

## The Altar

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The Altar is where the sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated. It needs to be large enough to hold the appropriate vessels and candles, and it needs to be beautiful and worthy of that sacrifice.

The celebration of the Eucharist is to take place on a permanent, fixed altar. The altar top (called the mensa) is to be stone. As described in documents concerning church furnishings, this signifies both Christ as the Living Stone and the eternal nature of God. The mosaic on the front of the altar symbolizes Christ, the Lamb of God.

The surprising thing (to me, anyway) was the placement of a “first class” relic under the mensa. First class relics are physical remains of the saint (like bone or hair) and most Catholic altars have a relic. Many early churches were literally built on the graves of the martyrs. These saints were considered a part of the foundation of those churches – supporting the church through their prayers. Resurrection was gifted with a relic of St. Catherine Labouré at our founding, but it was not placed in the altar. This might be because the relic is very small. A relic that is placed in an altar must be of suitable size to be recognizable as a part of the human body.

The Diocese has given us a relic of St. Sabbas (aka Savvas) the Sanctified (439 – 532AD) which will be placed in our altar at the Dedication Mass. St. Sabbas, a monk who lived in the West Bank, is a saint in both the Roman and Eastern Orthodox rites. He established multiple monastic communities and defended the dual nature of Christ (God AND Man) at the Council of Chalcedon. As it turns out, this saint also fits our “water” motif. In one of the miracles attributed to him, when the monastery was suffering a severe water shortage, he struck the ground with his staff causing a spring of water to emerge. This became a constant source of water for the monastery. For More information check out this website: [Catholic St Sabbas](#)

The altar will also be anointed with Chrism at the Dedication Mass which was blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass during Holy week. Why Chrism? The Chrism is mostly for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and ordination but also for dedicating and blessing physical objects. Chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balsam. Since Old Testament times, the pouring of oil is used to bless and dedicate special items – a pouring out of God’s grace. The balsam has a sweet fragrance referred to in the Chrism Mass as “the aroma of Christ”. By its nature, the balsam also prevents corruption.

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