

How a Church Becomes a Catholic:
The Theology of the Liturgy of the Dedication of a Church

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Suggested Pull-Quotes:

The five experts who revised the rite (including one of the very few women involved in the entire official liturgical renewal) restored the Eucharist as its central act, preceded by a “Baptism” and a chrismation, to round out the answer to the central question of this essay, How does a church building become a Catholic: the same way people do, by receiving the sacraments of initiation!

Who does the initiating/dedicating? The entire Christian community, the universal priesthood and the ministerial: assembly, hospitality, musicians, readers, servers, deacons, priests, and bishop.

As the rite tells us in its introduction and will tell us in its activities, a church is its people, its building is the place where the church meets to worship.

After seven years of the hard work of becoming and building a church, Padre Serra Parish in Camarillo will be dedicating its new church on Saturday evening, July 1, 1995. That day will hereafter be a double solemnity in the parish: its patron's day and its dedication anniversary. For the two thousand or more people who will participate, it will be an unforgettable experience. In the history of Ventura County only three churches¹ have been so blessed: Santa Clara in Oxnard in 1918, St. John's Seminary in 1940, and San Buenaventura Mission in 1976 (in the 155 years of the history of our archdiocese only twenty churches have been dedicated—we will see why

shortly).

In anticipation of our new Cathedral and of the dedication of Padre Serra church and many of the churches damaged in the Northridge Quake, I have been asked to summarize the history and theology of the Rite of the Dedication of a Church. My plan will be to describe an ideal dedication liturgy by using Padre Serra church's dedication as a concrete (and wood and tile—and pastor and people!) example.

First, a little history

Roughly speaking there have been four versions of the dedication rite over the past two millennia: Roman reserve (?–700), Gallo-Frankish extravagance (700–1000), Medieval magnificence (1000–1977), and Recent restoration (1977–). The third version which was used to dedicate Santa Clara, St. John's, and the Mission had 146 sections: Numbers 1–139 were called the pre-Mass and 140–146 were Mass. The pre-Mass steps were rich in smells, sounds, and sights: For example, the bishop threw special holy water lavishly on the exterior and interior walls in three processions each; the bishop inscribed the Roman and Greek alphabets onto a St. Andrew's Cross (an "X") of ashes strewn between door and sanctuary; an incensing priest did nothing but walk back and forth in front of the altar creating a holy smoke screen; the altar table, drenched in chrism, frequently was engulfed in flame when the bishop ignited the piles of wax and incense placed over the five engraved crosses representing the wounds of Christ. Because of all of this elaboration, it took half a day to perform the rite; when you take into account the expectation that the building needed to be permanent and paid for, it is no wonder that few churches were consecrated before the ancient simplicity of the rite was restored in 1977.² One got the impression that it was the activities of the bishop that blessed a building (in fact, the people were mentioned only at Step 25 and at Step 85), quite a devolution from the original Roman practice.

And what was the heart of that ancient rite? A building and all its appointments (font, ambo, altar, chair) was blessed by the celebration of the Eucharist in it: It was blessed by use, in other words. If the building had been previously a pagan sanctuary, it was washed clean of its devilish defilement beforehand. The five experts who most recently revised the rite (including one of the very few women involved in the entire official liturgical renewal)³ restored the Eucharist as

the central act of the rite preceded by a “Baptism” and a chismation to round out the answer to the central question of this essay, How does a church building become a Catholic: the same way people do, by “receiving” the sacraments of initiation.⁴ And who does the initiating/dedicating? The entire Christian community, the universal priesthood and the ministerial: assembly, hospitality, musicians, readers, servers, deacons, priests, and bishop.⁵ And not just the visible community but the Church in heaven as well, represented by the relics and invoked in the litany.

When is the best day for a dedication: “. . . when as many of the people as possible can participate, especially Sunday,” says the Rite [DC 7].⁶ The pastor and parishioners of Padre Serra Parish have chosen the the Saturday vigil Mass of Sunday, July 1st; and all the planning to park, greet, communicate with, and celebrate with the crowds before, during, and after the Mass has been going on for months!

Walking through the Rite and the Building

So, rather than remain abstract, walk with me through an ideal dedication of Padre Serra Church. As the rite tells us in its introduction and will tell us in its activities, a church is its people, its building is the place where the church meets to worship [DC 1–2]. This has been the emphasis of Fr. Liam Kidney, founding pastor of Padre Serra, since May of 1988, the month it was officially formed in east Camarillo from St. Mary Magdalen Parish on a ten acre site carved out of a corner of St. John’s Seminary.

