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CHAPTER 2

*A Holy People,
a Holy Place*

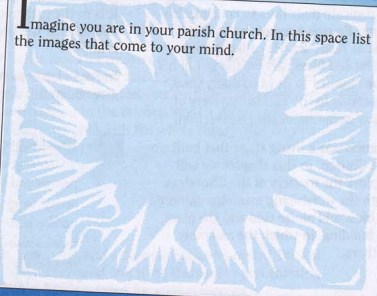
Come to him, a living stone.

1 PETER 2:4



What Do You Think?

Imagine you are in your parish church. In this space list the images that come to your mind.



In 1206, after his conversion, Saint Francis of Assisi was just beginning his new life as a servant of God. One day he entered an old abandoned church half in ruins in San Damiano, outside of Assisi, Italy. While kneeling in prayer, Francis looked up at a crucifix that hung above the altar. He heard Christ speaking, “Francis, go and restore my house, which, as you see, is going to ruin.”

Francis took the message literally, and began to rebuild the church of San Damiano. But there was a deeper meaning to the message. God was calling Francis to give up all that he had, follow Jesus, and serve the poorest of the poor. Francis was called to rebuild, or bring new life into, the Church, the People of God.

We too have a vocation to rebuild the Church for the next generation of believers. We are called to pass on our traditions and the teachings of the

Gospel to present and future generations. What ideas do you have about “rebuilding” the Church of today and the Church of tomorrow?



KEY TERMS

altar
ambo
ambry
baptistry
Blessed Sacrament
cathedra
holy oils
liturgy
tabernacle

San Damiano at Assisi. The first church to be restored by Francis.

Francis brought new life to the Church, the People of God. His love for Christ and the Church continues to attract and motivate men and women to dedicate their lives to continue his work. Francis reached out to people just as Jesus did. He called them to praise and bless God for the gift of his love revealed to us in so many ways, especially in the Paschal mystery of Jesus' suffering-death-resurrection.

Francis was a living stone that built up the Church. In this chapter we will explore the mystery of the Church as both the worshiping assembly gathered to bless and praise God and the place, or building, in which the assembly gathers.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1136, 1140–1144)

The Worshiping Assembly

The word *liturgy* is from the Greek word meaning “work of the people.” It is the whole *community*, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates.

Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is “the sacrament of unity,” namely, the holy people united and organized under the authority of the bishops.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 26

This meaning of liturgy helps us understand the role of the *entire assembly* upon entering a church to worship and give thanks and praise to God *publicly*. It is in the gathered assembly of the faithful that the Real Presence of Jesus is known.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he gives them this advice:

[B]e filled with the Spirit, addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Ephesians 5:18–20

This is a perfect example of full, active, conscious participation in the early Church.

Listen to how Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430), the great African saint, describes his experience while participating in the liturgy:

How I wept, deeply moved by your hymns, songs, and the voices that echoed through your Church! What emotion I experienced in them! Those sounds flowed into my ears, distilling the truth in my heart. A feeling of devotion surged within me, and tears streamed down my face—tears that did me good.

Confessions, 9, 6, 14

It is no surprise that this same Augustine is famous for his quote, “He who sings prays twice!”

What the Documents Say

The Church teaches that all members of the worshipping assembly are to take a full, conscious, and active part in the liturgy. When you are part of a liturgy, do you feel you are fully, consciously, and actively participating in the celebration? Or do you feel more like a passive observer, bored with the whole thing? Why do you think you feel the way you do?

What does full, conscious, and active participation mean? Do you think most people understand this to be their role upon entering a church for liturgy? Give reasons for your responses.

