

## The Church Building

Even before we say a single word or engage in a single action at Mass, one of the first mysteries we encounter is actually the mystery of the church building itself. Entering into the church and seeing the architecture and art of the church building, there are elements of the church building that are common throughout the Roman rite, throughout the Roman tradition. And so, what I want to do is in this video, look at the mysteries of the church building, just a few of them, we can't do everything, and try to unpack where those come from in both Scripture and tradition. And so, to start, what I want to do is describe to you what the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* says about the decoration and ornamentation of a church building.

So before I begin, though, the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* is actually a document of the Church. It's found at the beginning of every official missal used by the church, and what it does is it's an overview or instruction for how churches are to be decorated, how the Mass is to be celebrated, what kind of vestments the priest can use, and that kind of thing. This is a document that's been updated multiple times over the years, and so I'm reading here from the latest edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* that was published and translated in English back in 2011. So this is the most up-to-date regulations for the Church, and in that document, which is sometimes affectionately called the "GIRM" by priests and seminarians familiar with it, this is what it says about the church building. Listen to this quote:

For the celebration of the Eucharist, the People of God are normally gathered together in a church or, if there is no church or if it is too small, then in another respectable place that is nonetheless *worthy of so great a mystery*.

Okay, pause there. Notice that the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* is identifying and emphasizing once again that the Mass is a mystery. So if we're going to celebrate the Mass in a church, that church building needs to reflect the greatness and the sacredness of the mystery that it is dedicated to having celebrated

within it. So that's the function of a church building. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* continues:

Therefore, churches or other places should be suitable for carrying out *the sacred action* and for ensuring the active participation of the faithful.  
*Moreover...*

And this is the key line for us

*...sacred buildings and requisites for divine worship should be truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities.*<sup>1</sup>

So notice that. The ornamentation and decoration and architecture and art of a church building is not only supposed to be worthy of the Eucharist being celebrated, not only supposed to be beautiful according to the Magisterium here, but also should be signs and symbols of heavenly realities. Why is that? Well, what I want to suggest to you in this video is that the mystagogy of the mass is not limited to the words and actions of mass. It actually begins even before we make a single word or gesture with the very building itself. The sanctuary itself should, in a sense, lead us into the mystery of the fact that at every Mass, we are experiencing a heavenly reality, entering into a heavenly mystery.

So how's that the case? Well, let's look just for a few minutes at some of the common elements that are part of every Catholic sanctuary in the Roman rite, part of the Roman tradition, according to the Roman Magisterium and the *General instruction of the Roman Missal*. So here I just want to highlight about 10 of them. So if you walk into a Catholic Church, what things are you going to see in a Roman Catholic Church?

First, you're going to have a sanctuary, right? The sanctuary is going to be the place where the altar is, where the word of God is proclaimed, and where the priest and the deacon minister in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, offering the

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<sup>1</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Edition*. USCCB, 2011.

celebration of the Eucharist. The most important part of the sanctuary, that kind of center of the sanctuary is, of course, going to be the altar, which is the place of sacrifice. It's the place where the Eucharist is offered, where the sacrifice of the cross, as the General Instruction describes it, is effected, is offered. Then you are going to also have candlesticks, that will be one of the first things you see when you enter the church, you are going to see candles. These are going to be either on the altar or around the altar, according to the General Instruction.

You're also going to have a crucifix, a cross with a figure of Christ crucified upon it. Then you are going to have the ambo, which is a word many people aren't familiar with. We usually tend to call it the pulpit, that's a little bit more of a common term, which is the place where the word of God will be proclaimed from. It will often be elevated so that people can see and hear the one reading the scriptures. Another thing you're going to see is the chair, the chair of the presiding minister, the chair of the priest or the bishop who is leading the Eucharistic celebration. Another element that the General Instruction prescribes is actually for there to be seats in a Catholic Church. In a Roman Catholic Church you have seats for the faithful to sit in so that they can listen to the Word of God, ordinarily.

