

A Home for God



*Old Testament Tabernacle Worship:
Fulfilled in the Catholic Church*

When I was a Protestant, worship in my church on Sunday looked like this: a welcome and announcements; an uplifting hymn sung by the entire congregation; a pastoral prayer; another congregational hymn; the offering; a song, hymn, or other piece of sacred music sung by the choir; a sermon; an “invitation” to live out what was preached; and a closing prayer of blessing.

Regardless of its style or content, the worship service always consisted of about fifteen minutes of singing and forty-five minutes of preaching. Every Protestant worship service I ever participated in followed this traditional format, even when “contemporary services” came on the scene.

Many Protestant churches added an earlier service to accommodate those who preferred a “contemporary” worship style. Sometimes these included drama, dance, painting, mime, bells, and other techniques to illustrate what was being preached that Sunday. (I once attended a service during which the pastor broke a huge mirror with a sledgehammer to emphasize a particular point of his preaching!) Contemporary Sunday services typically featured a praise band that performed modern worship songs from a stage equipped with concert lighting, a large projection screen for song lyrics, slide shows, and compelling videos. If you have never attended such a service, you may have seen something similar on TV. They are compelling and heart-soaring and can be furiously inspiring, emotional, and worshipful.

But this is no different than anything in a local arena. There is no “holy other” about it, no mystery, no silence, no stillness, no peace. Eventually, it felt vain to me. Worship in nearly all Protestant churches, then, is primarily centered on the Sunday service, with emphasis on praise and prayer. In the Old Testament, however, God prescribed worship as an entire communal way of life, centered around the Tabernacle where God’s presence “lived.” Tabernacle-

centered worship occurred every day, as well as on seasonal and annual feasts.

As a non-Catholic, the more I learned about Tabernacle worship in the Old Testament, the more I wondered why God would specify such worship so carefully—and hold his people to following it so strictly over many generations—if New Testament worship was not supposed to resemble it in any way. And the heavenly worship described in Revelation looked *nothing* like the worship in my church. In fact, my worship service was missing almost all of the elements prescribed in the Bible—but it did sometimes resemble the time in the New Testament when St. Paul’s preaching was so long-winded that Eutychus drifted to sleep after midnight and fell out a window (see Acts 20:9)!

God is not arbitrary; he does not change (see Malachi 3:6). If Old Testament worship was preparation for New Testament and heavenly worship, shouldn’t there be some similarity between them?

Over time, I came to see that this similarity exists in the Catholic Church, in the Mass. In fact, it is only in the Catholic Faith that *all* the elements of biblical worship are fully—not just symbolically—maintained. This does not mean, of course, that the worship of non-Catholics is not pleasing to God; any worship is pleasing to him if it is sincere. But any worship less than what God prescribed for us lacks a great deal of what draws us most deeply into his presence.

The Old Testament shows us that God *loves* law and ritual! In fact, God was adamant about the Israelites maintaining strict obedience regarding worship, specifically so its fulfillment in the Church would be recognizable to us—and so that the eternal worship in heaven would be familiar to us as well.

Catholic rituals and practices can sometimes seem old fashioned, outdated, or even unbiblical at first glance. But the form of the

Catholic Liturgy has been prescribed by God himself, rooted in the Old Testament Tabernacle, modeled after the worship occurring eternally in heaven, and reflected in our souls.

We know what kind of worship pleases God and draws us fully into his presence because he told us what it should look like in the Old Testament Tabernacle and in prophecies of the new Temple. Because Old Testament worship was modeled after heavenly worship, we see that proper New Testament worship should also somehow follow the Tabernacle's structure and order—not as a dead skeleton, but as a living, breathing, fleshed-out practice that actually communicates the grace within it.

The first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch or Torah, reveal God's desire and prescription for worship. Here, we can discern some wonderful things about how our unchangeable God interacts with his people, even today.

