

SYMBOLS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THEIR MEANING

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Major symbols found in a Catholic Church.

The church building itself is a powerful symbol. The actual building is a visible expression of God's abiding presence amongst us. The church gets its name from the people who gather in it. The 'church' is actually the People of God gathered, and the building is the place the People of God gather to worship and encounter God in the special sacraments and rites celebrated inside.

And now we move to the universal symbols of the church :

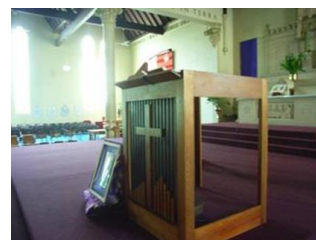
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Lectern (also known as an Ambo): The word lectern comes from the Latin word meaning 'to read'. The lectern is a reading table, especially that in a church from which the readings of the Holy Scriptures (the Bible Lectionary) are read. This is also known as the "Table of the Word (of God)." The alternate word for this table is the "Ambo" (coming from the Greek word meaning a Pulpit (which itself is a Latin word meaning 'a platform or stage' from which a sermon or homily or reading is proclaimed). We believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is a collection of writings detailing the journey of God's relationship with God's people across generations. It is the Sacred story of our faith and every time we gather to celebrate a ritual or a sacrament in the church, the word of God is central to that celebration.

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Altar (also known as the Table of the Eucharist). This is a special table on which the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist is celebrated. The bread and wine are placed upon this altar and here they are blessed as we recall the Last Supper where Jesus took bread broke it and shared it, took a cup of wine and handed it around and said "this is my body, this is my blood" do this in memory of me. We gather to do this action in memory of the Lord and we believe that as we do this, Jesus becomes present again to us, in the form of this meal, which we share and gain spiritual strength and grow in love for our Lord.

• Connected to this symbol, there are sacred vessels such as a communion cup, called a chalice. This cup is often of exquisite beauty and design and is to hold the wine that will become the Blood of Christ in the celebration of Eucharist. A bowl or beautifully designed plate or bowl with a lid (called a 'ciborium') holds the bread that will be blessed to become the Body of Christ. Worthy and beautiful objects are suitable to show the importance of the things they contain. The cup symbolises the covenant



God makes between humans and God's-self.

There is a saying: "We are fed at the table of the Word, by hearing and gaining strength from the Scriptures, and then we are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ at the Table of the Eucharist." Two tables, one Lord who nourishes us at both !

(For more detail about the Eucharist and the structure and meaning of the Mass, please see the following link:

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Presider's Chair. This is not merely a convenient place where a priest sits when not doing an element of the ritual. The chair represents the role of the priest as the leader of the worship of the community, and his pastoral care and responsibility for the people. All priests are co-workers with their superior who is called a Bishop. The bishop is the head priest of a particular area. The bishop has a special chair in his main church and this chair is called a Cathedra (Greek for 'Chair'). This chair symbolises the leadership the Bishop has over the whole area and his care for the people and his authority. The church where the bishop has his chair is called a "Cathedral" (which literally means 'the place of the chair'). So a cathedral is not defined by its size or impressiveness but actually by the fact that it is the church where the 'seat of authority' of the Bishop (the Bishop's chair) is located (literally !). The primary church for the whole region (in our Diocese here, our Bishop is Archbishop Mark Coleridge, and the primary local church is the Cathedral of Saint Stephen, in Brisbane.