Then, you'll also have a choir, which will be a group called the Schola Cantorum, the choir of singers or chanters who will sing sacred music of the liturgy, especially on Sundays. And then, last but certainly not least, you will have, according to the General Instruction, there should be a tabernacle in every church, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, as well as a sanctuary lamp, a candle that accompanies the Blessed Sacrament in order to indicate the presence of the Eucharist in the church building, the presence of the Eucharist in the sanctuary. Oh, and then finally, too, the General Instruction also prescribes that there would be sacred images in a Catholic Church, either images of Christ, like on the crucifix, but also images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the angels and the saints.

So this is standard stuff. If you're Catholic, you go into a Catholic Church, you're going to be used to seeing an altar, a tabernacle, candles, a chair, the pulpit, statuary of Mary and the Saints and of Christ, a crucifix, all these kinds of things, a sanctuary lamp. These are kind of the common signs and symbols that form part of the ornamentation of the church, and they are again prescribed by the Roman

Missal itself to be part of every Roman Catholic Church. Now the question is, if these are signs and symbols of heavenly realities, what do they represent? What do they reflect? What's the history of these signs and symbols, art, and architecture? And also, what's the mystery of them? Where do they come from? Why are they there? Now, there's no way I can cover all of this in this series alone, or even just much less in a single video, but I do want to at least give you a little bit of background and point to the fact that if you look at each of these elements of the church building, one way to open up the mystery is to recognize that the history of these elements goes back not just to the churches of the Middle Ages or the churches of antiquity, but all the way back to Jewish worship, both in the Temple and Tabernacle, Jewish worship of the Tabernacle, and the Jewish synagogue.

So in this video, what I want to do is look at how the very way we decorate the church itself is meant to lead us into the mystery of the fact that the Mass is not just a worship service, the Mass is not just any old church service. It is the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish Temple and the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish synagogue, and that both of these dimensions of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, are in a sense very closely attuned to the liturgy of the synagogue and the liturgy of the Temple. So, let's just look at that for just a moment. So a little bit of an overview here of ancient Jewish worship and the Jewish roots of the Catholic sanctuary.

So let's begin with the Jewish Temple. If you go back to the worship in the Temple of Judaism at the time of Jesus, any 1st-century Jew would have known that the Temple was really a permanent reflection of an older sanctuary known as the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Moses. So before the time of Moses, before, you know, 1400 BC or so, worship, liturgy, sacrifice could be performed by any of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, basically anywhere. If you wanted to worship God, you build an altar of stones. You might have to put wood on it upon which to lay the sacrifice, and you would offer sacrifice anywhere. But by the time of the Exodus from Egypt, once God gets the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and leads them home to the Promised land, God starts to give specific descriptions of how he wants to be worshipped in just one place, and that place was called the Tabernacle. And he gives very detailed descriptions in the book of Exodus 25, all the way to chapter 40, so basically the entire second half of the book of Exodus are

extremely detailed descriptions of how he wants to be worshipped in this place known as the Tabernacle.

And in fact, these descriptions are so detailed that this is the part of the Bible where many, many people, if they sit down and try to read through the Bible all at once, you know, from beginning to end, they usually will get through the book of Genesis because it's fascinating, all kinds of stories and interesting anecdotes about the patriarchs and polygamy and all these kinds of really interesting and even exciting accounts of the story of Joseph, the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, that kind of thing. And then they'll get to the book of Exodus with the plagues and the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and they tend to keep reading, but when they get to Exodus 25 and the descriptions of the Tabernacle, that's where a lot of people fall off the wagon and stop reading the Bible because it shifts from a kind of narrative historical mode into a very detailed description. Almost like reading an IKEA furniture building manual of how to put together a bookshelf or a bed or whatever it might be, but not with reference to secular furniture, but with reference to the sacred furniture of the Tabernacle of Moses. And although this might strike people as boring, it's actually extremely important for us to understand the mystagogy, the mysteries of the Catholic Church building in the Roman rite in particular.