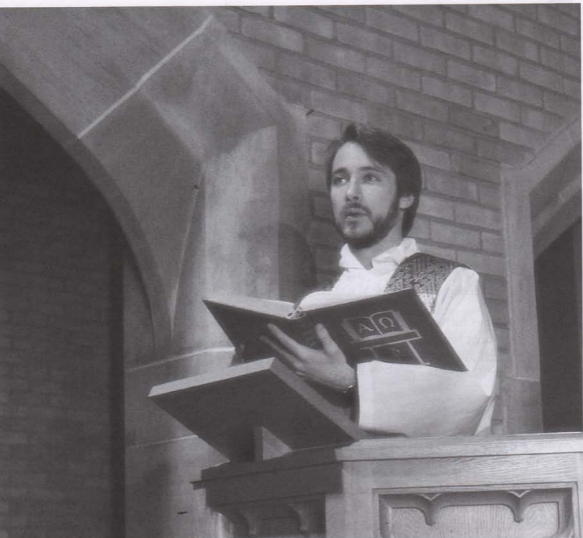
Presider

The worshipping assembly is led, or presided over, by the presider, or celebrant. At the celebration of the Eucharist, it is the priest who presides over the celebration. As the leader of prayer and as the “icon” of Christ, he sets the tone of the Eucharist with his welcoming remarks and his prayerful spirit. He prays the great prayer of thanksgiving, the eucharistic prayer, on behalf of those gathered with him. However, the priest is not the only person who presides at liturgical celebrations. The deacon can preside at baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Non-ordained laypeople can lead the

congregation in Communion services and other types of prayer services.

Ministers of the Word

Much emphasis is placed on the proclamation of the Word of God and on the ministers of the Word who proclaim it. From the opening procession, when all of the ministers proceed toward the altar, the Lectionary is held high for all to see. Sometimes incense is part of the procession and sometimes it is used before the reading of the Gospel. All of these actions remind us, through seeing and smelling the special fragrance, that the proclamation of God’s Word is a powerful event.



Deacon proclaiming the Gospel.

A reader is needed to proclaim God's Word clearly and articulately for all to hear. We respond with several different acclamations:

- ❑ "Thanks be to God!"
- ❑ "Glory to you, O Lord!" (as we mark our forehead, lips, and heart with the sign of the cross, reminding us that the Lord is in our heart and on our lips)
- ❑ "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!"

We also sing the psalm response.

Finally, the deacon, priest, or bishop who gives the homily after the proclamation of the Gospel nourishes the gathered assembly by strengthening us with the meaning of God's Word and God's love for today's world. At the conclusion of the liturgy, he charges the assembly to live out this message, saying:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Ministers of Music/ Leaders of Song

The choir, the cantor, the organist, the musicians, and the gathered assembly all contribute with their music to the community's prayer. We know that the music we use in the celebration of the liturgy is doing its work correctly when it adds to our prayer, when it helps the assembly to experience a unity in their participation, and when it adds reverence to the celebration.

Ministers of the Altar

The altar servers, boys and girls, assist the priest on the altar. They lend a

prayerful presence to the proceedings and should be role models of full, conscious, and active participation.

Ministers of the Eucharist

Eucharistic ministers assist the priest at the time of distribution of Holy Communion. They share the Body and Blood of Christ by offering the bread and wine to the faithful. Their ministry is also to take Holy Communion to those who are sick or homebound after the Eucharist is celebrated.

Reflection

Various forms of Christian piety, which are often rooted in different cultures, also give expression to our faith. These practices of Christian piety, connected with our participation in the liturgy, nourish and strengthen our Christian life.



.... Discuss:

What practices of Christian piety enrich your parish's life? Your own Christian life? How do they express your faith? How do they nourish your life in Christ?

Church

The Second Vatican Council taught at great length that the Church is the new People of God.

.... Discuss:

Compare the church as a gathering place to the Church as the People of God.

recollection and silent prayer that extend and internalize the great prayer of the Eucharist" (CCC, 1185).

The physical environment of our churches contains certain key elements. These include the altar, the ambo, the presider's chair, and the baptistry.

I saw underneath
the altar the souls
of those who had
been slaughtered
because of the
witness they bore to
the word
of God.

REVELATION 6:9

(CCC, 1179–1186)

The Place of Worship and Prayer

The church is a place where the People of God called by Christ come together to celebrate and be nourished. It is a place "that invites us to the

Altar

The central, most obvious part of the church is the **altar**. It is around the altar that the faithful gather as the Body of Christ to celebrate the Eucharist and to share the "Bread of Life."

