

Church Tour



There are many different parts to a church. Use the numbers to explore the various things you will find in a Catholic church. Then try to find these objects in your church.

1. **Altar:** The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered on an altar (from the Latin *altaria*), which is the center and focal point of the church, and upon which Christ is made sacramentally present during the Consecration. In the early days of Christianity, Mass was celebrated on the tombs of martyrs in the catacombs of Rome. Because of this, modern altars have the relics of saints, called the altar stone, upon their surface. Altars are usually made of stone but may also be made of a solid, well-made wood. They represent two aspects of the Christian mystery: the sacrificial altar where Christ offers Himself for our sins, and the table of our Lord, upon which Christ gives Himself for our food.
2. **Altar Cloth:** At least one altar cloth must be used during Mass, the top one of which must be white. To keep it clean outside of Mass, the white of the altar cloth may be covered with a dust cloth.
3. **Tabernacle:** The tabernacle is a small, box-like receptacle, in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the church; it is usually found on the altar. A tabernacle should be made of solid, nontransparent material and its interior lined with fabric. It is kept locked

to prevent desecration of the Eucharist. The word is from the Latin *tabernaculum*, the diminutive of *taberna*, meaning “hut, booth, or tent.”

4. **Sanctuary:** Derived from *sanctus*, the Latin word meaning “holy” or “sacred,” this is the part of the church immediately surrounding the altar where the ceremonial actions of the Mass take place.
5. **Sanctuary Lamp:** The sanctuary lamp, which is usually a candle in a red casing, burns day and night whenever the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle to alert the faithful of His presence.
6. **Apse:** The apse is the semi-circular end of the church, characteristic of the early Christian era, which housed the bishop’s chair.
7. **Crucifix:** A Cross should be located near the altar, either atop it, behind it, or suspended above it. In the Roman Liturgy this designates a crucifix with a figure of Christ upon it.
8. **Candles:** Mass normally may not be said unless there is the presence of at least two lighted candles on the altar, though more are allowed for High Mass. They should be good quality, clean burning, and white, in most cases. Pure beeswax candles are not obligatory.
9. **Credence:** This is the name of the table at the Epistle side of the altar, which holds the cruets (one with wine, another with water), the basin, and the finger towel. Oftentimes, the credence table holds a ciborium, chalice, paten, and the hosts to be consecrated during Mass, at which time it should be covered with a cloth.
10. **Pulpit or Ambo:** The pulpit, lectern, or ambo is where the readings and Gospel are proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word. They are built into the church’s structure and are immovable. The priest will usually give his homily from behind one of these.
11. **Presider’s Chair:** This is the name of the chair in which the main celebrant sits during the readings and at other times during Mass. It should be located behind or near the altar.
12. **Baptistery:** As the name indicates, this is the distinct area, which may be located in a small chapel or separate building, where the Sacrament of Baptism is performed. The font itself should be stationary, and its appearance befitting of its use. Its name derives from the Latin *baptisterium*, which means “a cold plunging-bath.”
13. **Side Altar:** In many churches can be found side altars or side chapels dedicated to various saints or which act as shrines to our Lord or our Lady.