

Churches Are a Sacred Space

It's important to keep in mind when entering the church that we are entering a sacred space: a space where the earthly liturgy reflects the heavenly one. Given that God dwells within the church, we should act accordingly. As described by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1186), "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."

It is because of this threshold that we cross, where we pass from a world wounded by sin to entering into God's presence, that we should be in a purified state. One of the main purposes of the holy water fonts that are located at the entrances of the church is for this exact reason; to purify ourselves before entering God's presence given that we are not worthy to enter God's sacred space.

It is a fairly common theme in the Old Testament that in order for the Israelites to be able to enter into the presence of God, who is holy, they themselves needed to become holy. Even Moses, who was the closest to God and the primary mediator between God and the Israelites, was not always allowed to enter God's tent. In order for the Israelites to restore their relationship with God and live in God's presence again, their sins had to be atoned for.

Typically, atonement consisted of various types of offerings or sacrifices that God requested of the Israelites; which were ways of saying thank you to God, or sorry and confessing to God. The majority of these sacrifices involved the slaughtering of animals; which were used as offerings for God on the Altar (which represented God). These sacrifices helped the Israelites become more aware of God's mercy and forgiveness. The slaughtered animal essentially took the place of the person's sin and was offered up to God.

This all serves as a reminder to us that when we enter God's presence at church or in the adoration chapel, we should be in a pure and holy state. It can be insulting and offensive to God if we enter into his presence while in an impure state. Similar to the Israelites in the Old Testament, there are actions that we can take to enter into a cleaner or holier state through frequent confessions, mortification, and the constant pursuit of growing in virtue.