

June 2022

Dear fellow parishioners,

Are you shocked to hear that only 31% of Catholics believe in the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist¹? Would you like to experience an increased reverence for our Lord?

In many parishes, a once-standard sanctuary staple is making a comeback: the altar rail and with it an increase in reverence for the Eucharist. There has been an interest in bringing the altar rail back to our parish.

For those who are unfamiliar with what an altar rail is (also known as a communion rail) here is a brief description and a picture of what our church looked like when it had one.

An altar rail is located at the entryway to the sanctuary. Usually about three feet in height, it stretches the width of the church, setting apart the sanctuary (symbolic of heaven) where the priest offers Mass and where the Blessed Sacrament resides from where the faithful gather (symbolic of earth). The altar rail symbolizes the gateway to heaven from earth below. The faithful kneel at this threshold to heaven in order to receive Holy Communion.



Altar Rail

Altar rails have long been used to facilitate reverent distribution of Holy Communion while communicants kneel. When they were removed, only those physically fit enough to move from their knees to standing without support could adopt the posture. With the rails installed, physical limitations are seldom an issue but provisions are made available for those unable to kneel.

Here are our experiences:

- The experience of receiving Jesus on my knees “took me from the fact of the true presence to knowledge in my heart”. Caleb Heckman
- “I had gone to several Masses where I knelt at the communion rail to receive Jesus. Then one day at Mass here at St. Joseph I was praying about it and our choir started singing, As I Kneel Before You[♪]. So, I had my answer! It’s hard to explain the experience of receiving Jesus on my knees. It was like He flooded my whole being with Himself”. Diane Thelen
- Receiving at the communion rail “helps me to be more focused and to be aware of what is happening when I receive Jesus in the Eucharist. It has created a greater reverence within me”. Bill Thelen

- “When visiting a parish with a communion rail, I received communion while kneeling, for the first time ever. I experienced a powerful emotional response that brought me to tears”. Kellie Antes
- “Since 2016, after having a profound experience regarding the reception of Holy Communion, I have had a strong desire to kneel and receive the Lord on the tongue. I did not feel comfortable at the time to kneel without a kneeler present. Recently, I read a book authored by Bishop Athanasius Schneider, “Christus Vincit”. I was so convicted that I now humble myself to receive the Lord kneeling. It has given me a new and deeper love, reverence and sense of adoration to our Lord and also feel that it has opened my heart to more deeply receive Jesus and his love”. Dave Antes

Our Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger, noted that, “the practice of kneeling for Holy Communion has in its favor a centuries-old tradition, and it is a particularly expressive sign of adoration, completely appropriate in light of the true, real and substantial presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the consecrated species”².

We ask that you prayerfully ponder in your heart whether St. Joseph’s parish is being called to return the altar rail to be used at specific Masses.

More information will follow in the upcoming weeks.

Please feel free to contact those listed below to offer your input or ask questions.

God bless each and every one of you,

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¹ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/pew-survey-shows-majority-catholics-dont-believe-real-presence>

² <https://liturgyguy.com/2014/06/22/altar-rails-and-reverence/>

Bulletin Announcement

As communicated, I have accepted a position at Most Holy Trinity, Fowler. My last day here at St. Joseph Parish will be July 1st. It has been an absolute privilege and honor to serve the parish once again. In this short time, my experience has been one filled with welcome, encouragement, growth and above all - love. Fr. Darrel, Nickie, and all of you have been a beautiful witness of faith to me. For this reason, I will be forever grateful and have been incredibly blessed by your presence. As we press forward, let us always be encouraged to see God's love and providential plan in everything. Even amid change, difficulties, inconveniences, and the many things that are simply out of our control. Let's not look to the darkness, but to the light, joy, peace that is found in Christ; having real faith that it is only a prayer away. Thank you again for allowing me to be a part of St. Joseph Parish. I wish all of you God's love and grace.

In Jesus through Mary,

Aaron Epkey

