

Making a Home Altar

Holy week and, in particular, the Paschal Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Great Vigil, are the heart of the Christian year. They are our annual pilgrimage by which we participate in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must make that pilgrimage in our homes and, with confidence, rest in the knowledge that our bonds of love and friendship connect us during this time.

We are offering online services during Holy Week – please participate. You can find service times, bulletins, and directions on how to join the online “room” on our website:

<http://www.stjohnskingston.org/online-streaming-worship/>

And, to help you make your paschal pilgrimage, I encourage you to make a home altar. For much of Christian history, the home was the primary place of prayer and worship. This year we have an opportunity in the midst of this trauma and turmoil, to restore that tradition and make our journey through Holy Week an authentic one, even if we are physically distant from one another. My hope is that this space will continue to serve you until we can be together again.

How to make a home altar

Each of us has sacred objects that reflect our faith and contribute to our spiritual practice. Creating a sacred space at home provides us a place that is “set aside” where we can stop and rest, where we can offer daily prayers, where we can center ourselves and return to the knowledge that God is with us. If you live with others, include them in the preparation.

1. Start by finding a place in your home that is low-traffic but easily accessible and highly visible – a side table, a windowsill, or an open shelf on a bookcase.
2. Take a prayerful walk around the home and yard. Ask yourselves: What belongings help me to feel connected to God and to others? Gather these things and bring them to your space.
3. Organize your altar so that the placement pleases you. You can drape the cloth over books to create dimension.
4. Visit the altar to worship throughout the day. I can be helpful to create a routine – for example: The bell at St. John’s tolls at 9am, 12 noon, and 6pm. Set aside time to worship as a family, if you live with others. A part of your worship can be the movement/change of objects on the altar.

Here are some ideas:

- **Cloth:** Color is a big part of our tradition – for Holy Week, we use red. And for Easter we use white or gold. You can also use black on Good Friday.
- **Bible and Book of Common Prayer:** Keeping scripture or other inspirational texts on hand may inspire us to read a few lines. The Psalms are particularly meaningful right now.
- **Candle:** We will definitely use a candle for the Great Vigil on Saturday night. Keeping one on your altar (lit or unlit) is a good way to remember that the Light of Christ reigns.
- **Icons or other objects:** Images and/or objects that remind us of God’s love for us can help us to ground ourselves. Crosses, stones, shells, small statues, prayer beads, etc.
- **Water:** a bowl, cup, or small jar of water to help remind you of your baptism.
- **Flowers/greenery:** You might want to lay the branch you’re using for Palm Sunday on the altar or other sparse greenery. Flowers on Easter provides a spiritual shift.
- **Paper and pen:** to jot down thoughts, questions, or reflections that come to you as you