The Dedication Rite regularly has four parts: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Prayer of Dedication and Anointings, and Liturgy of the Eucharist. When relics are to be placed beneath the table of the altar (“where a relic is venerated, the entire body is regarded as resting”⁷), these four parts are preceded by a Vigil Office of Readings commemorating the saints and preparing the faithful for the rite.

Vigil Office of Readings [DC 10]

Cardinal Mahony gave Fr. Liam a relic of Blessed Junipero Serra at the very beginning and now Fr. Liam is trying to secure the relic of a martyr since our Catholic heritage gives pride of place to blood witnesses to Christ [DA 5]. Because the parish possesses authentic relics of good

size [DC 5], they are looking forward to the vigil service at the relics in their mother church, St. Mary Magdalen's.

But which St. Mary's? The chapel was built by the Camarillo family in 1913 but the parish outgrew it by the 1970's when the new, much larger church was constructed. The planners might suggest celebrating the Office of Readings at new St. Mary's and the (ideally all-night) vigil at the relics at old St. Mary's. Why is this important? "As light comes from light (the symbolism of the lighting of the candles at the Easter Vigil), as faith generates faith (the rite of baptism), so does one community emerge from another. Symbolically, from a house of worship, a sign of the mother community arises another house of worship, the sign and place of a new ecclesial community."⁸

The next day the relics will be moved to St. James Chapel at St. John's Seminary College, lovingly nicknamed the "nanny" church because Padre Serra made good use of the college chapel and many seminary facilities as it built its community and buildings.

I. Introductory Rites

Entrance into the Church [DC 11, 29–35]

The ideal way to begin the rite is with a procession from the mother church to the daughter church. But this would mean a journey of over four miles, either down Lewis Road, a two-lane state highway, or down Las Posas Road, a major thoroughfare. The permits and the logistics would be a nightmare! Providentially the "nanny" church has a private road down which the procession can move, then out onto the sidewalk on Upland Road and up to the parking lot in front of the new church.

Picture two excited sun-hatted and comfortable dressed crowds, one waiting outside the new church—made up of people unable to walk the mile-long route—and one filling the gathering area outside St. James Chapel to overflowing with parents pushing strollers, representatives of the deanery's parishes carrying church banners, pastors and rabbis from Camarillo's dozens of churches and synagogues, civic dignitaries, a K of C color guard, all awaiting Cardinal Mahony's Greeting and Invitation to Rejoice [DC 30]. The brass band plays a fanfare as the chapel doors swing open and a hush comes over the crowd as cardinal, priests, deacons, and ministers move through them to the head of the procession. Two deacons, flanked by four servers who are

carrying the only lighted candles permitted at this point, have special roles today: the one in the red dalmatic is carrying the relics of the martyr and the one in white is carrying Father Serra's relics. The cardinal and assembly greet each with a new form of the ancient prayer exchange ("The Lord be with you." "And also with you."): "The grace and peace of God be with all of you in his holy Church." "And also with you." This prayer to the Holy Spirit is poised, so to speak, between the cardinal and the assembly for the rekindling of the gift given all in baptism and the gift given him in ordination in order that what is about to be done can be done and can be fruitful.⁹ Then the cardinal invites everyone to rejoice and the choir leads the singing of the ancient Jewish pilgrim song of ascent to the holy city Jerusalem:

Antiphon: **Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.** (Psalm 122)

**I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"
Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem--built as a city that is bound firmly together.
To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give
thanks to the name of the LORD.
For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of
David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."
For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.**

All now join the Procession of the Church to the Church, cross leading, ministers following, then the relic bearers, the concelebrants, the cardinal, and the people. The solemnity of the chant yields to the exhilaration of "When the Saints Go Marching In" as the procession moves down through citrus groves and eucalyptus-lined lanes and up to the church, where they are greeted by those assembled there.

