



Proposed Glass & Wood Altar Screen

Glass matches the front door design.

Vertical columns are 1 1/2 inch wide Oak.

The Tabernacle will be raised for better viewing.

Some glass will be stained and textured to prevent glare.

Support structure installed in approximately 5-6 work days.

Glass installation takes an additional few weeks.

Fr. Dave Heney
daveheney@stpascal.org

We Would Like to See Jesus

Reflections on the Mass and our new altar screen, by Fr. Dave Heney

Two people asked to see Jesus in John 12:21. We can only imagine why. Having suffered under Roman occupation, perhaps they felt hopeless, lost, or confused. Life in Israel was hard, dangerous, and short, so what was the point of it all? What was the purpose of so much suffering, and why do evil people prosper? They knew scripture foretold a messiah who would answer all these questions and bring them happiness at last. If Jesus was the one, well, no wonder they felt passionate about meeting Him. Everything depended on that meeting.

All who met Jesus with an open heart were dramatically changed. No one can meet Jesus and stay the same. In fact, dramatic change was the very sign that the meeting had even taken place. People found healing, purpose, meaning, and “life that is full and joy that is complete.” (John 10:10, 15:11). Meeting Jesus is still the main event in our faith. Nothing happens unless that happens.

What happens next?

Meeting Jesus is different than meeting anyone else; where nothing more than names and small talk are exchanged. Meeting Jesus is more of an *encounter* that questions our life and then calls for a *response*. “What do I make of this person, Jesus? Who is this Jesus for me? What is *my* life about?”

Meeting Jesus calls us to live in a new way. We look at people in a new way because we finally experience that God looks at us in a new way. We feel *unconditional* love. We love because God first loved us. That is the event that can change our behavior. Instead of selfishness, we choose *love*. Instead of greed, we choose *generosity*. Instead of hate, we choose *forgiveness*. Instead of arrogance, we choose *service*. Instead of falsehood, we choose *truth*. Instead of slavery to emotions, we choose *freedom*. Our life as Christians is always a response to meeting the Lord and receiving His love. We hope we do that everyday. Once a week God calls us to gather with others and experience that same love in sacramental ritual and ceremony.

Meeting Jesus is easier now but no less an encounter. We don’t have to be in Nazareth or Jerusalem anymore. We meet the Lord everywhere but He also indicated where He could be found in special ways for sure. The sacraments are those *visible* events He designed where we meet Him. At Mass, we meet The Lord especially in these four ways; the Eucharist, (*This is my body*), the Scriptures, (*in the beginning was the Word*), the Celebrant, (*Do this in remem-*

brance of me), and in ourselves as an assembly of believing people, (*when gathered in my name, I am with you*). When we put them all together we have a “Liturgy.”

Liturgy is a Greek word meaning, “Action of the people.” It describes what people do *after* they have met and experienced that love from Jesus. In Liturgies we respond to God with rituals, sacred signs and symbols; some that we design and others that *God designed for us*. Just as in every personal encounter we must make an actual *personal* response at Liturgy. No one can respond for us, not the musicians, the lectors, or the priest. They are each making their own response appropriate to their role. Theirs does not replace ours. They may or may not be doing a great job, and we hope for the best that they are, but God is still looking to us for our response. We can never delegate that to anyone else. At Mass, or whenever we walk into the church we have our own job to do.

In Mark 10:17, a young person asks Jesus, “What must I *do* to achieve eternal life?” Is any question more important than that? Jesus responds simply with the Ten Commandments, but for those who want to *do* more; there is the total gift of one’s self to others. Jesus reveals here that salvation is discovered in self-giving behavior. We know that instinctively. Words are cheap and ideas come and go, but behavior speaks louder than both. Love must be visible and expressed in action. Any one in love knows that. Gestures at Mass are signs of the daily behavior that “speak” love. *Gestures at Mass are love in the language of the body*. They are true gestures when they reflect our true inner spirit. All liturgical actions are meant to express God’s love for us and our response of love in return. That is why we judge whether certain liturgical gestures are better than others.

