



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 103, the Tabernacle 3 of 4

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### **Christian Tradition**

A **tabernacle** is a fixed, locked box in which, in some Christian churches, the Eucharist is reserved (stored). A less obvious container for the same purpose, set into a wall, is referred to as either a tabernacle or an aumbry.

Within Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and in some congregations of Anglicanism and Lutheranism, a tabernacle is a box-like vessel for the exclusive reservation of the consecrated Eucharist. It is normally made of metal, stone, or wood, is lockable and secured to its altar or adjacent wall to prevent the consecrated elements within from being removed without authorization. The reserved Eucharist is secured there for distribution at services, for availability to bring Holy Communion to the sick, and, especially in the Western Church, as the centre of attention for meditation and prayer.

The term tabernacle was a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle, which was the locus of God's presence among the Jewish people, and hence, it was formerly required, and is still generally customarily required, that the tabernacle be covered with a tent-like veil (conopaeum) or curtain across its door when the Eucharist is present within.

In early Christianity, priests and or lay people commissioned by them took bread consecrated at their Eucharist to their homes, to give it to the sick and others unable to attend the celebration. But when the Edict of Milan ended persecution, and the early Church was allowed to practice its religion more publicly, the Eucharist was no longer kept safeguarded in private Christian homes but was reserved near the altars of churches.

By the thirteenth century, the Eucharist was most often kept in a highly embellished cabinet inserted into the wall to the right or left of the altar. The Altar lamp indicated the Presence of Christ. This was a means of following the decree of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council requiring that the reserved sacrament be kept in a locked receptacle.

In the late fourteenth century, special stone constructions for the Eucharistic bread began to be built, especially in northern Europe. In Germany and the Netherlands, such structures can still be seen in the churches of that period, tall towers, usually placed to the north of the altar and often reaching almost to the ceiling. They were in use until the mid-nineteenth century. In the early sixteenth century, Bishop Matteo Giberti ordered that, in his diocese of Verona, Italy, the container case for the consecrated bread should be placed on an altar, possibly on a side altar and not necessarily the high altar.

In 1614 Pope Paul V imposed on the churches of his diocese of Rome a similar rule, of putting the tabernacle on some altar.

Reaction to Protestantism's denial of the reality and permanence of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist then led to the spread of the placing of the tabernacle even on the high altar, to make it more evidently visible.

Whether on the main altar of the church or in a special chapel, the tabernacle became larger and more ornate, even to the extent of dominating the altar.

## Roman Catholic Church

A tabernacle serves as a secure place in which to store the blessed sacrament for carrying to the sick who cannot participate in Mass, or as a focus for the prayers of those who visit the church.

The renewal of the Roman rite liturgy following the Second Vatican Council was to highlight the primacy of the eucharistic celebration itself, more than just a means for providing the permanent Eucharistic presence.

The altar, it was decided, should be "truly the centre to which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns". Before Vatican II, Mass was often celebrated directly in front of the tabernacle. Today, most often, the altar for the celebration of mass stands on its own, and the tabernacle is given its own, usually smaller, altar or it stands nearby on a pedestal or in its own separate chapel.

This allows the faithful to focus on the celebration of the eucharistic action during mass but preserves a dignity of place and fosters prayer and meditation outside of mass by giving the tabernacle its own space. In accordance with the structure of each church and legitimate local customs, the most blessed sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer.

The one tabernacle should be immovable, be made of solid and inviolable material that is not transparent and be locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is prevented to the greatest extent possible. Moreover, it is appropriate that, before it is put into liturgical use, it be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman ritual.

It is more in keeping with the meaning of the sign that the tabernacle in which the most holy eucharist is reserved not be on an altar on which mass is celebrated. Consequently, it is preferable that the tabernacle be located, according to the judgment of the diocesan bishop, either in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration, in a form and place more appropriate, not excluding on an old altar no longer used for celebration, or even in some chapel suitable for the faithful's private adoration and prayer and which is organically connected to the church and readily visible to the Christian faithful.

In accordance with traditional custom, near the tabernacle a special lamp, fuelled by oil or wax, should be kept alight to indicate, and honour the presence of Christ.

Tabernacles have generally been made of metal, such as bronze or brass, or sometimes of heavy wood. They are traditionally lined in white cloth, often silk, and are always securely lockable and generally permanently affixed or bolted to their support. Some tabernacles are veiled when the eucharist is present in them. These veils are often of cloth and design similar to the priest's vestments, that is, to create a harmony of design, and are either white or gold, or the same colour as the vestments, corresponding to the liturgical season.