Some altars have grains of wheat and grapes embedded or carved into the front. These symbols remind us of the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

The altar is also a symbol of Christ's presence. For this reason the priest kisses the altar at the beginning of the Eucharist. It is anointed with the scented chrism oil by marking five crosses on it, one on each corner and one in the center.

Ambo

Near the altar you will see the **ambo**, the place where the Word of God is proclaimed. Some ambos are very simple and plain in design. Others are more ornate. Oftentimes the ambo will match the altar in some way or have symbols built into it. For example, images representing the four evangelists are sometimes part of the design of the ambo—an eagle for John, an ox for Luke, a lion for Mark, and an angel for Matthew.

No matter how the ambo is designed and decorated, it is here that the Word of God is to be proclaimed with conviction and authority. Saint Augustine of Hippo spoke of the ambo as the table of God's Word that nourishes us, just as the table of the Eucharist feeds us on the Body and Blood of Christ.

Presider's Chair

The presider's chair stands as a symbol of the priest's office of presiding over the assembly and of leading worship. In a cathedral the presider's chair is called the **cathedra** and only the bishop sits there when he presides. The presider's chair is usually located in a place in the sanctuary where the presider can have the best communication with everyone gathered for prayer and worship.

Baptistry

The **baptistry** is the place where infants, children, and adults are baptized. It is here that the baptismal font, which can be a large, elevated bowl or a deep pool for people to step into, is located. Like the altar and the

The Way of Jesus

Many other symbols can be found in our churches.

- ❑ Stations of the Cross usually surround the entire area of the assembly. Each station represents a part of the journey Jesus traveled when he carried his cross to his death.
- ❑ Stained-glass windows will usually tell many Bible stories or portray something about the personality of the parish and its history.
- ❑ Statues, mosaics, and paintings of Jesus; his mother, Mary; or saints may decorate a church and add to its personality.

List as many such symbols as you can that are found in your parish church. Share how they lead you closer to Jesus.

ambo, the baptistry often has symbols built into it that remind us of the meaning of the sacrament of Baptism. Symbols often used include John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, a fish, an ark, or other baptismal symbols.

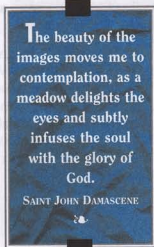
The baptistry is located in various places in the church. In some churches it is found at the entrance of the church; in others, near the altar; in still others, it is in a chapel located in the back or on the side of the church.

Other Elements of the Physical Environment of Our Churches

In addition to the central altar, the ambo, the presider's chair, and the baptistry, other elements included in our churches are the place of reposition of the Blessed Sacrament, which includes the tabernacle and the tabernacle light; the sacred, or holy, oils and the ambry; and the confessional or reconciliation chapel. Catholic churches also contain the Stations of the Cross, which help us remember and prayerfully reflect on and journey with Christ on the way of his Paschal mystery.

Tabernacle. The **tabernacle** is another very important part of our churches. It is here that the **Blessed Sacrament**, or consecrated bread (hosts), is stored for those who are sick and for the prayer and devotion of the people. People show their respect for the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle by genuflecting, or bowing, in front of it. The tabernacle is to be situated "in churches in a most worthy place with the greatest honor" (Paul VI, *The Mystery of Faith*).

One symbol often found on a tabernacle is the pelican piercing its side to feed its blood to its young babies. The legend this symbol portrays reminds us that the blood of Jesus saved us, and that his Body and Blood in the Eucharist feeds us in a spiritual way. The top of the tabernacle is sometimes shaped like a crown, reminding us of the kingship of Jesus and his royal presence.



Tabernacle Light. One way to locate the tabernacle is to look for the burning tabernacle light, or sanctuary lamp. This is a sign that Jesus is truly present in the tabernacle in the form of the eucharistic bread.

