

The Eucharistic table, or altar, was the ordinary family table in the time shortly after Jesus in the early Church. Today, the altar is the table in which the parish family gathers around to celebrate the Eucharist. It has come to represent Christ and is the focal point of the Church.

Placed upon the altar during the preparation of the gifts is the altar cloth. It is placed upon the altar, much as we would set the dinner table at home with a special cloth for a special meal. It is symbolic of the Eucharistic banquet, and also has practical use in absorbing any spilled sacred elements.

The plate of bread and chalice of wine are the primary symbols that are placed upon the altar and hence are set in the center of the altar (bread on the ambo side, chalice on the baptismal side). The flagons of wine are placed beside the chalice – slightly off to the side. As the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ – so too are our lives to be transformed into the body of Christ.

The (red) sacramentary or binder is placed on the edge of the center of the altar close to the priest and contains the sacred prayers that the priests prays on behalf of the people assembled.

During the liturgy the priest may place items in a different location, to facilitate the prayer. For example at the fraction rite the presider will move the flagons to be closer to the Eucharistic ministers to help them pour the precious blood in the chalices that are brought to the altar.