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Crucifix: The Crucifix, (that is a timber or metal cross with the image of the Crucified Lord Jesus on it) is an integral visual symbol of almost every Catholic Church. The Crucifix is often positioned in a very central position somewhere over or near the Altar, or on the sanctuary area. Ideally, the Crucifix is big enough but also light enough to be able to be carried in, in the entrance procession at the start of a ceremony. When the crucifix is brought in as part of the procession it leads the procession. The Crucifix is a central symbol because it is a visual reminder that God loved us so much that he sent his only son to die for us, so that we might have life through him. The suffering and death on the cross is a profound mystery of God's love, God's justice, God's forgiveness. We Christians believe that the Crucifixion of Christ, which seemed to be a humiliating defeat in the eyes of the world, is actually the victory of God over sin and death. God (in Jesus) took onto himself everything bad that the world had to throw at him and crucified it, defeating it with the self-sacrificing love of the cross. Other churches also venerate the symbol of the cross, doing so by emphasising the symbol of the wood of the cross. Such images are simply plain crosses made of wood or metal. Ultimately though, the symbolism is the same.

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Liturgical Colours:

Different coloured vestments, altar cloths, banners and drapery is often used in the Church to reflect the fact that, similar to the seasons in a calendar year, there are different seasons in the Church year. These church seasons reflect different times and areas of focus. Set colours have been given for the different church seasons, and these try to reflect the mood of the season. Light and bright colours represent Feasts of great joy and hope and darker colours represent sorrow, penitence, reflectiveness.

The main liturgical colours are these:

White: For Christmas and Easter seasons. Also white is used for feasts of saints who did not die a martyr's death. This colour represents joy, hope, light.

Red: For Pentecost, Good Friday, and for the feasts of Saints who were Martyred (had their blood shed for witness to the Gospel). The red represents the Fire of the Holy Spirit and for blood shed in faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus.

Purple (or Violet). This is used for the rather subdued and penitential season of Lent and the quiet, preparatory time of Advent. The darker colour represents quiet, sorrow for sins, penitence and waiting.

Green: Used for the ordinary times of the year. This represents life and abundance and 'the kingdom of God growing quietly but surely.'

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Vestments. There are special clothes worn by the priest as a symbolic sign of the importance of the events celebrated. Here are the main ones:

The major vestment is the white gown called an Alb. The name derives from the Latin "albus" meaning white, and has the same derivation as the word "albino" meaning white. It is a white garment reminding us of our Baptismal garment and that in Baptism each of us 'put on Christ, like we put on a new white garment.'

Here is Fr Paul wearing the Alb:

Over this, the priest puts on a scarf-like band of cloth that hangs over his neck. This is called a stole. This is the 'badge' of the priest's ministry. It used to be a cloak, and the word stole means 'cloak' but centuries of development has reduced it to a thin band of cloth.

Below is Fr Paul wearing the Stole: (this is a red stole, which would be worn for a Feastday of a Martyr, or a Good Friday Liturgy, or Pentecost).



At the celebration of Eucharist the priest puts on another vestment on top of the Alb. This is a poncho-like garment which is basically a large round cloth with a hole for the head and not attached at the sides. This is the vestment to be worn for Mass (also known as Eucharist). This is a priestly garment symbolic of the priest offering the sacrifice of the Holy Mass, in which Christ, the Paschal sacrifice re-presents himself on the altar in his one and only sacrifice (re-presented through time via this sacrament).

Here is Fr Paul wearing the Chasuble, over the white alb. Note that he is wearing a white/gold chasuble, with a white/gold stole over the top of it, and underneath is the white alb and which has a cord belt tied around the waist. This colour is worn in the Easter season or in the Christmas season or Feastdays of Saints who did not die by martyrdom but died of natural causes. This colour could also be worn at weddings – as sign of joy and festivity and also funerals - as a sign of hope in the resurrection).

The priest also wears a belt of cord, called a 'cincture' around his waist. This also is described as a symbol of chastity.

This is a picture of the cincture (cord belt) :

Below, Fr Paul is wearing the cincture (cord belt) around the waist and the Alb (white garment).

The outer vestments (stole and chasuble) are worn in the colour matching the season, as mentioned above, except the Alb should always be white, reminding us of the baptismal garment. Sometimes the stole is worn over the chasuble and other times under it, depending on the design of the vestment and the area and policy.

