

## The Place of Reservation for the Holy Eucharist

Over the last two millennia, there has been a wide variety of common ways that the Blessed Sacrament has been reserved. In the early Christian church, the Blessed Sacrament was typically brought home for members of the community unable to participate in the Sunday Eucharist. The Sacrament was commonly kept in a small pyx or wrapped in linen in a small basket. The devotion to the reserved Eucharist grew over time. Today, we reserve the consecrated bread for private adoration and prayer outside of the Eucharistic liturgy and to be brought to the sick and the dying.

In the early basilicas, the Sacrament was kept in a pyx, a cupboard in the sacristy, or a wall niche. In the 4th century we find the first account of an actual tabernacle. Later, in the 9th century, we find an early example of tabernacle placed on an altar.

In the medieval church, common practices included a small cupboard in the wall near the sanctuary or built into the reredos, a free standing "Sacrament House" or tower, a dove or pyx suspended over the altar, and a tabernacle on the altar table.

After the Council of Trent, greater uniformity developed. The tabernacle began to be placed as a rule at the center of the main altar. It became part of the architecture, and the church building came to be seen as a setting for the tabernacle.

In the years following the Vatican II, while there was a great deal of focus on the renewal of the sacred liturgy and our participation, a variety of examples emerged once again. Churches built before the Council often provided a special challenge. Finding a worthy place for the tabernacle when the altar was pulled away from the wall was a difficult task, especially in small churches.

In new churches, small, intimate prayer chapels were often built. Some of these separate chapel spaces were not connected

to the main body of the church. While they were well suited to private devotional prayer, they may not have been prominent enough in the church building.

In the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), we read that "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." (GIRM #314) There is to be only one tabernacle in the church, and it should be designed to protect the reserved Sacrament to the greatest extent possible. (GIRM #314)

The tabernacle may be located "in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration" in an appropriate form and place. (GIRM #315) Built of Living Stones (BLS), the US Bishops' document on the building and renovation of worship spaces, tells us that when this is done, sufficient distance, controlled lighting, or some other architectural device should be used to keep the appropriate focus on the altar, ambo and presider's chair during the liturgy. (BLS # 80) The tabernacle may also be located in an environment or "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". (GIRM #315) The GIRM reaffirms the authority of the local bishop in decisions regarding the placement of the tabernacle (GIRM #315). Archbishop Michael Sheehan has determined that the tabernacle normally be located in the sanctuary where it is clearly visible to those in the church.

"Christ present in the eucharistic species is a treasure the Church has come to cherish and revere over the centuries." (BLS # 70) A careful study and thorough consultation should be undertaken when a parish plans any renovation or new construction that would impact the placement of the tabernacle.