

Sacred is in part defined as a space or object dedicated or set apart for the service or worship, worthy of religious veneration, entitled to reverence and respect. Our human experience confirms this particularly in our own faith beginning with the altar constructed by Able to offer sacrifice to God, to the dedication of our new cathedral less than 3 weeks ago.

Within all of our lives, we have 3 sacred spaces, 2 are deeply personal and the third belongs to the community. The personal spaces are our own persons and our homes. The community space is the church.

Why are we, our persons a sacred space? Follow the logic. Aren't we all children of God, made in his image and likeness, made to love him, to honor him and to return to him in heaven? What about those Sacraments that leave an indelible mark on the soul, Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders? Don't they reside in a sacred space? Where is it that we host Our Lord after we receive him in the Eucharist? Jesus Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity becomes one with us. How can any place where he is present in Sacrament be anything but sacred space?

How do we treat our persons as sacred space? Do we treat ourselves with respect? Do we keep the space clean, neat, and ready for Jesus to visit? Or do we ignore the disciplines required for discipleship; prayer, fasting, alms giving and regular reception of the sacraments? Do we allow our person as sacred space to fall into disrepair and in some cases to rot away from neglect?

The second sacred space is the home; the residence of the Domestic Church. The home should be a space of safety, a space of love, emotional support, mutual respect and loving, but firm discipline. A space where the family can gather and grow physically and spiritually through out their lives. A space where it is safe to challenge, to grow and to reaffirm our faith. A space of joy, a place of celebration and a place of peace.

It isn't the physical facility that makes the home sacred space. It is through our behavior toward one another and through prayer, that a space becomes sacred. Our Lord said; "Where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." (Matt 18:20). Where a family gathers as husband and wife and as a family in prayer, that space becomes sacred.

After Moses came down from the mountain with the 10 Commandments, the Children of Israel need a way to transport them and a place for Moses, and later on the Priests to speak with God. Parts of 16 chapters in the book of Exodus speak to this sacred space, the meeting tent. The Lord described to Moses everything involved in the space. The size, the number and description of the candle sticks, the size and materials used to build the altar and every other item in the space. The clothing to be worn by Moses and the priests down to the fabric, decoration on the fabric, the recipe for the sacred oil that was used to anoint the walls of the tent and everything in it, all in minute detail. When all was complete, a cloud would envelope the tent during the day and a pillar of fire would rest above at night when God was present.

Within the meeting tent and later in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem rested the Ark of the Covenant. Within the Ark of the Covenant were three items. The stone tablets with the 10 Commandments, a golden vessel filled with manna, and after he died, the Rod of Aaron representing the authority of the Levitical Priesthood.

Hold on to these images and let's talk about the dedication of The Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral a few short weeks ago.

We processed into the building vested in our Diocesan vestments. The building is magnificent, but it was just a beautiful building. It didn't have any life within it. We processed past the altar without comment because at that point it was just a beautiful marble table.

The next event that struck me was the Litany of Saints. We sung all the Saints that we normally sing plus all of the Saints who were represented by the statuary in the Cathedral. 2,000 voices echoing as we responded 'pray for us'. The power of the response passed from hearing into feeling the response as we all sang together.

A little while later Bishop Burbage consecrated the altar by bathing it in Holy Chrism. From that point on it ceased to be a table and became a sacred object, the place to offer sacrifice, the Cross on which our Savior hung on Calvary. When the ladies from the Altar Guild came to clean the excess Chrism from the altar before dressing it for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, I could imagine Mary Strathern who many of you remember, supervising and fussing around the altar with them, making sure everything was just right. After the altar was consecrated, the walls of the Cathedral were anointed with Holy Chrism.

During the Liturgy of the Eucharistic the character of the building changed. Jesus Christ was now present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. After Communion, the Bishop incensed the Tabernacle lit the Tabernacle Candle and placed the Eucharist within it in a golden vessel.

As we lined up to process out of the cathedral, I stood in front of the Altar for a few moments and I could feel a tangible change in the building. It had morphed from being just a structure to a sacred space. A space of worship, a space of peace, a space of joy; a space where the Sacramental Presence of Jesus permeates the atmosphere.

Everything that was done to consecrate the Cathedral and make it a sacred space was done to consecrate this church and make this Naive, this Sanctuary, into sacred space. Just as the Altar of Incense in the meeting tent was consecrated with sacred oil, the altar in the Cathedral and in our Church were consecrated with Sacred Chrism. Just as the walls of the meeting tent and Cathedral were anointed, the walls of this Church were anointed with Sacred Chrism.

The Word of God in the form of the stone tablets with the 10 Commandments was in the Ark of the Covenant. The Word of God in the Book of the Gospel resides in the Cathedral and in our Church. Aaron's Rod representing the authority of the Levitical Priesthood was in the Ark, The Bishop's crosier, his rod, has multiple meanings, one of which is his authority as a direct descendant of the Apostles. Fr. Gaul presides as the Bishop's presence here in our Parish.

Manna, bread from heaven was stored in a golden vessel in the Ark. The Eucharist, bread from heaven and so much more is stored in golden vessels in the Tabernacle in the Cathedral and here at Good Shepherd.

We have so much more than the people of Israel in the Old Testament. During their time, a single Priest could enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies once a year to offer sacrifice.

We enter into the presence of God, the Holy of Holies every time we enter into this Church. They knelt in the presence of God, we receive him, and become one with him in the Eucharist. During Holy Hour when we have exposition, we can sit in quiet contemplation and speak directly to the Sacramental presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

We have so much, but do we appreciate what we have? Too often we enter our sacred space and use it as a social hall and a snack bar. A polite greeting is totally appropriate, loud conversations; candy bars and chewing gum are not. We have a wonderful gathering area with a coffee bar for our use to socialize and catch up with our friends and we want you to use it! One of the great strengths and attractions of this parish is how well we get along with each other and how we love to hang out after Mass and our other celebrations.

In the Gospel today, when the Apostles were frightened by Jesus walking across the water he said to them; "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." (Matt 14:27) Sometimes I think that we act so casually within our sacred spaces, particularly the Church because we are afraid of that close personal encounter with God. Take courage, do not be afraid, it is Jesus and he loves us.