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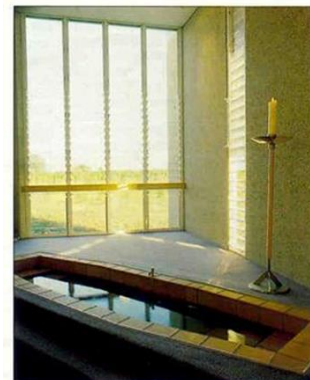
Tabernacle: This word comes from the Latin meaning "tent" or "little booth." In Roman Catholic churches, the 'tabernacle' is a beautiful, ornate box or container, (usually made out of brass or another strong and worthy metal), which ought to be securely bolted down and locked. This container is where the remains of any blessed and consecrated hosts (communion wafers) are stored. The Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine used at Eucharist, (Mass), once blessed and consecrated in the ceremony, is and remains the Body and Blood of Christ, in the form of what looks like and tastes like and has the chemical make up of bread and wine. Since it remains the body and blood of Christ, any unconsumed hosts (bread) and precious blood (the blessed wine) must either be consumed after mass or the hosts can be stored in the tabernacle. When there are blessed hosts in the tabernacle there is usually a red light beside it to indicate that there is the presence of the consecrated elements within – that Christ is present in the sacrament. People pray before this tabernacle and reflect quietly on the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. This secure tabernacle is a



proper place to store the blessed hosts so that they can be accessed and taken at any time to give to someone who is sick and in need of the Eucharist for spiritual strength. The tabernacle used to be positioned on the high altar at the very centre of the sanctuary. Some churches still do this. Other places have a special side altar, or sacrament chapel specially designed for private prayer and reflection and people can sit or kneel in front of the tabernacle and pray and meditate.

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Baptismal Font. This is a really important object. It is a large ornate pool or majestic bowl and stand that is used for Baptisms. It ideally should be near the entrance to the church to symbolise that Baptism is the way we ENTER into the Church by being made children of God. But wherever the baptismal font (font: derived from the word 'fountain') is located. It symbolises our dying and rising with Christ to new and everlasting life.



The Paschal or Easter candle. The word paschal derives from the word "Passover". We have an enormous candle that we use for various occasions. A new Easter Candle gets blessed for use for the following year every Holy Saturday night (the night before Easter Sunday). The candle reminds us of Christ, who is the light of the world, who came into the world to show us the way, and give us light and hope. The Paschal candle reminds us that Jesus is the Passover lamb sacrificed for our sins and risen again and now is the light of the world. It has rich meaning. We use this candle for various rituals in our church. The candle, or at least the large and long Candle stand usually stands next to the baptismal font and serves as a reminder of Christ our light in times of darkness, Jesus Christ is our guide along the path.



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Genuflecting. This is a symbolic gesture of great solemn reverence. This is when one touches one knee to the ground in a profound kneel of reverence and honour. The usual time that one genuflects is in the presence of the exposed sacrament of the Body of the Lord and / or the Blood of the Lord (the blessed and consecrated Bread and Wine – which is the real presence of Christ). People also genuflect towards the tabernacle to acknowledge the presence of Christ in the sacrament inside it. The red light indicates if the Eucharist is present in the tabernacle.



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Bowing. This is a symbolic gesture of general reverence. One bows to the altar as a sign of respect to its significance. One can bow towards the Crucifix as a sign of respect for its meaning.



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Holy Water: because water is the main symbol of baptism, which is a rebirth in Christ, a dying to old sinful ways, the sign and symbol of water is very important in the church. At the entrances of a Catholic Church one will often find little decorative bowls of water attached to the side of the wall, for people to dip their finger in and use to make the sign of the cross. People do this symbolic action to remind themselves that they have been reborn and washed clean of sin by Baptism, and called to live in the new life of discipleship of Christ. Holy water thus is a reminder and symbol of eternal life, of God's protection and care for us and of course God's forgiveness.