So let's just look at the Jewish Temple for a moment and look at some of the elements, and you'll already be able to see very quickly parallels between the Jewish Temple and a Roman Catholic church building. In Exodus 25, for example, when God begins to give instructions on how the Tabernacle is going to be constructed, this is what He says:

And let them make me a sanctuary [Hebrew miqdash “holy place”; Latin *sanctuarium*], that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it...<sup>2</sup> (Exodus 25:8-9)

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

So notice a couple things here. First, God says to build him a sanctuary. In Hebrew the term there is *miqdash*, it means a holy place. A place that is sacred, a place that is set apart. Why is it set apart? Because God dwells there. It's the dwelling place of God on earth. That's what a sanctuary is. It's where the God of heaven, dwells on earth. And that Hebrew term, *miqdash*, gets translated into Latin eventually as *sanctuarium*. So the very term we use to describe the sanctuary is actually a clue to us that when we enter into a Catholic Church building, we are entering into a replica, a kind of recapitulation of the Tabernacle, of the Sanctuary of Moses for God.

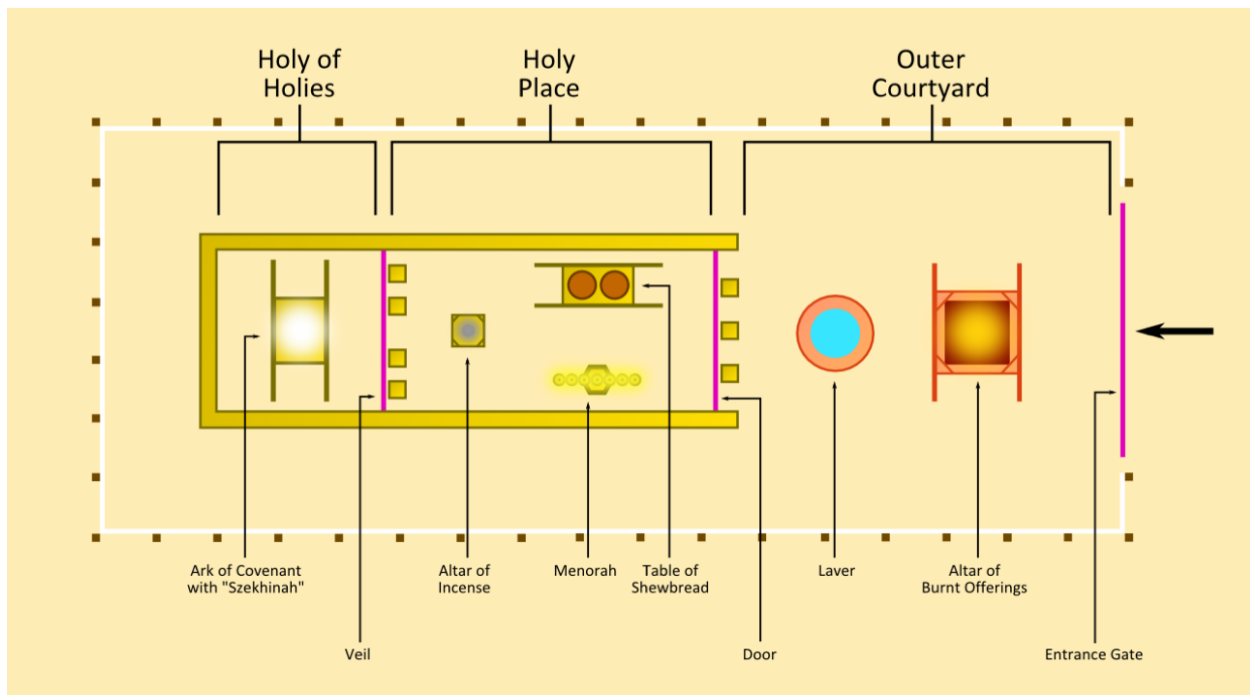
Second, notice, this is important. The Tabernacle is not going to be built just according to Moses 's whims, but it's going to be built according to the pattern that was shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. Now if I had more time I could get into detail and show you this, but in the book of Exodus 24, it actually says Moses and the elders go up the mountain and they see heaven, they see the God of Israel. They eat and drink in his presence, and while they're there, God gives them a pattern, a vision of the heavenly sanctuary, and basically says to Moses, I want you to model the earthly tabernacle and earthly sanctuary on the heavenly pattern that you saw. So the architecture of the Tabernacle is not something that Moses does out of his preferences, right? I would like this kind of shape or I would like this kind of ornamentation. No, it's meant to imitate the heavenly realities, the heavenly sanctuary, the heavenly realm of God, right? To show you that when you go in the Tabernacle, you're entering heaven on earth. That's the basic point.

