

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—SYMBOLS AT MASS— BY FR. STEVE LAPE



Many people may understand a symbol as being the same as a sign—something that points to something else. Yet, a symbol goes much deeper than that. It is actually about a thing, word or action that serves as a means for something more profound to be experienced, while actually embodying that deeper reality. For example, a red stop sign is merely that—a sign that tells traffic to stop at a particular intersection on a road. It’s really not meant to allude to anything deeper than that. However, when we look at a cross, Christians are drawn in to a deeper, more spiritual awareness than just a decorative item. Gazing at a cross reminds

us of many things about God: of how much God loves us, that God sent Jesus the Son to be our Savior, that Jesus endured such intense pain to express God’s love, that it symbolizes forgiveness of sins because of God’s merciful love for us, and that it beckons us to carry our own crosses in life & to suffer with humility, out of our love for Jesus, and to grow in faith in Jesus, trusting in His promises of rising to new life beyond earthly death. Other symbols include:

+++candlelight—It symbolizes Jesus as the Light who has come into the world to cast out the darkness of sin and death, brightening our ability, through the gift of faith, to see the path towards eternal life in Heaven.

+++altar—It symbolizes the eternal banquet that we hope to share someday in Heaven. It also is meant to remind us of the altar of sacrifice that we know as the cross, on which Jesus gave up His life freely, so that we may live.

+++bread and wine—These fruits from the earth fully become Jesus’ Body & Blood during Mass, so that Jesus can be our very nourishment or fuel for our long journey through life in this world, with hope for life to come.

+++water—Jesus chose to use water, of which our bodies are mostly composed of and is essential to our sustained living here in this world, to convey the gift of His Holy Spirit through Baptism to purify our spirits from the stain of original sin and to bring us into a new way of being in life. When we enter into a Catholic church, we dip our fingers in the fountains of holy water and mark ourselves with the sign of the cross, saying the Holy Trinity formula, as a reminder of our call to live in a pure, holy way, doing nothing to taint the gift that we received in our Baptism.

+++Advent wreath—Its circular shape suggests that God is eternal, with no beginning or end. The evergreen on it represents God’s sustaining love through all seasons. The gradual lighting of each of the 4 candles on it represents the approaching birthday of the Light of the world—Jesus Christ, the King and Lord of the universe!

