

Re-locating the Statue of Our Lady in Sacred Heart Church

The following points are offered to assist parishioners in understanding the proposed re-location of the statue of Our Lady to the left of the presider's chair (facing the altar) in Sacred Heart church. At present the statue of Our Lady, unlike in other churches of the parish, is marginalized in a way that diminishes her role in the prayer of the community. I hope this summary of doctrine will also assist all parishioners to understand the function of statues of Our Lady in the churches of the parish along with a deeper appreciation of the role of Mary in our prayer and the life of the Church. The quotes below are taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) published in 1994:

1. Mary and the holiness of the Church

"[The Church's] structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members. And holiness is measured according to the 'great mystery' in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom." Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church's mystery as 'the bride without spot or wrinkle.' That is why the 'Marian' dimension of the Church precedes the 'Petrine.'" (CCC 773)

2. Mary as symbol of the Church

"At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and most perfect realization of the Church: 'the Church indeed... by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons (and daughters) who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse.' (St Augustine)" (CCC507)

3. Mary is the Mother of God

"Called in the Gospels 'the mother of Jesus' Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as 'mother of my Lord.' In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly 'Mother of God' (*Theotokos*)." (CCC495)

4. Mary is Mother of the Church

"The Virgin Mary... is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer... She is 'clearly the mother of the members of the Christ'... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head.' 'Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church.' (Pope St Paul VI)" (CCC963)

5. Mary is the Mediatrix of Graces

"This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside the saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring the gifts of eternal salvation... Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, benefactress, and Mediatrix." (CCC969)

6. Mary works with the Holy Spirit

Finally, through Mary, the Holy Spirit begins to bring men (and women), the objects of God's merciful love, *into communion* with Christ. And the humble are always the first to accept him: shepherds, magi, Simeon and Anna the bride and groom of Cana and the first disciples. (CCC725)

7. Mary joins with us in prayer

Mary is the perfect Orans [pray-er], a figure of the Church. When we pray to her, we are adhering with her to the plan of the Father, who sends his Son to save all men (and women). Like the beloved disciple we welcome Jesus' mother into our homes, for she has become the mother of all the living. We can pray with and to her. The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary and united with it in hope." (CCC2679)

8. Mary joins with us in the Eucharistic sacrifice

To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already *in the glory of heaven*. In communion with and commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, the Church offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ." (CCC1370)

9. The significance of statues and images in the liturgy

It is clear that the role and prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary is of great importance to the Church. To have her statue visible in the main body of the church during Mass deepens our prayer and unites us closer to the offering of Jesus, her Son, to the Father on the Cross. In speaking of images the Catechism states:

"The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, 'the honour rendered to an image passes to its prototype,' and 'whoever venerates the person portrayed in it.' The honour paid to sacred images is a 'respectful veneration,' not the adoration due to God alone." (CCC2132)

In the General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM) the teaching reminds us of the importance of sacred images:

In the earthly Liturgy, the Church participates, by a foretaste, in that heavenly Liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem, toward which she journeys as a pilgrim, and where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; and by venerating the memory of the Saints, she hopes one day to have some share and fellowship with them.

Thus, in sacred building images of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saints, in accordance with the most ancient tradition of the Church, should be displayed for veneration by the faithful and should be so arranged so as to lead the faithful toward the mysteries of the faith celebrated there. Care should be taken that their number should not be increased indiscriminately, and moreover that they be arranged in proper order so as not to draw the attention of the faithful to themselves and away from the celebration itself. There should usually be only one image of any given Saint. Generally speaking, in the ornamentation and arrangement of a church, as far as images are concerned, provision should be made for the devotion of the entire community as well as for the beauty and dignity of the images." (GIRM318)

The placement of the statue of implements the "noble simplicity" (GIRM292) required of church decorations which: "... should be truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities." (GIRM288) The statue leads us to the spiritual realities whereby it is not just the congregation who gathers rather we are united with Our Lady and the saints and angels in our prayer and Eucharistic celebration. The intention of the votive candles is to help parishioners enact the devotion and prayer that lies within their hearts. As a visible sign of prayer outside of the Mass, the candles make the main body of the church at Sacred Heart, not just the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, a place of ongoing prayer and reflection.

A meeting open to all interested parishioners to discuss this proposal will take place in the foyer after the 9am Mass on Sunday, 2 May at Sacred Heart church.