CALLED TO THE MOUNTAIN

In Exodus 3:18, God sends Moses to Pharaoh to request that Pharaoh grant the people a three-day “leave of absence” of sorts, so they could go into the desert and offer sacrifices to him. Exodus is very much the story of Moses' repeated confrontations with a stubborn Pharaoh. Ultimately, because he would not allow God's people to go and worship for a few days, God removed his people from Pharaoh's rule completely.

In Exodus 19:1-2, after the Israelites have gone out from Egypt, they make a “pit stop” on the way to the Promised Land at Sinai (also called Horeb), God's holy mountain—the very same mountain upon which Moses received God's command at the burning bush to lead his people out of Egypt (see Exodus 3:1-4:17).

The Exodus had “drawn” the Hebrews out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, whose name means “to draw out.” God then brings his people to himself at Sinai, and they become a nation with which he will make his covenant. If they obey him and keep the covenant, God promises to make them his special treasure (see Exodus 19:3-6). He promises to lavish special knowledge and attention on them and make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. His Chosen People will be in a unique relationship with him, different from every other nation because of their relationship with the living God. Every other nation will learn of God through them, and they will lead others to worship him—not just through Temple ceremonies but through an entire way of life.

The people readily agree and prepare to meet God at Sinai, where he will speak audibly to Moses so that the entire nation will know God is present. In anticipation of meeting God, they were required to make special preparations. And then ...

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up (Exodus 19:16-20).

Read this passage again, slowly. Imagine that you are one of the Israelites present at Sinai. I am not sure why this brings tears to my eyes, except that I want to be there, keeping my eyes tightly shut the whole time, praying not to be annihilated by the glorious tornado

of unbearable, thundering holiness whirling around that mountain. Alleluia! We can understand the terror the people of Israel must have felt; they knew from the patriarchs that no one could look upon God's face and live. But surely, we must not say we share their ultimate desire, as they refused to come near God again for fear (see Exodus 20:18-21).

Yet here was the Almighty, the King of the Ages, the Lord of Hosts coming to commune with them. They trembled in one accord, saying, "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die" (Deuteronomy 18:16).

Never were the people so unified in their desire, and never was a nation so fearful. The fear of God abounded in the heart of everyone present. Each was made to know that he or she was unclean before God, so they spoke as one, asking that Moses be their mediator. God's Word would be given to them through Moses, as he had done before in the Exodus events. Imagine if they had said, "I don't need Moses! God is my only mediator!" and begun the hike up the mountain into the flaming, thundering, quaking cloud.

CALLED FOR RELATIONSHIP

On the top of Mount Sinai, with the people awaiting his return at its base, Moses received the formal covenant from God. The next twelve chapters of Exodus include the Ten Commandments and the instructions for constructing the Tabernacle, followed by the ceremonial law—"worship manual," if you will—in Leviticus.

In striking contrast to the ten plagues, we are told in Exodus 31:18 that God gave Moses the gift of the Ten Commandments. On stone tablets, written by the "finger of God," he made a "keepsake" for the people. I find that to be a very tender thought. We also find this type of intimate terminology for the written Word of God in the New

Testament. In 2 Timothy 3:16, we read that “all scripture is *inspired* by God” (emphasis added). “Inspired” here literally means “God-breathed.”

With his “breath and finger,” God wrote us a love letter of sorts, an invitation to risk everything with him. The Bible is the epic story of how determined God is to draw us to himself and give himself to us as fully as we will allow. By reading the Bible, we can know when we are worshiping in a manner that allows for a complete self-donation. As St. Paul says in his second letter to Timothy, “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in *righteousness*” (2 Timothy 3:16; emphasis added). Simply put, “righteousness” means “what is right.”

At Sinai, Moses was called by God to lead the nation of Israel into “right worship.” It was on this same mountain that Moses received the Ten Commandments and the whole Law (or Torah) through which he would instruct the people in proper worship through the Tabernacle that would be built at its base. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states:

The gift of the Commandments is the gift of God himself and his holy will. In making his will known, God reveals himself to his people. The gift of the commandments and of the Law is part of the covenant God sealed with his own (CCC 2059–2061).

Moses placed himself at God’s service—and he was faithful. He led the new nation of God to the mountain to which God had called them to begin to live together in relationship. The people of Israel would memorialize and remember this event forever.