The procession comes to a halt in the gathering space. It is now time for Meeting the Builders [DC 40]. David Martin, the architect and grandson of the designer of old St. Mary Magdalen Chapel, steps out from among the representatives of the various trades and professions who built the building. He explains to the cardinal and community some of the most remarkable features of the church (to name just three: the petroglyph and bougainvillea designs carved into altar and window panes to remind all of the parish's Native American and Mexican heritage; the

roughhewn black granite stones for the font, blessed sacrament chapel, and altar [the latter has a finished granite table]; and the evocation in the bell tower and other features of St. Mary Magdalen Chapel.) In testament to the dignity of labor and laborers, he presents the cardinal with the book in which all of the names of those who worked are inscribed. Finally he gives to the cardinal the key which the cardinal then hands to Fr. Kidney with the invitation to open the doors. “The rubric, no doubt, implies the pastoral and theological notion which lies behind the action of opening: the priest . . . must himself be the one who opens the door (*ianitor*), and also the door (*ianua*). With the proclamation of the word, that is, he must open the hearts of the faithful to knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom, just as with his life, in imitation of the Good Shepherd, he is to be the door of the sheepfold.”¹⁰ In other words, The Door Opens the Doors.

At this point the cardinal turns to all and invites them to enter the church and to take their places, singing another ancient pilgrim song reserved for entering the temple in Jerusalem. The deacons with the relics place them on the table set up near the altar; the candles are placed here as well.

Antiphon: **Lift high the ancient portals. The King of glory enters.** (Psalm 24)

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;

for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation.

Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Deliberately omitting to kiss the altar (it is not yet the chief symbol of his beloved Lord), the

cardinal walks to the movable presider's chair placed by the baptismal pool, the starkly beautiful rectangle cut into the floor in the entryway. "The first seating in the chair . . . has a precise meaning. The bishop, by virtue of his episcopal ordination, in an eminent and visible way acts in the name of Christ teacher, pastor, and pontiff; thus he is the first to take the place from which he will preside and exercise the magisterial function. That place, which is simply the chair of the celebrant, is on this occasion a true chair of the bishop, as the rite stresses."¹¹

Blessing and Sprinkling of Water [DC 48]

When everyone has found a place, the cardinal invites all to pray as he blesses the waters of the font. Accompanied by the deacons, the cardinal performs the Sprinkling of the People and the Walls (Humanity and Cosmos) and Sprinkling of the Altar. Notice that the people are sprinkled first and then the building: They are the Church made holy through the waters of baptism, as the prayer of absolution at the end of the rite says, "May God, the Father of mercies, dwell in this house of prayer. May the grace of the Holy Spirit cleanse us, for we are the temple of his presence." During the sprinkling the following antiphon is sung:

I saw water flowing from the right side of the temple, alleluia. I brought God's life and his salvation, and the people sang in joyful praise:: alleluia, alleluia.
(Ezekiel 47:1-2, 9)

Then, as at the birth of Jesus the Hymn of the Angels was first sung, here at the birth of this new church it is sung again. Finally, with all the Introductory Rites now performed, the cardinal prays the Opening Prayer which concludes the "baptism" of Padre Serra Church.

II. Liturgy of the Word [DC 53-56]

Because the rite of dedication tries to exemplify the ideal liturgy, the ideal number and kind of ministers of the word—two readers and a psalmist—now make their way to the cardinal for the Presentation of the Lectionary to the Bishop. One reader is carrying the lectionary, an unusual thing to do. It is usually in place at the ambo (the Book of the Gospels is the one that gets carried); but like the altar, the ambo has not yet been dedicated. Its inaugural use will dedicate it.

Standing, the cardinal takes the lectionary and for the Showing of the Lectionary to the

Assembly. He uses words so significant that they will be embossed on a new lectionary cover being prepared: “May the word of God always be heard in this place, as it unfolds the mystery of Christ before you and achieves your salvation within the Church.” (Since Vatican II we Catholics more readily understand that God’s Word unfolds the mystery of Christ; but we have some distance to go in our experience of how it actually achieves our salvation.) The cardinal delivers the lectionary into the care of one of the readers and the readers and psalmist process, “carrying the Lectionary for all to see” [DC 53], for the First Use of the Ambo.

Because it recounts the first Liturgy of the Word in the Old Testament, Nehemiah 8: 1-4a, 5-6, 8-10 is always proclaimed (even in Easter time, when ordinarily no Old Testament scripture is used), with Psalm 19B: 8-9, 10, 15: “Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.”

