

Scripture

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in scripture: 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner;' and 'A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

1 Peter 2:4-10

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Prayer

Bless this altar built in the house of the Church, that it may ever be reserved for the sacrifice of Christ, and stand for ever as the Lord's table, where your people will find nourishment and strength.

Make this altar a sign of Christ from whose pierced side flowed blood and water, which ushered in the sacraments of the Church.

Make it a table of joy, where the friends of Christ may hasten to cast upon you their burdens and cares and take up their journey restored.

Make it a place of communion and peace, so that those who share the body and blood of your Son may be filled with his Spirit and grow in your life of love.

Make it a source of unity and friendship, where your people may gather as one to share your spirit of mutual love

Make it the centre of our praise and thanksgiving until we arrive at the eternal tabernacle, where, together with Christ, high priest and living altar, we will offer you an everlasting sacrifice of praise. Prayer of Dedication of an Altar, 48

**Liturgy
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Consecrated for Worship



At the altar the memorial of the Lord is celebrated and his body and blood given to the people. Therefore the Church's writers have seen in the altar a sign of Christ himself. This is the basis for the saying: 'The altar is Christ'.

Rite of Dedication of an Altar 4

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 centre of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal 29

The Altar

The Altar

The altar is the second of the tables of the Mass, from which the faithful are fed. They are fed first by the word of God proclaimed and broken at the ambo. They are then fed from the altar of sacrifice, where Christ's sacrifice is re-presented by the Church, and from where the people of God receive the Bread of Life and the Cup of eternal salvation.

A single altar

It is most appropriate to have a single altar in a church which in the gathering of the faithful will signify the one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church.

The altar should be in a position which is a natural and central focus within the church, and should be freestanding, so that the Eucharist may be celebrated by the priest facing the people and with sufficient space on all sides so that the priest and other ministers may walk around it easily.

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.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 303

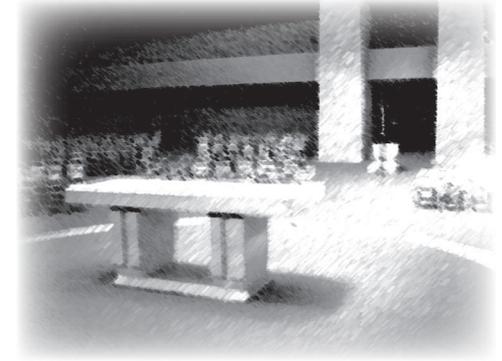
Space around the altar

When the altar stands on a raised area within the sanctuary, there should be space for all the ministers to gather around the altar (e.g. at Confirmation, the Bishop, concelebrants and deacons) and for the altar to be incensed without the presider having to negotiate steps during the incensing.



Materials

It is traditional for the table of a fixed altar to be made of natural stone, and to be fixed. Such an altar is a clear symbol of Christ the Living Stone. However in England and Wales it is also permitted for a fixed altar to be made of wood which is worthy, solid and well-crafted.



Relics

It is traditional to place relics of saints, especially those of Martyrs, under an altar which is to be dedicated. Relics used in an altar should be properly authenticated by the Church, should be recognisable as parts of a human body and not be tiny slivers of bone.

Reserved for the Sacrifice of the Mass

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, only what it required for the celebration of the Mass may be placed on the table of the altar. -, for example the eucharistic vessels and the Missal. Even these items are to remain on the altar for so long as is necessary. Taking care to reserve the altar for its primary purpose, helps to protect its symbolic nature. If the altar is used as a place for keeping hymn books, or parish newsletters it loses something of its sacred significance and can appear to be simply a table.

Flowers and decoration

For the same reason moderation should be observed in the decoration of the altar. Even candles are probably more appropriately placed around the altar rather than on it. Flowers should always be placed around the altar rather than on it.