A HOUSE MADE OF GIFTS

God led his people out of bondage to meet and worship him on Mount Sinai. It was a terrifying experience and one they never forgot as a people. The rest of the book of Exodus is the account of what occurred on Mount Sinai and the instructions Moses was given. The instructions include the laws and Ten Commandments, a liturgical worship schedule, worship procedures, and the elaborate, detailed instructions for the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Skilled workmen carried out the important task of building everything. The Tabernacle was the center of the communal life of God's people.

After leading his Old Testament people out of Egyptian slavery, God told them, through Moses, that he desired to live with them. Think about that for a moment. The same God who created photons, fingerprints, and moose, wants to live and remain close to you. The word "tabernacle" literally means "to dwell." The instructions God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai contained detailed plans for a physical worship structure that would be God's new "home" in the midst of his people:

Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me an offering; from every man whose heart makes him willing you shall receive the offering for me ... And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it (Exodus 25:2, 8-9).

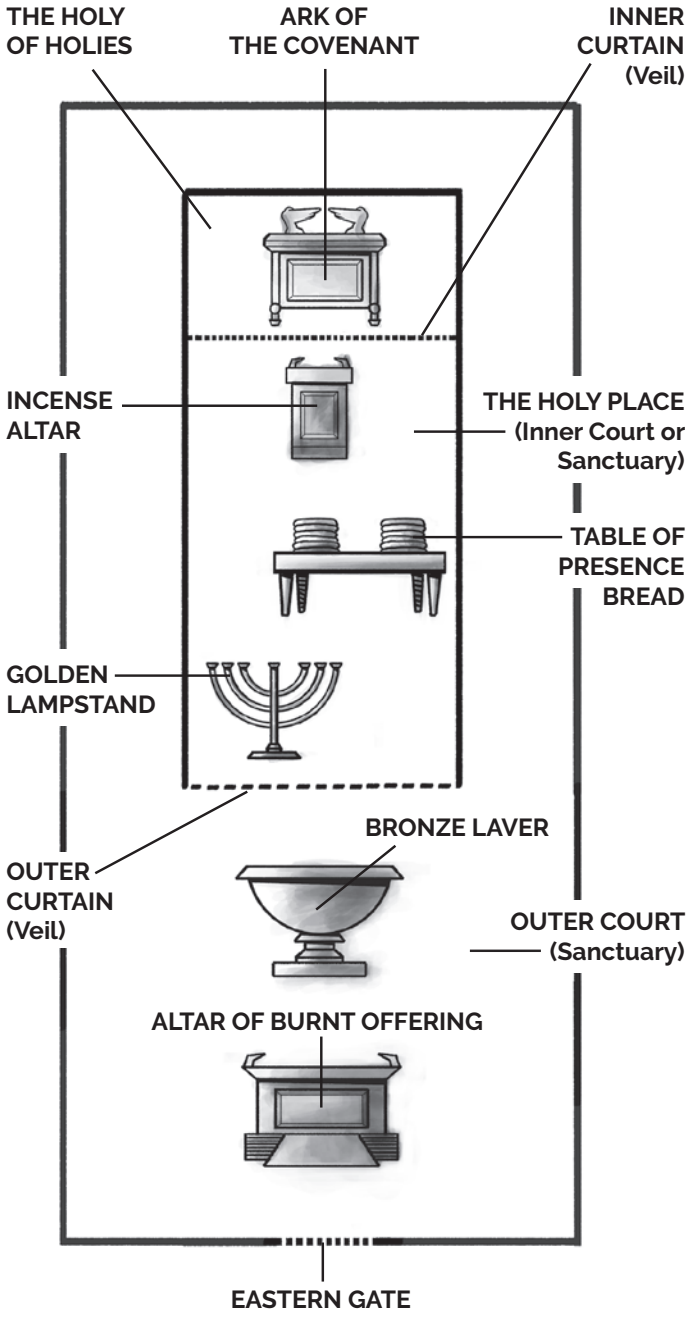
Before they left Egypt, the people were given spoils—gold, silver, jewels, thread, and textiles—everything they would need to construct the Tabernacle God was planning. God wanted his new home to be made from offerings given to him by his people from those spoils. Consider that when harassed by thoughts that your life has been too sinful for God to ever be able to use.