All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. 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. The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose and opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Antiphon: **Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.**

**The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;**

the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Readings II and III are chosen from the Common of the Dedication of a Church in the lectionary (at the time of this writing, they have not been chosen because they are so rich it is hard to make a selection) and are followed by the homily and the profession of faith.

III. Prayer of Dedication and the Anointings

Everyone now stands for the Invitation to Prayer and Litany of the Saints which takes the place of the general intercessions. The saints whose relics are to be deposited are specifically invoked and petitions based on the Padre Serra Parish's mission are added at the appropriate place.

Depositing of the Relics [DC 61]

Now we come to the second oldest part of the rite (celebrating the eucharist being the oldest). Cardinal Mahony approaches the altar and there the deacons bring him the relics. He kneels down and places them in the opening in the floor at the base of the black granite altar. As everyone sits to sing the following psalm which extols the meaning of holiness, a stone mason closes the opening.

**Antiphon: Saints of God, you have been enthroned at the foot of God's altar:
pray for us to the Lord Jesus Christ *or***

**Antiphon: The bodies of the saints lie buried in peace, but their names will
live on for ever (alleluia) with Psalm 15: 1-5:**

**O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?
Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from
their heart;
who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor
take up a reproach against their neighbors;
in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the
LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the
innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.**

Prayer of Dedication

Now all stand and pray silently as the cardinal recites the solemn prayer of dedication (the full text is found on page X below/above). To get the full impact of the theology of this text, it is important to see the parallel expressions and repetitions of key words and to dwell meditatively on the metaphors and biblical allusions. All are arranged as a rich setting for the jewel of the epiclesis at the center which begins: “Lord, send your Spirit from heaven . . .”

The principal parallel expressions and repetitions are: (threefold) this house . . . , this temple . . . , this home . . . ; (fourfold) the Church is fruitful . . . , the Church is holy . . . , the Church is favored . . . , the Church is exalted . . . ; (fivefold) here . . . , from here . . . (the first four “here’s” successively dedicate the font, the tables of word and sacrament, the hall, and the site; when you reach the fifth “here” with the addition of “from,” you experience the church as a springboard into heaven!). The principal metaphors and allusions are: the bride/virgin/mother, the vineyard/branches/tendrils/the cross as stake, the temple, and the lighthouse/foghorn (“a beacon to the whole world, bright with the glory of the Lamb, and echoing the prayers of her saints”).

Rites of Anointing, Incensation, Covering, and Lighting of the Altar {DC 63–71}

It is now time for the Concelebrated Anointing of the Altar and Walls (Christ and His People). Cardinal Mahony takes off his chasuble and puts on a linen apron as he approaches the altar. He distributes four smaller vessels of chrism to the (at least) four priests who are going to assist him in the anointing the walls and pillars (Msgr. O’Brien, pastor of Mission San Buenaventura (the great grandmother church), Msgr. Nugent, pastor of Santa Clara Church (the grandmother), Msgr. Hughes, pastor of St. Mary Magdalen (the mother), and Fr. Kidney; they stand as the cardinal is handed the principal vessel of chrism. He pours it out onto the altar top, spreading the fragrant oil with his hands to the very edges. When he is finished, the others anoint the walls at the four cardinal points of the compass (symbolizing Christ’s lordship over all creation) and then the eight pillars, for a total of twelve places in witness to the twelve apostles. As this chrismation proceeds, the assembly sings the “song of intense yearning for the house of the Lord . . . the canticle of the bride yearning for the porches of heavenly temple.”¹²

Antiphon: **See the place where God lives among his people; there the Spirit of God will make his home among you; the temple of God is holy and you are that temple.** (Revelation 21:3, with Psalm 84)*or*:

Antiphon: **Holy is the temple of the Lord, it is God's handiwork, his dwelling place.** (I Corinthians 3:9)

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.

They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!

Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

There are two ways¹³ to accomplish the next step, the Incensation of the Altar and the Church. The most ancient way is to make a heap of incense and and small candles on the altar table and set it aflame; a more reserved way is to place a brazier with hot coals on the altar and heap it full of incense. Of either method the object is billows of "holy smoke" to accompany the cardinal's prayer at this point: "Lord, may our prayer ascend as incense in your sight. As this building is filled with fragrance so may your Church fill the world with the fragrance of Christ."¹⁴

The cardinal then places incense in several censers, takes one himself and incenses the altar while ministers take the others and incense first the people and then the walls. The assembly sings a great psalm of adoration and thanksgiving:

Antiphon: **An angel stood by the altar of the temple, holding a golden censer. From the hand of the angel, clouds of incense rose in the presence of the Lord.** (Psalm 138)*or*:

Antiphon: **From the hand of the angel, clouds of incense rose in the presence of the Lord.** (Revelation 5:8, 8:3–4)

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.
On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.
For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.
Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.
The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

In order to carry out the Covering of the Altar and the Lighting of Altar ministers must first come forward to wipe the table clean; then they dress the altar with a cloth and arrange the candles.

