

THINGS INSIDE A CATHOLIC CHURCH

When I was a Catechist, teaching youngsters about Catholicism, I was asked by some of them about the things inside a Catholic church with funny names. I found myself not knowing how to answer. The words Nave, Sanctuary, Sacristy, and others came to mind, but I couldn't remember what some of them represented. Should you be asked such questions by children or anyone, could you answer them?

Since the beginning of the Christian faith, churches have been the centre of religious services. Older churches were usually built in the shape of the cross and facing eastwards. Modern churches are usually designed to bring the congregation and any religious ceremony closer together, making it easier for all to take part in the services. The Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool is a great example.

Any Catholic church has three special areas:

1. The Sanctuary.
2. The Nave.
3. The Sacristy

THE SANCTUARY

This is where the rites and rituals of the Catholic Church are conducted, such as:

The Mass. Baptisms. Marriages. Ordinations,
Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Within the Sanctuary are special objects such as:

- The Altar
 - Used by the priest from which he conducts services such as the mass. Part of the definition of a priest is one who administers sacrifices, and an altar is needed for offering up a sacrifice, such as the mass.
 - The altar contains relics of a saint.
- The Tabernacle
 - Used to contain any consecrated hosts (Blessed Sacrament) left over from a previous mass. These can be used to take to people too ill to get to mass, or in special services where a priest is not available
- A large Crucifix
 - usually visible to all.
- The Sanctuary Lamp.
 - When lit, it indicates that consecrated hosts from a previous mass are in the nearby Tabernacle

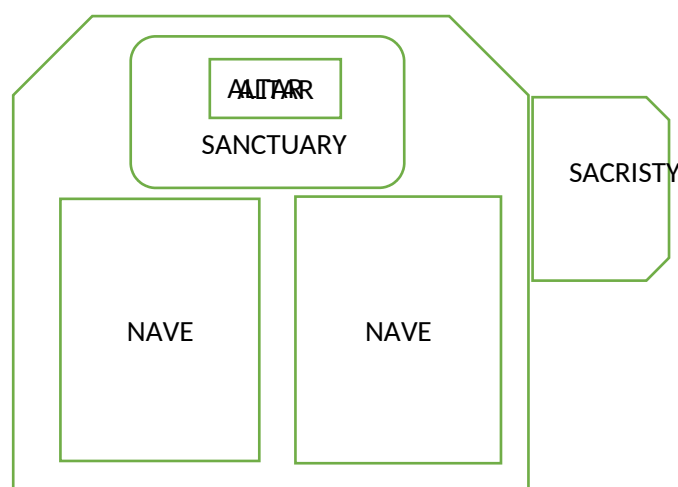
- Credence table
 - Contains all the cruets needed during services.

THE NAVE

This is the area within the church reserved for people attending services or visiting a church to say private prayers.

It usually consists of rows (called PEWS) of chairs and kneelers facing the SANCTUARY.

Today a church may be built in any shape so long as it contains the Nave, Sanctuary and Sacristy.



THE SACRISTY

This is a room or rooms where the priest and his assistants usually dress appropriately for the relevant service to be conducted in the church.

It can also house the sacred vessels and clothes used during religious services.

The sacristy can be anywhere around the building, such as next to the Sanctuary or at the other end of the church. When a priest is ready to start a religious service, he and his assistants walk ceremoniously from the Sacristy to the Sanctuary to start the service.

THE SANCTUARY LAMP

Would you be able to tell:

- What a Sanctuary Lamp is.
- The purpose of such a lamp.
- Where you'll find one?

The following is just one simple explanation of these questions.

During mass, a priest consecrates bread and wine into the body and

blood of Christ. The bread itself is of a type known as unleavened bread. It's compressed and shaped into small circular wafers. When a priest has consecrated them, they become the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. They are also known as The Blessed Sacrament.

When any are left over after communion, they are put in a 'ciborium', which is like a chalice but with a lid. This is then locked away in the nearby tabernacle. There are two main reasons why this is done.

1. When a person would like to receive Holy Communion but is ill and unable to get to mass, a priest, deacon, or Eucharistic minister can retrieve one of the consecrated wafers from the tabernacle and take it to that person.
2. Any Catholic church is known as the House of God because God is present as the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle. This is why it's a great place to pray to God. He's in his house.

This is where the Sanctuary Lamp comes in. It's just an ordinary, usually red glass container hanging somewhere in the sanctuary with a lit candle inside it. When the candle is lit, this informs anyone entering a Catholic church that the Blessed Sacrament is in the Tabernacle.

Answering the above three questions:

1. What is a Sanctuary Lamp? It's usually a red glass container with a lit candle inside. Some are grand and ornate, others small and simple, but they all have the same purpose.
2. What is this purpose? If lit, it indicates to Catholics that consecrated hosts are in the Tabernacle, God is present in his house.
3. Where would you find one? In a Catholic Church, hanging in the Sanctuary.

When people worldwide go into a Catholic church to pray, they feel warm when they see the Sanctuary Lamp with a lit candle inside. It tells them that the Blessed Sacrament is present in the tabernacle. Whenever the Blessed Sacrament is not in the Tabernacle, the candle is not lit, but always tell the priest if you find it not lit, just in case it's accidentally gone out.

Does all this answer your questions regarding the important things to be found in a Catholic Church?