Whatever gifts individuals might give for the purpose, God would show the nation exactly how to use them to make his new Tabernacle. As a Catholic, the term “tabernacle” probably makes you think of the place in your church that houses the ciborium containing the Blessed Sacrament. But I would like you to think of the Tabernacle in several other distinct ways.

The first is the Old Testament Tabernacle. Throughout history, the Tabernacle was the outward sign and reminder of God’s desire to be surrounded by his people, to be present with and to live among them as the heartbeat of their existence.

It was a tent of sorts and the portable place of worship for the nomadic Israelites who lived directly outside its gates. Their campsites surrounded the Tabernacle by tribe on all sides in a picture of perfect design and order in what seemed like chaotic wandering in the wilderness. God placed each Israelite tribe in a specific position facing the Tabernacle (see Numbers 2). The camp was divided into four sets of three tribes at each compass point with one flag for each tribe.

Because a person’s identity was derived from his or her tribe and position in relation to the Tabernacle, the tribal organization offered security to the Israelites in their relationship to the living God who dwelt there. Sometimes in Scripture, the term “tabernacle” indicates the whole Temple area. Other times it refers to the tent sanctuary itself. This was the layout of the sanctuary:

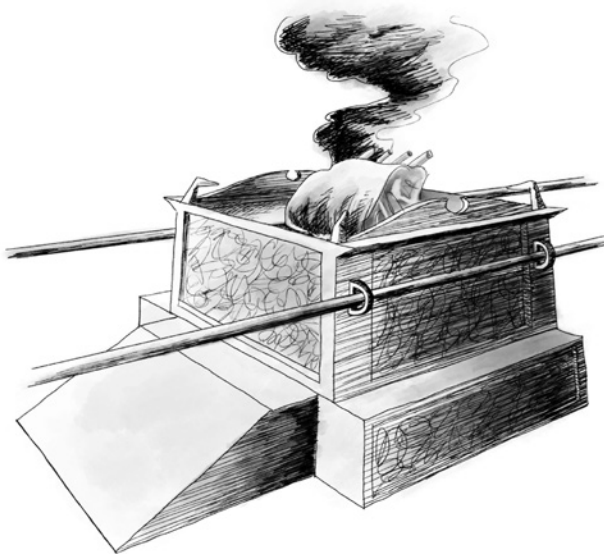


Through the Tabernacle, God would teach a people accustomed to pagan Egyptian worship how to worship the One True God properly. They were not yet, nor for long afterward, capable of the concept of a God who “does not dwell in houses made with hands” (Acts 7:48), so a temple was given to them, but not fixed to one spot.

Instead, its removal from place to place in the nomadic life of the Israelites offered a persistent education leading away from the polytheism of their enslavement. The Tabernacle included some fascinating facilities. Let’s get a general picture.

THE COURTYARD

Located in the outer courtyard, just inside the gate, was a grill-like structure for ritual burnt offerings. The daily animal sacrifices offered on the altar were a constant reminder that sin causes death, and that atonement is the first requirement for entering into the presence of God.



The next worship element was the bronze laver full of water, an oversized birdbath-shaped structure used for washing the blood and dirt off the priests' hands and feet before they entered the enclosed sanctuary for their ministry duties (see Exodus 30:18-20, 40:30-32). The constant washing taught the people that after atonement for sin, purity was necessary to draw near to God in the sanctuary.