Symbolic Gestures:

Along with symbols, the church has special gestures or actions that symbolise religious realities:

For example. One of the most ancient and simplest prayers is the action of saying the following words, accompanied by the action of the 'sign of the cross':

The Sign of the Cross:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In the name of the Father..

..and of the Son...

...and of the Holy.

...Spirit. Amen

forehead

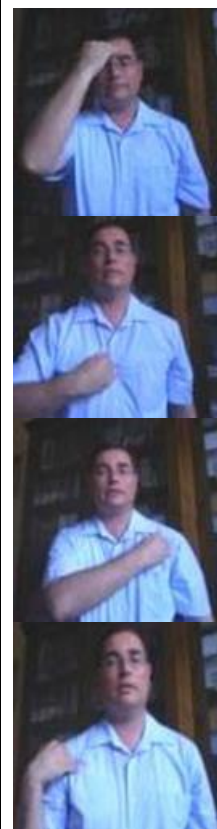
chest

left shoulder

Right shoulder

Another "symbolic" moment is in official liturgy. There is an ancient greeting that the priest says to the people and they respond. It is old language that recalls the greetings used by Christ after his resurrection and also the greetings of St Paul in his various letters. It also recognises that, through baptism, we have the Lord living in us and we have received the Holy Spirit, and the priest has also been given the gift of the Holy Spirit for leadership in the church. So, the priest says: "The Lord be with you" or "the Peace of the Lord, be with you always," and the people reply: "And with your Spirit".

When the priest (or Deacon) reads the Gospel in Mass or a Liturgy, there is a special greeting too, with special words and gestures:



Gospel (Read by the priest)

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your Spirit.

Priest: From the holy Gospel according to Luke

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

(as the people are saying “Glory to you, O Lord” above, they copy what the priest is doing, namely, they use their thumb to trace the sign of the cross on themselves like this...)

Forehead (+)

lips (+)

heart (+)

Silently praying words to this effect: May the Lord be on my mind.....

.. and on my lips...

....And in my heart. So that I may hear God’s word and live it...

(The people, in doing this action, are copying the action of the Priest who is also doing this gesture whilst silently praying: “Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel”).

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STATUES:

There is a lot of ignorance, misunderstanding and fear (from people who are not Catholic) about the use of Statues in the Church depicting holy women and men or even depicting Our Lord. Some of the things said about Catholics by people who are not Catholic, about the presence of Statues in our Churches and our devotion to Mary the Mother of God, are downright wrong and repugnant. No truly Christian person would wish to perpetuate lies or distortions about the meaning of them in the life of the church.

Statues are simply helpful visual reminders, symbols representing of our membership in the communion of the saints, which involves all the holy women and men that have ever lived: the saints. We do not ‘worship statues’. We worship the Lord God alone. We do not ‘pray to statues’ we pray to God alone.

Statues serve the same function as photographs of loved ones kept in our homes. Just as the mere presence of a photograph of a loved one or friend is perfectly good, so too are statues and pictures of saints. They are symbols which serve as a reminder of the lives of holy people throughout Church history. They recall aspects about their lives to inspire us to imitate their virtues which of course come from God’s grace. Popular statues in Catholic Churches include statues of Mary the Mother of God, St Joseph, and other Saints. A church will often have a statue of the patron saint of the church. So, for example, if the Church is named “St Peter’s” it will probably



have a statue of ST Peter somewhere in it and so on.

Mary the Mother of God has a very special place in the life of the Church but, again, we neither worship, nor do we pray to her statue. People often pray whilst looking or kneeling at statues as it helps them visualise and focus their prayer, but they are not worshipping graven images or anything like that.

We don't even pray TO Mary, nor do we pray TO any other saints but we pray TO God alone. We do believe that the communion of saints can be asked to "pray for us" to the Lord, in whose presence they stand. The saints continue to pray for us to the Lord Our God and so they act as intercessors the same way that we can pray to God for a loved one or friend when they ask us to pray for them. The Lord is God of the living, not the dead, all people are alive to God. The dead, who have lived lives of holiness and virtue, live on in the presence of God and continue to pray for us to the Father. Naturally we can and do pray and make petitions directly to God. It doesn't stop us from also asking all holy people (alive on earth or in God's presence), to keep us or our intentions in THEIR prayers which is their conversation and praise and petitioning of God.