Now with that said, if you look, there's a chart of the Tabernacle that just gives you a kind of basic overview of the pieces of sacred furniture that are in it. For our purposes here, I just want to focus on a few of those so that you can get a sense of their connection with a contemporary Roman Catholic Church building.

The first and most important one is the presence of the altar of sacrifice. So if you walked into the Tabernacle of Moses, the first thing you're going to encounter is a large bronze square altar where the blood of bulls and goats and lambs will be poured out in sacrificial worship of the one God of Israel. So Exodus 27 says this about the altar:

*You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad; the altar shall be square... You shall overlay it with bronze... You shall make it hollow, with boards; as it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made. (Exodus 27:1-2, 8)*

So notice a couple things there about the altar. First, although altars could be made of stone in the time of the patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they were, an altar can also be made of wood, as long in this case as it's covered with precious metal, and in this instance bronze, so it's overlaid with bronze. Whenever you see a precious metal, that's often a sign that you're entering a sanctuary, you're entering a holy place. It's a place that's set apart.



The second thing about the altar that's important is, apparently, there's an altar in heaven, because God tells Moses to make the altar of sacrifice on earth modeled on what was shown him on Mount Sinai, what was shown him about the heavenly sanctuary. So, once again, there's an imitation. There's an altar of sacrifice in heaven, then there should be an altar on earth, because the earthly liturgy corresponds to heavenly realities.

Another element that you would see when you would go into the Tabernacle of Moses, is if you enter into the inner sanctum known as the Holy Place, you're going to see candles. You're going to see a golden lampstand with seven tongues of fire. That golden lamp stand is known as the menorah. Most people are familiar with this, but look at what the Bible says about it:

You shall make a lampstand (Hebrew menorah) of pure gold... You shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light... See that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. (Exodus 25:31, 37, 40)

So notice a couple of things. As you move further into the Sanctuary, into the Holy Place, the degree of sanctity and the preciousness of the metal goes up. So bronze is on the outside, inside the Holy Place, gold, right? You'll see this over and over again. Not just any gold, pure gold, right? So God wants the sanctuary to be adorned with gold. Why? In ancient Israelite religion as well as other religions, gold was often a symbol of divinity, a symbol of heaven. So when you enter into a place adorned with gold, it's telling you that you're entering into the realm of the divine, into the presence of God, into a heavenly place. And if you had any doubts, God makes clear, I want you to make the menorah, the golden candelabra, according to the pattern you saw on the mountain. So apparently not only is there an altar in the heavenly sanctuary, there are also flames of fire, golden candles, a golden menorah, and in this instance, even in ancient Jewish tradition, there was a link between the menorah and its flames and then the cloud of fire, the glory cloud, the *shekinah*, that would actually come down upon Mount Sinai where Moses enters into it, and would actually come down upon the Tabernacle and the Ark as they are traveling throughout the desert, so that the fire of the cloud of glory, the *shekinah*, is a reflection of the presence of God, so too the flames of fire on the Menorah reflect and tell us that you are entering into God's holy presence.