THE SANCTUARY

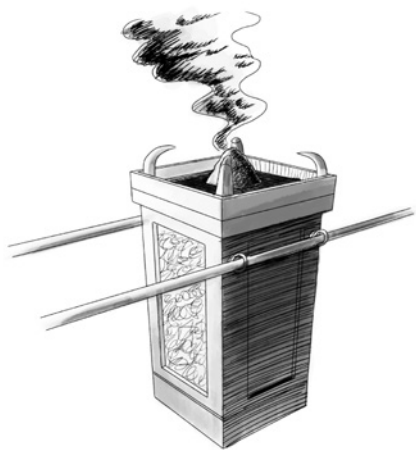
Just inside the thick outer curtain protecting the sanctuary of the Tabernacle, it was cool and dim. Incense hung in the air as the priest went about his duties in the glow of the man-sized golden menorah to his immediate left.



The priest was responsible for keeping the seven oil lamps of the menorah full of oil and their wicks trimmed at all times. The gold Table of Presence Bread was located to the right, opposite the lampstand, while the incense altar stood straight ahead, in front of another thick, more richly embroidered curtain. The twelve loaves of Presence Bread, also called Bread of the Face (of God), represented the twelve tribes of Israel, and the priest kept the bread fresh and replenished on a weekly basis. The bread was called Presence Bread because it was placed in the presence of God, and God was present in it, in the Tabernacle.



The incense altar was a smaller version of the outdoor sacrificial altar, and a special formula of incense burned perpetually. Altogether, these elements of sanctuary furniture communicated that light, sustenance, and prayer are found in the presence of God.



THE INNER SANCTUARY, THE HOLY OF HOLIES

Just inside the inner curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was the Ark, the most sacred of all the furniture in the Tabernacle, because it was here on which the presence of God rested in the pillar of fire and cloud. Inside the Ark, the Hebrews kept a copy of the Ten Commandments to summarize and symbolize

the unsurpassed gift of the whole Law; a memorial pot of the daily manna from heaven to stress God's faithful daily provision; and Aaron's budded rod to remind them they lived under the protective authority of an institutional priesthood, all of it according to the explicit instruction and will of God.



Everything in the Tabernacle was specified by God himself to Moses, down to the last detail. The weight of all the gold used in the construction of the Tabernacle is thought to be about one ton! As mentioned, the gold and silver and brass, all the jewels and linens—everything needed to construct and decorate the Tabernacle and its furnishings according to God's instructions—was provided by God from their enemies and slave masters, the Egyptians.

The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36).

Whatever you have suffered can also be turned into the treasure that will furnish and decorate the sanctuary of your heart.

Although it was a tent and portable, the Old Testament Tabernacle was not a substitute dwelling, but a glorious shrine that symbolized the presence of God living in the midst of his people. The Tabernacle was the “how” of the Old Testament people, the locus of their communal life and worship. All the seasons and liturgical festivals of the year centered around it, especially the sacred family meal of Passover when the Passover lamb was offered on the altar of burnt offering every spring.

Perhaps most importantly, the Tabernacle was a copy of the sanctuary in heaven and the prototype of the Church to come: “They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary” (Hebrews 8:5). The reason God specified the Tabernacle, its liturgical worship, and its elements in such detail to Moses in the Law at Mount Sinai is because it was patterned after the one in heaven and would be the pattern, fulfilled, for New Testament worship.

WORSHIP IS NOT ABOUT ME

In Scripture, we see that God desires a particular kind of worship. That means that worship is not about me, what I like, or whether I am being entertained or satisfied by what is happening. I love how beautifully Robert Cardinal Sarah emphasizes this point:

God, not man is at the center of Catholic liturgy. We come to worship him. The liturgy is not about you and I; it is not where we celebrate our own identity or achievements or exalt or promote our own culture and local religious customs. The liturgy is first and foremost about God and what he has done for us.¹

C.S. Lewis clarifies that the Liturgy is the entry point to God's presence, "In commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him."²

My friend Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers likes to say that if you are "not being fed" at Mass, it is because you prefer junk food, and you do not get junk food at Mass. Worship is about God, what he wants, what glorifies and reveals him most, and what draws us into the closest possible proximity to him in heaven. God knows exactly what leads us most deeply to intimacy with him. For these reasons, God also specified in great detail how the Tabernacle should be built, filled, and used. He strictly held their generations to its adherence for our benefit, so we could recognize and participate in it similarly.