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Stations of the Cross: These are a series of usually fourteen pictures of images depicting the final journey of Jesus towards the Cross and his suffering and death. They are called stations because people go to each image, which are spread around the church, and stop (remain stationary) at each picture and pray, meditate and reflect on the significance of what this image depicts in the journey of Jesus to Calvary hill and his crucifixion. Traditionally there are fourteen stations, that depict the following:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus receives the cross
3. Jesus falls the first time
4. Jesus meets [His Mother](#)
5. [Simon of Cyrene](#) carries the cross
6. [Veronica](#) wipes Jesus' face with her veil
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of [Jerusalem](#)
9. Jesus falls the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of His garments
11. [Crucifixion](#): Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus' [body is removed from the cross](#) ([Pietà](#))
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

or
an alternative set, based on incidents directly depicted in Scripture, are as follows:

1. Jesus in the Garden of Olives,
2. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested,
3. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin,
4. Jesus is denied by Peter,
5. Jesus is judged by Pilate,



6. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns,
7. Jesus takes up his cross,
8. Jesus is helped by the Cyrenean to carry his cross,
9. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem,
10. Jesus is crucified,
11. Jesus promises his kingdom to the good thief,
12. Jesus and his mother and disciple,
13. Jesus dies on the cross,
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Or.....and another version, called the Way of the Cross, are as follows:

1. Jesus institutes the Eucharist
2. Jesus prays in Gethsemane
3. Jesus before the [Sanhedrin](#)
4. Jesus is [scourged](#) and crowned with thorns
5. Jesus carries the cross to Calvary
6. Jesus falls under the weight of the cross
7. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene
8. Jesus meets the pious women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus is nailed on the cross
10. Jesus promises Heaven to the repentant thief
11. Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is laid in the tomb
14. Jesus rises from the dead

The stations developed as an act of popular devotion by ordinary people, and is still extremely popular as a private time of prayer or as a group gathering, especially in Lent, and on the Fridays of Lent and Good Friday particularly. There is not just one ceremony that goes with these stations, there are many versions. It is not an official ritual of the church, hence the greater flexibility, but it is nevertheless very popular and important.

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Organ: Many churches have a musical instrument such as an organ. Organ music has been part of church liturgy for centuries. Other types of music are allowable, but there is quite a tradition for organ music. The very visible presence of an organ or other large musical instrument is there to support people in their worship by singing or assist in their worship and prayer by uplifting music to raise one's soul and mind and heart to God.



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Collection plates and charity boxes: Collection plates are handed around one or two or three times (depending on the event) and people place coins or money on these plates to contribute to the upkeep of the church and the upkeep of the priests and religious and also donate to needy causes. Collections are taken up in the ceremony because they are part of the symbol of the fact that we give our lives, work and treasure to God for the



benefit of those in need and to sustain the missionary work of the church in the world.

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Stained Glass windows: These style of beautiful artwork date back to the middle ages and earlier. Many people could not read or write back in the early centuries of the church, so they passed on stories and messages about God and their faith in spoken stories and also pictures. The stained glass and leadlight windows are designed to inspire and uplift people's minds and hearts to contemplate God's love and goodness. The images in the stained glass tell stories from the bible, from church history and from liturgy to teach and inspire people about aspects of their faith, without need of words.