A third aspect of the Tabernacle that's important is the golden box containing the Ark of the Covenant and the golden statues of cherubim atop the ark. So, if you go into the innermost sanctum of the Tabernacle, known as the Holy of Holies, which is a Hebrew way of saying the most holy place, you're going to see a golden box covered with two statues of cherubim. This is what Exodus says:



They shall make *an ark of acacia wood... You shall overlay it with pure gold... You shall make two cherubim of gold...* The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings... You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and *in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you...* (Exodus 25:10- 21)

So once again, although the ark is made out of wood, acacia wood, which by the way, the reason it's acacia wood is because acacia wood doesn't rot, it's incorruptible. So it's a fitting sign of something permanent, like the ark in heaven. So you don't make the ark out of pine or something cheap, you make it out of acacia wood, which is a very, very durable wood that will not rot or corrupt. Then you cover it in pure gold to symbolize the heavenly reality, and you put two statues of cherubim atop of it. Now, in modern American parlance, a cherub is like a naked baby with wings, right? But in ancient Israel, that wasn't the case. The cherubim were angelic beings that were actually considered mighty and powerful, who dwelt in the presence of God. So the presence of the statues, note that Catholics, statues of cherubim atop a golden ark containing not just the tablets of the 10 Commandments, but also later on, Exodus will say a golden bowl filled with manna, the special bread and the rod of Aaron that budded, all these things together tell us that if I'm in the Holy of Holies, I've entered into basically the throne room of God.

In the ancient Near East, we've actually found archaeological evidence of other arks beside the ark of Israel, and these too would have sphinxes atop them or some kind of heavenly beings, but they would have a statue of the deity in the middle of the angelic beings to kind of represent the ark as a throne of that deity.

What's different about the Israelites is although they can depict in a graven image, note this, statue of the angels, there's no image for the deity, right? Because their God is the God who cannot be seen and cannot be depicted. He's the invisible, transcendent God, the creator of the universe. So for our purposes here, the main point is that the ark is a symbol, once again, that you're in heaven and it's being made according to that heavenly pattern.

The final thing I would add here about the Tabernacle is that over time the liturgy of the Tabernacle is going to develop. In fact, there's a major difference between the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon. So during the time of Moses, let's say from, you know there are debates about that exact date, so either the 15th or 13th centuries down to the time of King David, the liturgy and the Tabernacle is totally silent. You enter into it and it is just the sound of sacrifice. But at the time of David, about 1000 years before Jesus, when he wants to build a temple but isn't going to be able to, it's going to have to be his son Solomon who builds it, David adds something new, something novel to the liturgy, and that is sacred music. So 1 Chronicles 6 tells us:

These are the men whom David put in charge of *the service of song in the house of the LORD*, after the ark rested there. *They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem...* (1 Chronicles 6:31-42; cf. Psalms 1-150)

So what does David add to the liturgy? He adds the Psalms, he adds the singing of the Psalms, so that if you were a first century Jew, by the time you get down to Jesus' day and you enter into the Temple, if you're a Jewish priest and you see an altar and a menorah, tongues of fire and a golden ark, and you hear the sound of sacred music being chanted by a choir of Levites, you know you're not on earth anymore, you're in the Temple. So each of these elements is a kind of biblical basis for what we're also going to see in the Mass, in the altar, the sanctuary lamp, the Tabernacle containing the urn of the holy bread of the Eucharist, is like the Ark of the Covenant, right? The sanctuary lamp is like the menorah. The altar of the Eucharist is like the altar of sacrifice. The chanting of the psalms, like the Responsorial Psalm, are an echo of the liturgy of the Temple telling you you're in the temple of Jerusalem. You're entering into the fulfillment of that.

