the intercessory prayer book, which is now in the baptismal area. The prayer book and the votive candles belong together. The processional cross and candles will be placed there. The area will be used for seasonal displays for Lent, for the Advent wreath, the Christmas Crèche and so on.

H. To help you visualize this change look at the photo shopped picture in the vestibule. It is stunning. When you look at it disregard the Sacred Heart of Jesus statue there. That statue will remain in the narthex. After the Parish Pastoral Council saw the photo shopped picture and reflected on the theology of the Crucifix, altar and tabernacle they embraced the change. Please take a moment to look at the rendition and prayerfully ask God to open your heart that you may also embrace this change. Please see the insert in the bulletin to answer some questions you may have. Remember, the crucifix is the universal sign of our identity. This is who we are. This is who we follow, "Christ, the way, the truth and the life."