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HOLY OILS:

(In various Catholic ceremonies, the priest uses oil as a symbol, it is olive oil that has been blessed by the Bishop, the leader of the church in a particular region.

we call these various oils: **HOLY OILS**

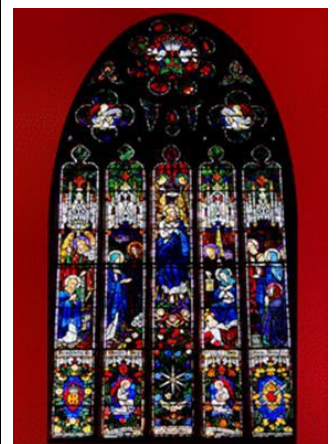
each year, a week or so before Easter, the bishop gathers with his priests and representatives of all the parish communities of the area for a Mass with the blessing of the oils which will be used in the sacraments for the coming year. These blessed oils (of which there are three different uses) is taken back by each community ready for use in the sacred rites of our church.

THE OIL OF BAPTISM... also known as Oil of Catechumens. This oil is used to anoint people before they are baptized, it is a physical prayer that God will protect and strengthen the one to be baptized to enable them to live as good Christians... (we trust and pray that God will shield them from harm).....anything bad in life will slip off them.... Unable to grab hold.... "When the priest uses this oil he prays: "May Christ strengthen you with his power."

THE OIL OF THE INFIRM.. or oil of the sick.... Blessed and used just as it was said in the letter of St James in the Scriptures: "are there any sick among you, then call for the priests who will pray over them and anoint them with oil..." ...When this oil is used, the priest prays that "through this holy anointing, may God in his love an mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord save you, and raise you up."

THE OIL OF CHRISM,.... Symbol of royalty.....used to anoint the heads of Kings and Queens at their coronation... and priests hands at their ordination... This beautiful perfumed oil is also used in the baptismal rite and most importantly... is used to anoint the foreheads of those receiving Confirmation.....Those anointed will remain "forever a member of Christ, who is Priest, Prophet and King. "

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An important liturgical principle is to ensure that any symbols we use in our worship are strong. That is, if we use a symbol at all, it should be clear and unambiguous and strong. One sees this particularly in the Baptism ceremony. The symbols of Baptism are Oil of Catechuminate, Water, Candle, Baptismal Robe and Oil of Chrism. One could be forgiven, however, for remembering only the pouring of the water and not noticing the anointing of the chest and head with oil. This is because these other symbols are often featured so slightly as to go unnoticed. The minister of baptism may have a miniature container of oil and swiftly daub a slight amount on the person to be baptised. Why do something at all if one is not to do it strongly and clearly? So, in this parish, we have large, worthy containers for the oil, and we take a goodly amount of the oil and anoint with a sense of purpose.

Symbols are so important that they can actually be watered down by multiplication. It is not acceptable to have a main crucifix in the sanctuary and also have a crucifix on the altar and another crucifix nearby as well. The symbol of the cross is so central that one strong expression is more than enough. Also, as we said a few weeks ago, since the altar itself is a symbol of the abiding sacrifice and presence of Christ, using it as a “stand” for a crucifix diminishes both symbols in themselves.

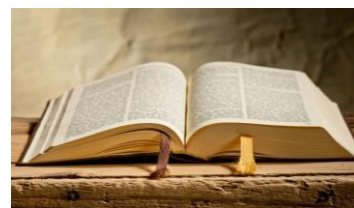
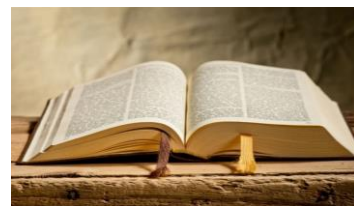
Use of disposable paper booklet to proclaim the Word of God in liturgy is also discouraged. Since the Word of God is something important, powerful and permanent. It is best to always proclaim scriptures from the proper lectionary or bible. The Bible itself is given special reverence. However, you may notice that the Presider, (the priest), at the end of the Gospel, does not lift the gospel up to say “The Gospel of the Lord”, since after proclaiming it, the Gospel is no longer to be found merely in the printed words of the book, but in the hearts and minds of all who have heard it.

THE SYMBOLS USED IN THE BAPTISM CEREMONY

There are a few symbolic elements used in the Baptism ceremony. Here is a quick summary, to help explain the meaning of them.