The cardinal gives the deacon a lighted candle and, invoking the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, says: “Light of Christ, shine forth in the Church and bring all nations to the fullness of the truth.” Then, as the deacon lights the altar candles, all the other candles are lit, especially the dedication candles on the walls and pillars where the anointings were made, and all the lights of the church come on. The assembly sings the glorious epiphany canticle:

Antiphon: **Your light will come, Jerusalem, upon you the glory of the Lord will dawn and all nations will walk in your light, alleluia.** (Isaiah 60:1–3, with verses from the Canticle of Tobias [Vulgate] 13:10, 13–14ab; 14c–15; 17)

Bless the Lord, all your saints of the Lord.
Rejoice and give him thanks.
(repeat antiphon)

Jerusalem, city of God,
you will shine with the light of God's splendor;
all people on earth will pay you homage.
Nations will come from afar,
bearing gifts for the King of heaven;
in you they will worship the Lord.

(repeat antiphon)
**Nations will consider your land holy,
for in you they will call upon the great name of the Lord.
You will exult and rejoice over the children of the righteous,
for they will be gathered together to praise the Lord.**
(repeat antiphon)

IV. Liturgy of the Eucharist [DC 72–78]

For the Procession of Gifts to the Chair chosen members of the assembly bring bread, wine, and water to Cardinal Mahony at his chair. Receiving their gifts, he hands them to the deacons, while the choir sings:

Lord God, in the simplicity of my heart I have joyously offered all things to you; with great joy I have looked upon your chosen people, Lord God, I have obeyed your will (alleluia). (I Chronicles 29:17–18)

During this chant, all witness the cardinal's procession and First Kiss of the Altar, now Christened with chrism.

The Mass proceeds in the usual way, except that neither the gifts nor the altar are incensed. The cardinal has a choice of Eucharistic Prayer I or III into which special prayers are inserted. The full text of the Preface is found on page X below/above so that its theological beauty, composed of images drawn from the heart of scripture, can be enjoyed at leisure.

During communion the assembly sings one of the great nuptial psalms:

Antiphon: My house shall be called a house of prayer, says the Lord: in it all who ask shall receive, all who seek shall find, and all who knock shall have the door opened to them (alleluia). (Matthew 21:13 and 7:7)

or:

Antiphon: May the children of the Church be like olive branches around the table of the Lord. (Psalm 128)

**Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways.
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.
The LORD bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.**

May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

When communion is finished, what is left of the body of Christ is put into a ciborium and left on the altar.

It is time for the last special rite of the dedication of a new church, the Inauguration of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. At his chair, after praying with the assembly in the last of the many welcome silences during this liturgy, Cardinal Mahony stands to recite the prayer after communion. He then approaches the altar and receives the humeral veil which he uses to cover the ciborium. As the procession of crossbearer, ministers with candles and incense leads the cardinal to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel (“through the main body of the church,” the rite specifies, in order to emphasize the solemnity of this procession), the assembly sings the final song of the Mass:

Antiphon: **Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.** (Psalm 147:12–20)

**Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!
For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you.
He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat.
He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.
He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.
He hurls down hail like crumbs-- who can stand before his cold?
He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the
waters flow.
He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his
ordinances. Praise the LORD!**

When the procession comes to the chapel of reservation the cardinal places the ciborium in the tabernacle, the door of which remains open. Then he incenses the blessed sacrament. Finally, after all pray silently, the deacon closes the tabernacle door. A minister lights the lamp, which will burn perpetually before the blessed sacrament.

When the procession returns to the sanctuary, Cardinal Mahony imparts the blessing and the deacon dismisses the assembly to a fine summer evening picnic. Padre Serra Church now has a fully initiated Catholic place of worship.

