

Signs and Symbols

Week One Bulletin Insert: New Translation of the Roman Missal

According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal: “Lest Christ’s flock go hungry . . . the Holy Synod commands pastors and all others having the care of souls to give frequent instructions during the celebration of Mass, either personally or through others. . . . Among other things, they should include some explanation of the mystery of this most holy Sacrifice, #11.” This weekend we focus on **Signs and Symbols**. “For the celebration of the Eucharist, the people of God normally are gathered in a church . . . worthy of so great a mystery. Churches . . . 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 . . . be truly worthy and beautiful and be *Signs and Symbols* of heavenly realities, #288.”

Sacred Language - The New Translation of the Roman Missal will help bring us to a deeper encounter with heavenly realities because Sacred Language is itself symbolic. What is said during the Liturgy is more than mere words. It is an opportunity for the Lord to call us to a deeper encounter with Himself. Sacred Language is symbolic when it uses something that is real (a dove) to stand for or suggest another reality that cannot be pictured or shown (the Holy Spirit). Sacred Language is symbolic because it has been chosen and arranged to create a deeper meaning than the mere words themselves. Eucharistic Prayer III has a good example. Instead of just saying “everywhere,” it says “from the rising of the sun to its setting.” For Catholics the “rising sun” speaks to us not just of the morning, but also of the resurrection.

Sacred Images - “In the earthly Liturgy, the Church participates, by foretaste, in that heavenly Liturgy . . . 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. 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 and should be arranged so as to usher the faithful toward the mysteries of faith celebrated there, #318.”

The Cross - “There is to be a cross (crucifix), 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 liturgical celebrations.” (Servant of the Sacred Liturgy – Liturgical Regulations for the Diocese of Baker, page 17)

Candles - “Candles, which are required at every liturgical service, symbolize, with both reverence and festiveness, the light of Christ.” (Servant of the Sacred Liturgy – Liturgical Regulations for the Diocese of Baker, page 11)

The Tabernacle - “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, #314.” “Near the tabernacle a special lamp, fueled by oil or wax, should be kept alight to indicate and honor the presence of Christ, #316.”

The Chair - “The chair for the priest celebrant must signify his office of presiding over the gathering and of directing the prayer, #310.”

Sacred Vestments - “In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, not all members have the same office. This variety of offices in the celebration of the Eucharist is shown outwardly by the diversity of sacred vestments, which should therefore be a sign of the office proper to each minister. At the same time, however, the sacred vestments should also contribute to the beauty of the sacred action itself. The purpose of a variety in the color of the sacred vestments is to give effective expression even outwardly to the specific character of the mysteries of faith being celebrated and to a sense of the Christian life’s passage through the course of the liturgical year.” (Servant of the Sacred Liturgy – Liturgical Regulations for the Diocese of Baker, page 54)

The Ambo - “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, #309.” “In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always proclaimed from the ambo, #58.” “It is from the ambo that the Sacred Scriptures are proclaimed, the homily is given and the intentions of the faithful are prayed. It should be afforded a degree of honor and not be used for lesser purposes.” (Servant of the Sacred Liturgy – Liturgical Regulations for the Diocese of Baker, page 6)

The Book of the Gospels - “In a special way, care must be taken that the liturgical books, particularly the *Book of the Gospels* and the Lectionary, which are intended for the proclamation of the word of God and hence enjoy special veneration, really serve in a liturgical action as signs and symbols of heavenly realities and hence are truly worthy, dignified, and beautiful, #349.” “It is a praiseworthy practice that the *Book of the Gospels* be placed upon the altar, #122.”

The Altar - “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, #296.”

Sacred Vessels - “Among the requisites for the celebration of Mass, the sacred vessels are held in special honor, especially the chalice and paten, in which the bread and wine are offered and consecrated, and from which they are consumed, #327.” “Sacred vessels are to be made from precious metal.” (Servant of the Sacred Liturgy – Liturgical Regulations for the Diocese of Baker, page 5)

Bells - “A little before the consecration, when appropriate, a server rings a bell as a signal to the faithful. According to local custom, the server also rings the bell as the priest shows the host and then the chalice, #150.”

Incense - Incense provides a visible symbol of our prayers rising to God. It is often used to reverence various objects and people within the liturgy.