1. **OIL OF BAPTISM:** Your child will be anointed on the chest (older children and adults we anoint on the forehead) with the oil of Baptism. This is ordinary olive oil that has been specially blessed by our Bishop in an annual ceremony just before Easter. This oil is a symbol of preparing the child for Christian living. Just as an athlete is rubbed with oil to prepare their muscles for the race, this oil is used to strengthen and prepare the child to live a good Christian life. The oil also symbolises protection. Just as it is hard to grab hold of someone who has oil rubbed on them, they slip away from one’s grip, so too we pray that this child will be protected from harm and temptation; nothing bad in life can grab hold of them, it will just slip away.

2. **WATER:** This is the main symbol of baptism. Water represents washing clean and re-birth and renewal. Water is a perfect symbol, it contains so many meanings: Health and life, recreation, danger and threat, power and gentleness, washing and renewing. It is a wonderful way of showing that by following Jesus we want to ‘immerse’ or “plunge” ourselves into Jesus’ way of life. Baptism is a word that literally means “Plunge” and we believe that Baptism is not just a sign of following Jesus, Baptism connects us to



Jesus and makes us one with his life and with the life of all other believers in Jesus.

In ancient Christian churches there was a special separate room or even separate building where the Baptismal font was located. .. // People would be welcomed into the life of Christ...and become members of the church in this Baptistry... and then be led into the church... to take their rightful place around the altar of the Lord...for the first time. There were a couple of major styles of Baptism font.....

One type (pictured) was a rectangular pool with steps going in one side and coming up the other..... These kinds of fonts look very much like a water-filled grave..... People would be led down into the pool, leaving behind their old clothes and old ways of living... and any sins they committed... and came up out of the waters.... Putting on the new white baptismal robe....// . The power of the symbol was strong.... One could see the symbolism of going into the tomb with Christ (dying with Christ, to our old ways) and rising from the tomb with Jesus to a new way of living. If you have ever visited Birkdale Church... you will see a strong Baptismal font rather clearly looking like a “coffin shaped” pool in the ground.... This picks up what Saint Paul so effectively says in his Letter to the Romans (6:3-11)

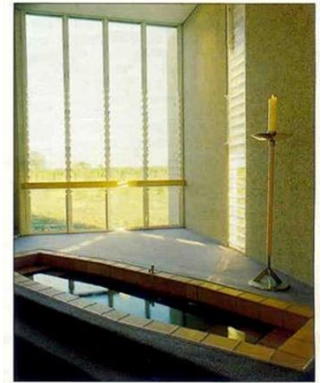
“All who have been baptised -have died with Jesus in the waters of Baptism and now we walk in newness of life.... Being ‘dead to sin’. (NRSV Bible).

The other style of font was circular..... It seemed to pick up the powerful image of renewal and re-birth....

The Brisbane Archdiocese’s pre-eminent church... where the Archbishops’ chair is located... the Cathedral of St. Stephen.... Has a magnificent font that cleverly incorporates both images... with the pool and the steps... and the mural and bowl representing rebirth in Christ Jesus.

The beauty of the Baptismal image of ‘water and washing’ is that it picks up so many different facets of Jesus and his message..... Life, death, joy, suffering, forgiveness, cleansing, new life, re-birth, and danger, even death. It is a reminder that all who dare follow Jesus into the pool must be prepared for both fullness of life and the real possibility of suffering - of being outside our comfort zone. Baptism into Jesus makes us one with Jesus in his life, death and resurrection. We say “yes” to the deep mystery of dying and rising that is found in all aspects of life. Each time we recite the Creed at Mass, we renew the promises made at our Baptism, when we dared, or our parents lovingly dared on our behalf, to follow Jesus into the (often cool and uninviting) waters of Baptism, so as to rise to a new – albeit challenging – way of life. Thank goodness Jesus always has gone before us to lead us through these waters.