What this all adds up to

Ignazio Calabuig, the Spanish Servite liturgist and theologian to whom we owe the principal debt for the restored rite of the dedication of the church, has the right to the last word:

The rite has an exemplary structure, a very clear logical line—not of a cerebral logic . . . but the logic of Mystery . . . Its doctrinal riches . . . are explicable above all in terms of having been inspired by the rich repertory of antiphons. The antiphons appear as incisive and lyrical theses. The psalms that accompany them, read in an ecclesiological and christological key, complete and enrich the rite's theology.

The rite is a biblical, liturgical pageant of many temples: the cosmic temple that tells of the glory of God; the tent-temple of the days of Exodus; the temple of Jerusalem; the temple that is Christ, the only necessary one, the only absolute in which is achieved the perfect oblation, and in which the Spirit dwells in its plenitude; the temple that is his Church built with living stones; the temple that is each faithful soul, a primordial *templum Dei*; the temple of the consummation, the ultimate temple of the last and final City. And this great pageant is brought together and evoked in the temple of stone, the smallest of them all, whose glory is to be a sign and a reverberation of the glory of the others.

“If the church is the place of the divine presence, this place is the assembly of the faithful, is the soul of each believer.” . . . It is the presence of God on which all the doctrine and actions [of the rite] converge: the altar table, the baptismal font, the tomb of the martyr and the eucharistic tabernacle, the icon of the Virgin Mary and the pictures of the saints; and still more the Word proclaimed and the sacramental actions celebrated. All the rites performed in the church . . . culminate in Christ and the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God and the service of humanity. All summon forth the Presence.”¹⁵

(5453 words, exclusive of front matter; 6428 all words)

¹ The recently renovated and enlarged Holy Cross Church in Moorpark was already in use when it was dedicated by Cardinal Mahony in 1994. He used the rite, “The Dedication of a Church Already in General Use for Sacred Celebrations” which eliminates or heavily abridges (1) the rite of opening the doors, (2) the rite of handing over the church to the bishop, (3) the rite of sprinkling the walls with holy water, and (4) the special use of Nehemiah 8 and Psalm 19 as the first readings which inaugurate the ambo.

² Pierre Jounel, “The Dedication of Churches,” in Aimé Georges Martimort, *The Church at Prayer, Volume I: Principles of the Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 220.

³ Fr. Annibale Bugnini tells us (*The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990] 792) that Msgr. Pierre Jounel (France) was the priest in charge, assisted by Frs. Ignazio Calabuig, OSM (Spain), André Rose, OSB (Belgium), and D. Sartore; Professor Rosella Barbieri assisted Fr. Calabuig who wrote the official commentary about the revised rite in *Notitiæ*, 13 (1977) 391–450, an English version of which was published as *The Dedication of a Church and an Altar: A Theological Commentary* (Washington: USCC Publications, 1980) hereafter referred to as “Calabuig.” Because Bugnini says that “The Introduction, and especially the doctrinal part that explains the meaning of the dedication of a church and an altar, was seriously mutilated, at times in a clumsy way” (795) by the suppression of the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1975, it is important to read the full text of Calabuig’s commentary.

⁴ “Just as believers become temples of God by receiving in succession the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist, so it seemed fitting that an altar should be washed with water and anointed with holy chrism before being decked out for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper” (Jounel, 218; see also Calabuig, 6.)

⁵ Jounel, 224, and Calabuig, 7.

⁶ I refer to the Rite by citing its relevant section numbers in brackets, e.g., “[DC 1–2]” for §§ 1 and 2; references to the Dedication of an Altar will be abbreviated “DA.” All biblical references will be to the New Revised Standard Version, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

⁷ An ancient liturgical formula in the Old Gelasian Sacramentary, cited by Jounel, 217–218.

⁸ Calabuig, 7.

⁹ In *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroads, 19XX) Yves Congar refers twice to W.C. Van Unnik’s article, “*Dominus Vobiscum*: the Background of a Liturgical Formula,” in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of T.W. Manson 1893–1958*, edited by A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 270–305.

¹⁰ Calabuig, 11.

¹¹ Calabuig, 12.

¹² Calabuig, 28.

¹³ DC 66 (a 1977 document) mentions the brazier; the Ceremonial of Bishops 905 (a 1984 document) adds the heap of wax option.

¹⁴ The biblical allusions are Ps 140:2 and 2 Cor 2:14–15.

¹⁵ Calabuig, 36.