

Making a Home Altar

Holy week and, in particular, the Paschal Triduum (literally, 3 days preceding Easter) 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.

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. And even though we make this pilgrimage as a full community at St. John's through our Holy Week services at church, having a space devoted to prayer and reflection in your home will support your Holy Week journey and, hopefully, remain as a space that is set aside in your home.



The home altar at the Rectory. If you'd like to see more examples, you can search the internet for "Christian home altar images."

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: 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 spend time at your altar.