3. OIL OF CHRISM: The name “Christian” comes from the name “Christ” who we follow. The word “Christ” literally means “Anointed One.” Jesus is the Anointed and Chosen one of God who was ‘anointed’ by God to be THE Priest, Prophet and King. Oil of Chrism is again ordinary olive oil that has been mixed with beautiful perfumes. This oil symbolises royalty and vocation. This oil is anointed onto the crown on the head of the newly baptised child. This is the same oil that is used to anoint the heads of Monarchs at their Coronation, to anoint Priest’s hands at their Ordination,



and is the same oil that is used in Confirmation, which seals and confirms the baptism of the child later in life. This second anointing makes it clear that your child is a royal member of Jesus' kingdom, as all Jesus' followers are. The child will be connected and part of Jesus, and share with Jesus in his vocation to be "Priest, Prophet and King" in the world.

4. WHITE BAPTISMAL GARMENT: There is a Bible reading where Saint Paul subtly refers to the white Baptismal when he says : "when you were baptized, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes." The white Baptismal garment represents cleanliness and purity. As Baptised followers of Jesus we have been washed clean and purified and we are expected to keep our lives "clean" and "pure." The white garment is a symbol reminding us of how we want to keep ourselves holy the way a person keeps a white garment nice and clean.



5. CANDLE: We believe that Jesus is the "light of the world." Jesus is the light who shows us the way, and helps us in life, especially when we feel we are in darkness of difficulty or temptation or confusion. Every Easter a very large candle is blessed called the "Easter Candle" or "Paschal Candle" (a word meaning Passover: Jesus is the "Passover Lamb" who was sacrificed to save us from sin). This candle represents Jesus who is a light to all in darkness. When a child is baptised, they are said to be "enlightened by Christ" and they have become a "Child of the Light." A Baptismal candle is lit from this Easter candle and is presented to the family as a sign that this newly baptised person has received Jesus' light and now must be a 'light of Christ' to all they meet in how they live and behave. Just as the big light does not lose any of its brightness or power by having other candles lit from it, so we become a carrier of Christ's light without taking anything from the greatness of the true light who enlightens and guides us all: Jesus Christ.



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Funeral ceremony symbols:

A Pall

The name "Pall", (pronounced "Pawl" - same as "Paul"), comes from the latin word pallium, meaning 'a cloak.' A Pall is a large white cloth that is placed over a coffin in a funeral ceremony. It has a special significance. In a funeral ceremony, there are a lot of symbols used to remind us of Baptism. This is because, in Baptism, God makes to us unbreakable promises. In Baptism, we are made forever children of the living of God. We are made 'children of light' and it is as if we have "put on living as part of Christ like one puts on new clothes," (to paraphrase Saint Paul). So, the symbols of Baptism are brought back as comforting reminders of God's promises at the time of a Christian Funeral. That is why the "Paschal" or "Easter Candle" stands near the coffin, to remind us that our departed loved one remains a child of light. We sprinkle holy water on the coffin to remember the eternal life we have already gained and the saving waters of Baptism.

Remember that in the early days of Christianity, Baptismal fonts often looked like this type:



This picks up on what Saint Paul says in the letter of St Paul to the Romans

(Baptism: a sharing in Christ's death and resurrection)

"When we were Baptised in Christ Jesus we were Baptised in his death; in other words, when we were Baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection. "

Very powerfully too, the coffin has a white cloth placed over it as a reminder of the white garment worn when they received the new life of Baptism. The garment is a symbol of the Christian dignity that we received and how we are to bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven.

These beautiful symbols, including the Pall, all serve to speak, silently but strongly, of the hope we have that "just as we have already died with Jesus in the waters of Baptism, so will we rise with Jesus on the last day."

**Fr Paul Kelly
Surfers Paradise Catholic Parish,
50 Fairway Drive,
Clear Island Waters,
Queensland, 4226**

paulwkelly68@gmail.com

