

Liturgy We Live *by Dr. Gil Haas*

A family's wooden table was requisitioned as an altar in early Christian Eucharists. As it became customary to celebrate Eucharist on the stone tombs of martyrs, stone altars were subsequently built over a saint's relics. Altars were originally freestanding but gradually became fixed to a curtain hiding the patron saint's relics. During the Reformation, many stone altars, which were associated with Catholic Eucharistic "sacrifice", were replaced by wooden tables. For this reason the Anglican BCP substitutes the word "table" for the word "altar". Reformed Anglican priests stood at the end of the "table" while high church priests stood at the "altar's" center. With time, the concepts of an altar and Christ became inseparable. Because of this relationship, permanent altars can only be consecrated with chrism by a bishop. Because an altar represents Christ Himself, five crosses are chiseled into altar's surface symbolizing His five wounds. Maundy Thursday's stripped altar symbolizes Christ's death. Altars are cleansed with wine and water before Easter, reminiscent of the care given a corpse, to symbolize the mourning over the dead Christ. It is customary to reverence the altar (Christ) with a bow or reverence the reserved sacrament (Christ's body) with a genuflection.

If you have a liturgical question or an inquiry about anything that transpires during or around our worship service, please forward the question you would like researched to: gghaas@aol.com, or drop the question in the offering basin. Please note whether we can credit you as the source of the question.