For example, standing is a sign of life and personal dignity. We each stand at our own full height, as we actually are, filled with both good and bad, strengths and weaknesses. We stand to show we believe in the resurrection. After His

death on the cross, Jesus was laid in a tomb, but then stood again at Easter, full of life again. We sit, in the manner of students, to be relaxed and open to learning as much as we can from the scriptures and the homily. We show our love in our spirit of humility and openness to new ideas. We kneel to show submission to God's place in our life. Kneeling makes us smaller in stature, which means we will not fight God or arrogantly place ourselves above the Lord. Genuflecting is a brief kneeling on one knee, as we move near the Tabernacle in the church. Folding our hands in prayer is a sign our hands are "tied" and will not fight the Lord. Bowing our head is a simple sign of respect. All these signs are different ways of expressing love. That is what they are for. Kneeling, genuflecting, folded hands, and a bowed head all show who is in charge, and it is not us!

What is the Purpose of Sacred Art in Church?

All artwork, statues, décor, architecture, and furniture are meant to enhance meeting Jesus. However, while some objects like the Tabernacle are more important than others for that meeting, nothing in the church is meant to get in the way! That is how we judge everything inside the church; how well does it enhance or detract from the experience of meeting Jesus. Most of the elements of Liturgy, such as music, statues, furnishings, movement, singing, and architecture, are artistic expressions of our love for God and His love for us. However, they are still works of *art*, and as such have very *subjective* qualities. After all, what some people like in art may be different from other's taste, e.g. some like Picasso while others do not. We should not get too dogmatic about things that are by nature very subjective. What one person finds deeply inspiring another finds horribly distracting. That is why Liturgy evokes such strong feelings; and a parish like ours that has over 6,000 families can have a wide variety of personal preferences and taste in art. Our Bishops have set general guidelines to follow that are mainly based on common sense about how to meet the Lord in Liturgy. They serve to safeguard basic reverence and prevent misunderstandings. The guidelines change from time to time as those safeguarding needs arise and taste in art changes. Artistic motive is important. Is artwork made from a motive of respect, dignity, and love for the Lord, or is it meant to draw attention to the artist? It is always Jesus we want to meet first and foremost.

The largest object in most churches is a central crucifix. Jesus came with a message and life of love but was crucified by those consumed with jealousy, envy, selfishness, and pride. Gazing at the cross we see what sin looks like. Gazing at the cross we are stunned to see how anyone would go through this suffering for us. Seeing Jesus on the

cross we are moved to compassion for an innocent victim. That compassion is what returns us to our true humanity and is our salvation. There would be no church at all were it not for the passion and resurrection of the Lord. It is fitting that the first experience we have of seeing the Lord when we walk inside our church is His love on the cross.

Meeting Jesus inside the Church

Meeting Jesus is still the goal every time we enter the church. Remembering that we are going to meet the Lord can help arrange our mood, our feelings, and our spirit even while we are enroute from home. It can put in perspective any difficulties we face in getting here, such as getting out of the house on time, traffic on the road, or problems in parking. None is as important as a personal encounter with Jesus as He asked us to do at Mass. We can then choose to let nothing bother us. We can choose to arrive at peace. Keeping the encounter with Jesus in mind helps put everything else in our life in perspective and balance. We remember LOVE.

We walk through large front doors into a sacred place. The church is unlike any other building because it contains a Tabernacle with the presence inside of Our Lord in the Eucharist. It also contains an altar where Jesus becomes Eucharist for us. But the Mass reconciles two very opposite feelings. It is both a *celebration* of our salvation as well as making present the *sacrifice* of the Lord. Liturgy must reflect both feelings; being neither a party nor a somber event, for it is both a joyous communion of people and a reverent worship of God. Of course, we are glad to see friends and greet new ones, but perhaps we can speak to them in a different way while at church. The sacred church building itself reminds us that these people are more than just friends or neighbors but our brothers and sisters in *the Lord*. The Mass reminds us that Jesus died and rose for them and so the people around us are sacred to God. If we talk with others, perhaps our conversation could be more than simply "passing the time" or "small talk." Perhaps we could share conversation on a more meaningful level or share some spiritual insights.