But, and this important, in the Mass, there isn't just the sanctuary, the altar, the tabernacle. There's also, as we saw from the description of church building, there is the ambo, there are seats for the faithful, there's the reading of the scriptures. Where do those come from? Well, those come not from the Temple, but from the synagogue. This is very important. There were no scripture readings in the Temple in the way that there are in the synagogue. There are no seats in the Temple, it's

just a place for sacrifice. If you want to hear the readings and you want to have... there's no pulpit in the Temple, for example, for preaching to take place. All of those elements come from the Jewish synagogue. So let me just give you a couple of quotes here about the history and biblical roots of the synagogue and let them shed light on the Mass in that way. So if you look here from Nehemiah 8, we have a description of the beginnings of worship, which would eventually come to take place in the synagogue. So remember, Nehemiah is after the exile, so it's about the 6th century BC. The Israelites were exiled to Babylon and the Temple was taken away from them. It was destroyed. So now they can't offer sacrifice. There is no altar there, the Ark of the Covenant is lost. You don't have the menorah in the Temple. All that's gone and now the Israelites have to worship God through the reading of the word. And so they begin to develop a liturgy that is not going to be restricted just to the one temple in Jerusalem, but can happen in any gathering place known as a synagogue, throughout the Land of Israel and even beyond? So here's an example of that liturgy. And again, think of the Catholic Church as you're reading this. Nehemiah 8 says:

*And Ezra the priest brought the law (Hebrew torah) before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding.... And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ...The Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. (Nehemiah 8:2-8)*

So notice here, what do we have? We have Nehemiah, the priest, we doing the readings from an a pulpit, which is basically the same thing as what we have in the ambo. It's an elevated place where he can speak the Word. We have the Levites

explaining the scripture to the people in basically what would amount to a homily. And that it's focused not on the sacrifice of animals but on the reading of the word of God. So this is going to be the beginnings of the synagogue. So by the time you get down to Jesus's day, the scriptural reading and explanation of the Torah and the Prophets is going to really be the center of weekly worship. So, for example, when you'll go into a synagogue at the time of Jesus, although there are no seats in the temple, there are seats in the synagogue because the people are going to be listening to the Word and having the Word preached to them.

And you know this from the Gospels very well in Matthew 23. Remember when Jesus says:

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on *the chair* (Greek *kathedra*) of Moses; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach...

And then he'll go on to say a little bit later that they:

They love to have... *the best seats in the synagogues...*

So the synagogue has seats, it has an ambo, it has preaching, because it's focused more on what we would call the liturgy of the word. So these two realities, then, the synagogue, liturgy of the word, and then the Temple or Tabernacle, liturgy of the Eucharist, are going to be fused into one in the mass in early Christian worship. They're going to flow into early Christian worship that will eventually guide the way we decorate an ornament and orient the church to this day. So you don't have to take my word for this. You can actually look at writings on the Mass throughout the centuries from Saints and other scholars. For example, one of the most exhaustive books on the Mass ever written was this book called the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, the *Rationale of the Divine Offices* by William Durandus, who was a bishop in the 13th century. This is just one of seven volumes on the Mass that he wrote, and in it, in the 13th century, this is what he says about Catholic worship, Roman Catholic worship, he writes:

*It is from both the tabernacle and the temple that our material church has taken its form... It is in imitation of this [ark] that in some churches, like in the temple of Solomon, an ark or tabernacle is placed on the altar.<sup>3</sup>*

So notice, two important points, by the 13th century, tabernacles are not yet in every place — we'll come back to when we look at this a little bit later in our series — but notice that the Tabernacle was kind of a late development in the early Church. Reserving the Blessed Sacrament in the sacristy was pretty common for many centuries in order to keep it as safe as possible. But eventually it was reserved in a holy box known as the Tabernacle on the altar in imitation of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple of Solomon. So there is a mystagogy not just of the church building as a whole, which Durandus is saying is based on the Tabernacle Moses and Temple of Solomon, but even down to particular elements like the Tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament is based on the Ark of the Covenant. So if we know that biblical basis, we can know when we go into any Catholic Church that we are entering into a new tabernacle, a new temple, a holy sanctuary of the New Covenant. But it's not just the new temple, the way we decorate the Church is also based on the synagogue and another writer on the Mass, St. Isidore of Seville, in his book *On the Ecclesiastical Offices*, this is from the 7th century. St. Isidore is a Doctor of the Church, one of the Saints and Doctor of the Church, who wrote a short treatise, not as long, but a really important one, on the Liturgy, on the Latin liturgy in Spain in the 7th century. This is what he says:

Tradition teaches that to proclaim reading is an ancient institution of the Jews. For indeed on the legitimate and prescribed days they used readings from the Law and the Prophets *in the synagogues*. [The churches of Christ preserve this by ancient institution of the Fathers.]<sup>4</sup>

So notice, what is St. Isidore saying? We get the Liturgy of the Word, the readings, all these things are Jewish tradition that have flowered over from the synagogue

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<sup>3</sup> William Durandus, *Rationale of the Divine Offices* 1.1.5; 1.2.5. In Guillaume Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (5 vols.; trans. Janet Gentles; s. l.: Paschal Light, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Isidore, *On the Ecclesiastical Offices*, 10.1-3. In Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* (trans. Thomas L. Knoebel; New York, N.Y./Mahwah, N.J.: Newman Press, 2008).

into the Mass, into the liturgy of the Church, so that the church is really a fulfillment of the liturgy of Tabernacle and Temple and the liturgy of the synagogue.

One last point and then I'll close. It's because this is important. Remember, the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* said that not only are the signs and symbols of a church sanctuary supposed to represent the mystery of the Mass, but they're supposed to reflect heavenly realities. And it's very interesting to note that in the book of Revelation, which is a principal description of what heavenly worship looks like. There's not a lot of description in the New Testament of what earthly worship looks like. We get a few hints in St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, a little bit of a description, kind of oblique, of what the Eucharist was like in the Church of Corinth, which had some problems. Of course, we get the descriptions of the Last Supper from the Gospels, but the principal description of liturgy you get in the New Testament is not about the earthly liturgy, it's actually about the heavenly liturgy in the book of Revelation. And if you read through Revelation as a whole, what you're going to notice is, as John is having visions of heavenly liturgy, all of the elements that the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* describes as being part of a Catholic Church building, are also present in heaven.

So I'll just run them down real quick. You can look at these for example. First, God has a sanctuary in heaven. In Revelation 11 it says "God's temple in heaven was opened" and what does John see in that temple? He sees an "altar" in Revelation 8:3. He sees "golden lampstands" in Revelation 1. He sees a sacrifice, a "Lamb standing as though slain" in Revelation 5. He sees the "scroll" being opened and read from as if he were in a synagogue where the scrolls of the Torah would be read in Revelation 5. He sees a big chair in heaven, "a throne stood in heaven" as he describes it, also in Revelation 5. He sees people in seats "round the throne", the elders, just as the elders sat around the the chair of Moses in the synagogue, so they sit around the throne in the heavenly temple. He hears choirs singing what he calls "a new song", this special liturgical song using instruments called *kitharas*. They're sometimes called harps, but *kithara* is the actual Greek term. It's a stringed instrument that was used by the Levites in the Temple. He sees the Ark of the Covenant in Revelation 11:19. And finally he he sees what we represent in our

sacred images, not only is God in the heavenly sanctuary, but you also have the “elders”, you have angelic beings like the “four living creatures” reflecting the Seraphim, as well as this mysterious woman in Revelation 11:19-12:1, who appears in the heavenly temple and appears to be in the actual Holy of Holies, because when it's opened that's when he sees the woman.

So throughout the Book of Revelation, what we see is the very signs and symbols that are associated with the Jewish Temple or the Jewish synagogue on earth, are also part of the heavenly sanctuary, part of heavenly worship. So what does this tell us about the mystagogy of the Mass in the building itself before we ever begin the words and actions and signs and symbols of the Mass? Just by crossing the threshold of a Roman Catholic Church, the ornamentation of the building itself should tell you that you're entering into the worship of new Tabernacle, the new synagogue and the sanctuary of Heaven. And this is, of course, exactly what the Church teaches, not only in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, but in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which says this.

To enter into the house of God, we must cross a *threshold*, which symbolizes passing from the world wounded by sin to the world of the new Life to which all men are called... *Our visible churches, holy places, are images of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, toward which we are making our way on pilgrimage...* (CCC 1186, 1198)