

## **Your Sacred Space**

How many times have you heard, or have said it yourself, that your parish feels like home? You feel comfortable and at ease, as you enter the doors of St. Patrick. You feel like you belong. Your fellow parishioners know you and you know them. You are genuinely concerned for their well being and vice versa. In other words, it is like walking into your own home. But there is more to your parish than the people. I am referring to the sacred space. The average parishioner knows where everything is located, every picture on the wall, statue, chair and even your favorite pew. Let's be honest, we all have our favorite pew or area that we seek to sit in every weekend. As you look around in your sacred space, everything has a purpose and a history. Let us take a quick tour of our sacred space. As you enter the doors you walk into the vestibule or narthex. This is the area where the faithful gather and greet one another before they enter into the church. In the early history of the Church, the vestibule was a waiting area for unbaptized individuals not allowed inside the worship space and not allowed to participate in all or part of the Mass. It is in this area that we also realize that we are about to enter holy ground and that our attitude, body language and voice should reflect it. As you enter into the church, this is called the nave. It is where the laity prays and worships. **The nave is not a meeting place but it is a sacred place.** It is a place of quiet reflection and prayer. We prepare ourselves for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. As you process up the aisle you enter into the Sanctuary. This often raised area in the front of the church is where the altar, the ambo (the stand where the Gospel is read), the celebrant's chair and still in many churches the tabernacle are located. One other item that is in this area that often goes unnoticed is the sanctuary lamp. In every Catholic church is located a visible burning candle. The flame signifies God's living presence. Canon Law 940 requires the lamp to burn continuously as long as Jesus is present in the tabernacle. In nearly every church, statues and pictures of Jesus, Mary and saints adorn the tables and walls. It is important to mention at this point, that despite the accusations from our Protestant brothers and sisters, Catholics DO NOT worship statues; rather we venerate, respect and admire the individual that the statue represents. The Second Council of Nicea and the Council of Trent stated that the faithful venerate the person represented by the image and not the image itself. As we look around the church, we catch sight of the baptismal font, Easter (or Paschal) candle, Stations of the Cross, ambry for holy oils and confessionals. There is one other area that many people have never seen called the sacristy. This is a separate room usually located off of the vestibule or the sanctuary. This room contains the unconsecrated bread and wine, sacred vessels, books and vestments. It is also the location where the priest, ministers and altar servers prepare for Mass. After Mass, the sacred vessels are cleaned by using two separate sinks. One sink is called the sacrarium, which drains directly into the earth. The water that is used from cleaning the vessels is poured into this sink to ensure that any remaining amount of Jesus' Body and Blood is properly disposed of. Just as we love our home and the tranquility that we experience, we too come to realize that our sacred space comes alive with love and ease as we seek the mysteries and beauty of Christ Jesus.

*–Sherrie Clutts DRE*