Proper worship was meant to include liturgy, ritual, and ceremony. The Old Testament Tabernacle included a priesthood, an altar, an altar fire, a water basin, a light source, bread and wine, incense, a special curtain, a throne for God, a liturgy, and a liturgical schedule. Each of these things was required for proper worship, according to God and specified by him. In addition, each element was required to remain, perpetually, throughout the generations of his people (see Exodus 25–31); and they do remain with God's people—in, with, and through Christ.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "ABOLISHED" AND "FULFILLED"

In the Old Testament, this Tabernacle was the visible symbol and reality of God's presence with his people. In the book of Hebrews, we see the historical Jewish association of the Tabernacle with the cosmos, the holy and most holy divisions (sanctuary and Holy of Holies) representing the earthly and heavenly realms of Christ's activity. We will explore this idea more closely in the next chapter.

Scripture scholars have long debated why the book of Hebrews repeatedly refers to the Old Testament Tabernacle rather than the later, grander Temple of Solomon, which is said to symbolize the new creation. Perhaps, as many think, the Temple was already destroyed by the time the book of Hebrews was written, illustrating the book's purpose for encouraging the new Christians to cling to their better Tabernacle and High Priest in Christ.

In any case, beyond its literal application as the worship place of the nomadic Jewish people through the wilderness, strict Hebrew treatment of the Tabernacle focuses in metaphors for the cosmos in this way, or for the highest heaven beyond the cosmos, and ends there for lack of a Messiah. Because their Scripture—our Old Testament—makes this connection to the cosmos, it illustrates why the Old Testament Law and its Tabernacle can never be “abolished” until “heaven and earth pass away,” as Jesus said in Matthew 5:18.

Christian denominationalists also illustrate the fulfilled-not-abolished principle without realizing it, in expending vast amounts of energy exploring the symbolism and imagery of the Tabernacle as the sacred spiritual “space” in which Jesus as the heavenly High Priest makes spiritual, eternal atonement for sin. But they necessarily stop all consideration with Jesus in heaven, declaring the Old Testament “obsolete” (Hebrews 8:13), abolished, in the same way Herod's temple was sacked and burned to the ground in AD 70 and never rebuilt. If Christ's sacrifice destroyed the earthly sacrificial system, then it is only logical that an earthly New Testament sanctuary is also unnecessary.

But if *he fulfilled* the earthly sacrificial system ... well, that is an entirely different idea altogether. Jesus himself, the fulfiller and fulfillment, is not obsolete in the way Herod's temple is extinct, likely never to be rebuilt. Rather, Jesus' body, as the true and eternal Temple, was bludgeoned, ripped open, pierced, and crucified but rose from the

dead completely different and new and lives on through his people. Jesus lives on, the “system” lives on. Similar, but different. Not Jewish. And in a resurrected way that fully incorporates his “old,” “obsolete” body, yet infuses and communicates life and grace.

My point is that the Old Testament worship system was not abolished as a mistake or failure any more than Jesus’ earthly body was wiped out as a mistake or failure. Jesus’ body was dead and resurrected. The Old Testament Law was dead and resurrected in him and with him as the glorious blueprint for fulfillment—for proper, later worship in Christ. Simply, the Tabernacle teaches us what true worship looks like, here and in heaven.

The Jews were not shown the plenitude of its eventual purpose as type and shadow at Sinai, so they received the Law as the gift of revelation from God that it was, embracing it with great joy and reverencing its splendor throughout their generations, even to this day. And if that Law “carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses’ face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor?” (2 Corinthians 3:7-9).

The Old Testament Tabernacle and Law surrounding it did exactly what they were designed to do. Scripture teaches in divine pedagogy: that Old Testament Law—summarized in the Tabernacle—was the template and tutor for New Testament law and therefore necessary for establishing the foundation of the Church as it is supposed to function, according to the book of Hebrews. The Torah was not designed to communicate grace, only to tutor and prepare humanity to receive grace in some resurrected way.