The church building is primarily built for the celebration of the Eucharist so everything inside must encourage an authentic encounter with Christ: e.g. comfortable seating, good lighting and acoustics, and even air-conditioning and heating. However, we only celebrate the Eucharist at certain times. The rest of the day we can still meet the Lord in the Eucharist as reserved in the Tabernacle. During Mass, special lighting helps to focus attention on the altar, scriptures, and all our parishioners gathered together. Mass is where Jesus said He could be found. After Mass, special lighting helps focus attention on the Tabernacle, (raised for better viewing), which is where He can be found. When the

light is on the Tabernacle, it signals our time is about "Jesus and me." When it is on the altar our time is about "Jesus and us." The screen helps that light distinguish the whole church space from either a private place of prayer or a community praying together at Mass. Our new screen design is very close to the *original idea* of our church architect and the input of the several parish committees that met prior to the renovation of 2002. The glass repeats the design of the front doors and artistically frames the Tabernacle and altar.

What do we do at Mass?

The time before Mass is more than "waiting for it to start." We can enjoy those moments more by thinking, meditating, and pondering what is about to happen and who is coming. We can pray about our life, what is going on in our family and work, and what it means in the larger context of eternal life. We can draw inspiration from what we see and hear, like the crucifix, music, readings in the missalette, or statues. We can think about how we are going to put our faith in action or how we will respond to the Lord this day. We can use that time to look around and see Jesus.

Although gathered together with many other people, God intends this time for *our own* public response to His love. We cannot let others carry the singing or prayer responses for us. However, we do not pray or sing everything. Some prayers are done by the priest and some by us. Some songs are sung by the choir and some by us. Either way we can be actively involved by making the prayers and music our own as we listen. The Mass is not for spectators. We can get that mistaken sense because the church space looks so much like a theatre; complete with stage, performers, and audience. If anything, *God is the audience* and He is patiently waiting to hear from us! We cannot be simply looking at ministers while God is looking and waiting on us!

What Does God do at Mass?

2000 years ago, God took what was most personal to Himself, His own Son, and offered that life for us in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus repeated this offering by taking His own life and offering it back to His Father in Heaven. *That is the real meaning of life and source of happiness; to have a life and offer it in service to others.* We see and hear it at Mass; "This is my body, given for you." We take Jesus into ourselves and find the faith and courage to take our life, with all its wonder, gifts, talents, and abilities, and offer them all in service to others. That is why the church has always founded hospitals, schools, soup kitchens, etc. (St. Paschal's gives almost \$90,000 each year to

the poor in our community.) We can also say at Mass, "This is myself and I am for you." Why else would God make so many different people if it were not for each to offer their unique set of gifts to others? God designed us to feel tremendously fulfilled when we do. We cannot give what we do not have so we must recognize our goodness and abilities well. That life is what we have to offer. When the gifts of Bread and Wine are brought forward, spiritually place yourself on the altar too. You will also be transformed into something *more* just as the Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Jesus and us at Communion

We believe that at the words of consecration (This is my body...) Jesus identifies Himself with the gifts on the altar. That change does not depend on the goodness or faith of ourselves or even the priest. It depends on what God wants to do and He wants to give Himself to us. As the objective presence of Our Lord, we handle it very reverently, especially during Communion. The Eucharistic Ministers should move in dignified movements since they carry the Lord with them. We sing a song as we process forward and bow or genuflect before receiving. We have the option of receiving from the Chalice and then we return to our seats to reflect on who is now with us. We can stand together until all have received or sit and pray if we feel the need. Communion is an intense encounter with Our Lord. What will he ask of us? How will we respond? It is a dynamic meeting!

Mass ends with a major blessing from God bestowed on us all by the Celebrant and the sending forth into the world with the words: "Go....to love and serve the Lord and one another!" That sending forth to offer our lives to the world, to repeat what Jesus just did at Mass, became the very name of the whole event. The Latin word for sending is "missa" from where we get our English word, "mission," and eventually the word, "Mass." We should always stay to hear those words. They tell us what we are to do that day and it is the Word of the Lord to us! If we follow it, we will have shown that we actually did meet Jesus. That meeting makes all the difference.