Holy, or Sacred, Oils. Near the baptistry are the **holy oils**. These include the oil of catechumans, which is used with those preparing for the sacrament of Baptism; the oil of the sick, which is used in the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick; and the sacred chrism, which is the scented oil used to consecrate a person in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, or a sacred place, such as the altar. The place where the holy oils is kept is called the **ambry**.

Chapel of Reconciliation. The place in our churches where people go to celebrate God's love and forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance is called the confessional or the reconciliation chapel. In older churches, confessionals were dark places. Newer churches often

have a reconciliation chapel with a brightly lighted room. The room usually has two chairs not separated by a screen, and a kneeler and a chair separated by a screen. This gives the person the choice of either facing the priest or not.

READING THE BIBLE



Prayerfully read and reflect on these gospel stories about what Jesus did in the Temple. Write down the differences in each of the stories.

Matthew 21:12–17

Mark 11:15–19

Luke 19:45–48

John 2:13–17

.... Discuss:

What is the central message of each of these gospel passages? What do they reveal about the deeper meaning of "what" our church buildings are?

Prayer



Saint Francis of Assisi rebuilt the Church with concrete and living stones. Take the time to pray this famous prayer which captures the spirit of Saint Francis. Allow the words to lead and guide you to take action.

PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument
of thy peace.

Where there is hatred let me
sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master, grant that I
may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to
understand;

To be loved as to love:

For it is in giving that we
receive;

It is in pardoning that we are
pardoned;

It is in dying that we are born
to eternal life.

IMPORTANT TERMS TO KNOW

altar—the table around which the
Liturgy of the Eucharist is cele-
brated

ambo—the place where the Word of
God is proclaimed

ambry—the place where the holy oils
are kept

baptistry—the place where infants,
children, and adults are baptized

Blessed Sacrament—another name
given to the consecrated bread and
wine, the Body and Blood of Jesus

cathedra—the chair in a cathedral
where the bishop sits when leading,
or presiding, at the liturgy

holy oils—the three sacred oils used in
the liturgy: oil of the sick, oil of
catechumens, and sacred chrism

liturgy—a Greek word that means
“work of the people”; it refers to
a gathering of the Christian
community for prayer.

tabernacle—the place where the conse-
crated hosts are kept for those who
are sick and for the prayer and
devotion of the people

CHAPTER SUMMARY

A church is more than a building. It is the living stones that make up the Body of Christ alive in our world. In this chapter we looked at the Church—the worshipping assembly—and the parish church—the physical space in which the faithful gather for worship, prayer, and sharing the Word of God.

1. *Liturgy* is the Greek word that means “work of the people.” It reminds us that we are to participate fully, actively, and consciously in the action, or work, of the Church at prayer.
2. The assembly celebrates the liturgy and is called to full, conscious, and active participation of the celebration.

3. The members of the worshipping assembly each have various roles. These roles are fulfilled by the presider, ministers of the Word, ministers of music, and ministers of the Eucharist.
4. The key elements or symbols of the physical environment of Catholic churches include the altar, the ambo, and the presider’s chair (or in a cathedral, the cathedra).
5. Other key elements include the baptistry; the ambry; the place of reposition of the Blessed Sacrament, which includes the tabernacle and the tabernacle light; and the confessional or the reconciliation chapel.

EXPLORING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

1. Listening to God’s Word

Invite the Spirit’s help and prayerfully read and reflect on the Word of God in Matthew 18:20: “[W]here two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” What does this Scripture passage tell us about who we are and what we are called to be?

2. Understanding the Teachings of the Catholic Church

Visit your local church and describe, in detail, the parts of the church environment discussed in this chapter. Include as many details as possible regarding shape, pictures, and symbols on the various objects. Explain how they help the People of God worship.

3. Reflecting on Our Catholic Faith

Reflect on these words that give us insight into who we are and why we gather as the assembly of God’s people: “What words can adequately describe God’s gifts? They are so numerous that they defy enumeration. They are so great that any one of them demands our total gratitude in response” (Saint Basil the Great). Write your thoughts in your journal.

4. Living Our Catholic Faith

Design or compose your own “welcome announcement” inviting teenagers to your parish church.