Jesus brings a new law on a new mount, one that does not eliminate the old, but wraps it up in an embrace and *includes* it in its minutiae by diving beneath the surface of our outward behavior to the inward motivations beneath.

Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19-20).

The sacrificial system is transformed in him, High Priest and Victim, and in us as his mystical body, who follows him in all things. Like him, we consecrate ourselves to God as living sacrifices through a prescribed worship system. This, and only this, is true “spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

Because it was a copy of the tabernacle that eternally exists in heaven, God was very specific about how everything should be made and situated:

They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5).

Later, the more permanent temples of Solomon and Herod, for which the Tabernacle was the temporary prototype, retained all the attributes of the portable Temple of Exodus, but enjoyed more lavish decoration and the stability of stone construction. But it was not until “the days were completed” that we get an inkling of what God was ultimately up to, something unheard of and spectacularly new. In addition to the Old Testament worship structure, Mary is another way I would like you to think of the word “tabernacle.”

THE FIRST HUMAN TABERNACLE

In Luke 1, we read the stunning news that a human being—Mary—will be a tabernacle for God:

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus ... therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:30-31, 35).

I have always found this account fascinating, partly because God tells Mary how pleased he is with her, and I long to hear those words from him myself. I am also captivated by Mary’s reaction: “And Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I have no husband?’” (Luke 1:34). Has God ever revealed something to you that you could not comprehend in the moment?

At the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary is told that the power of the Holy Spirit will “come upon,” or “overshadow,” her (Luke 1:35). That almost makes me shiver. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the language is the same as that in Exodus 40:34-35:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud *abode upon* it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (emphasis added).

This most sacred moment in human history is the Incarnation, and it is why we bow deeply during the Mass at the words of the Nicene Creed, “By the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” It is the moment when Mary’s Creator is conceived within her, the moment when the New Covenant takes flesh within Mary, who is called the “Ark of the New Covenant” by the Church Fathers. *Glorious. Marvelous. Miraculous.*

For this reason, Mary is also given the title *Theotokos* by the Church, meaning “Mother of God.” And it is at this moment that Mary becomes the very first living tabernacle. She is the living temple in whom the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, makes human nature the “house” in which he dwells. The tabernacle of his flesh is formed wholly from hers.

God was really present in the Old Testament Tabernacle, in the pillar of cloud and fire, leading his people. He was really present in Mary at the Incarnation. The first thing she and Joseph do with the new baby, as obedient Jewish parents, is to present Jesus in the Temple according to Jewish Law. There, they ascend the Temple stones in Jerusalem, summing up the Old Testament and ushering in something wonderfully new—something similar to the old but fresh, vibrant, and mercifully new.

JESUS, THE TRUE AND FINAL TABERNACLE

Thousands of years after the original Old Testament occupation of the cloud and fire in the Tabernacle, the Gospel of John applies a particularly special designation to the new way God is present with man in Christ. The cloud and fire, the *Shekinah*, came to dwell with us again in an especially tender, miraculous, and surprising way. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory” (John 1:14). “Dwelt” in this context literally means “tabernacled,” while *Shekinah* means “glory.” Jesus is the new Tabernacle where the glory of God dwells.

Jesus connected his body to the new temple: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) explains that Jesus’ body will take the place of the Old Testament Temple:

This is a prophecy of the Cross: he shows that the destruction of his earthly body will be at the same time the end of the Temple. With his Resurrection the new Temple will begin: the living body of Jesus Christ, which will now stand in the sight of God and be the place of all worship. Into this body he incorporates men. It is the tabernacle that no human hands have made, the place of true worship of God, which casts out the shadow and replaces it with reality.³

LIVING STONES

In a very real sense, everything true of the Old Testament Tabernacle is also true of us, individually and as the Church, because you and I are tabernacles, too. “By the grace of God, Christians also become temples of the Holy Spirit, living stones out of which the Church is built” (CCC 1197). Through us, the Church, God is literally present, “living” on the earth.

This glory-presence foreshadowed Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction today. As the incense rises before the Lord—in the presence of the people, singing *O Salutaris* and *Tantum Ergo*—the God of the Universe is with his sons and daughters in the monstrance (from the Latin word *monstrare*, meaning “to show”). Jesus Christ shows us his “face” and is truly and substantially present—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—in the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

In the Old Testament, God dwelt in a portable tent, and it was the center of communal life for God’s people and their place of worship. The Tabernacle was patterned after the one in heaven, and it foreshadowed the Church to come.

The Old Testament Law, the center of which was the Tabernacle, was humanity’s tutor, training the Jews, and—through them—the world (us) to long for, seek, and recognize the fullness and maturity of faith and worship that would come through Christ and the Church

he would establish: “Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:23-24).

Just before his ascension, Jesus left his apostles with instructions to wait in Jerusalem until the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon them (see Luke 24:49). He was referring to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The scriptural language is similar to the language the angel Gabriel used at the Annunciation, and it gives us a clue as to God’s intent for the apostles and “for those who believe in [him] through their word” (John 17:20).

The presence of Mary among the apostles at Pentecost illustrates to us that she is the living connection between the earthly life of Christ—through the Incarnation—and the mystery of the Church as the body of Jesus (see Acts 1: 13-14; 1 Corinthians 12). Mary, the first living “temple,” presented the infant Jesus to Simeon the priest to be offered back to God through her son’s human nature. The Incarnation is the most extraordinary presence of God in the world.

In the New Testament, God dwells in a living tabernacle, the body of Christ, the Church, which is made of “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5). We are the Church! When we gather together in our parish churches to celebrate the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, God is present in and through us. As the *Catechism* puts it:

In its earthly state the Church needs places where the community can gather together. Our visible churches, holy places, are images of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, toward which we are making our way on pilgrimage (CCC 1198).

What, then, is Christian worship, the “how” of the New Testament? It is built firmly on the foundation of the Old Testament.

LET'S REVIEW

The Tabernacle is able to concisely communicate our Faith because:

- God is always calling man to worship in his presence.
- God explains how to worship him properly, in a way that draws us into the closest possible relationship to him.
- God longs to make a home in us.
- God is completely consistent: New Testament worship and practice is built on the foundation of the Old Testament.
- In the Old Testament Law, God gave detailed instructions for whole-life liturgical worship centered around the Tabernacle.
- The Old Testament Tabernacle was a copy of the sanctuary in heaven and the prototype of the Church to come.
- New Testament worship should resemble both Old Testament and heavenly worship.
- Jesus is the new and final Tabernacle of worship. The Church is his body, built of “living stones.”
- The only religious group that contains every piece of proper worship commanded by God is the Catholic Church.

INVITATION

In addition to equipping you to confidently share your faith with those you know and love, the goal of this book is for you to come to sense more deeply through the Tabernacle that Jesus is a living, breathing part of your life—if you allow him to be. Thomas à Kempis taught:

Whatever be the affair, enter with Moses into the Tabernacle to ask advice of the Lord, you will sometimes hear the divine answer and return instructed in many things present and to come. For Moses always had recourse to the Tabernacle for the solution of doubts and questions, and fled to prayer for support in dangers and the evil deeds of men. So you also should take refuge in the secret chamber of your heart, begging earnestly for divine aid.⁴

Let us pray.

God Prompt – LOVE the Word™

L **LISTEN:** “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25:8).

O **OBSERVE:** In what areas of your life do you most need God’s presence, help, or instruction?

Have you invited him there? Explain.

In what specific areas might God want to work in your life through this book as you make room for him there?

What are your goals in reading this book?

What is the most significant statement or Scripture passage you read today? What does God want you to do in response?

V **VERBALIZE:** Lord, the areas of my life that need you most are ...

My deepest desires about these areas are ...

From what I understand you to be saying so far about them, your will seems clear here ...

But not so clear here ...

E **ENTRUST:** *Lord, I believe it is your desire to tabernacle with me, to be present in my life and circumstances. Help me learn to make my heart a sanctuary in which you can be comfortable and fully present. I commit these challenges to you in the coming weeks and ask for direction in these areas. I believe. Help my unbelief.*

