

As many of you know from your own experience of visiting different Catholic Churches around our country and maybe even in different places in the world, the super vast majority of these Churches had a large and prominent crucifix in the center of the sanctuary over the altar. There are many reasons for this predominant tradition in the Church, which is also held by the Catholics who worship in the 47 other rites of the Church and all of our Orthodox brethren. Basically stated: 1.1 billion of the 1.5 billion Christians in the world hold this tradition and have since the late 1st century. In fact the latest edition of the "General Instruction of the Roman Missal" (abbreviated GIRM) published in 2003 continues to reinforce this tradition:

*GIRM #308: Likewise, either in the altar or near it, there is to be a cross, with the figure of Christ crucified upon it, a cross clearly visible to the assembled people. It is desirable that such a cross should remain near the altar even outside of liturgical celebrations, so as to call to mind for the faithful the saving Passion of the Lord.*

Even though it allows for some accommodation what is stated first in Church law is what should prevail. If that is impossible for whatever reason then the later stated provisions can be employed. The law above first states that a crucifix should be "in the altar". Sadly enough we don't have a proper high altar in which a crucifix could be placed in, but we do have a large sanctuary wall where we can hang one as if a high altar were there. Then it says, "with the figure of Christ crucified upon it, a cross clearly visible to the assembled people". Where could this be clearer and more visible than mounted high and centered on the sanctuary wall, over the altar where the sacrifice it symbolizes and signifies will take place. As we put the crucifix in the center of our worship space with the tabernacle we coherently proclaim the love of Jesus Christ to be at the center of our lives and hearts.

The Mass is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is the eternal sacrifice of Christ that we come to participate in at Mass. His amazing sacrifice that earns God's pardon for our sins, opens the doors of heaven for us, obtained for us all of the sanctifying graces that we receive in the sacraments. Sacrifice is the greatest form of love.

It was the maximum disgrace, shame and humiliation of the ancient world to be publicly crucified. Not to mention one of the most horribly painful ways devised by men to kill other men. However, the paradox of the mystery of our salvation is that this sign of defeat and shame becomes the greatest sign of victory as Christ endures it as a completely innocent man for love of us to win for us God's mercy and saving/sanctifying grace. There through his perfect immolation of self on the cross he earned the right to be our King, the king of our hearts. The crucifix is now the throne of the Christ the King, where he demonstrates in a dramatic way the infinite love of God. "No one shows greater love than he who lays down his life for his friends" (John 15/13). Because of our sinful nature and constant failings, we need to be constantly reminded of God's love and mercy towards us. His outstretched arms waiting to embrace us in eternity. When asked how much Jesus loved us, one child answered, "This much," as he stretched his arms wide to show how Jesus died on the cross.

Even Pilate and the entire Roman Empire recognized Jesus' Kingship as he had the sign placed over his head, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The Roman Centurion in charge of the security detail at the base of the Cross as Jesus died, remarked, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (Mt. 27/54). This centurion was later asked to assure Jesus' death and ran his lance through Jesus' side. We remember him as St. Longinus. If these pagan, heathen soldiers, accustomed to battle and seeing death and even crucifixions, could be so moved at the sight of Jesus on the cross, shouldn't I? How hard is my heart from living in this world of egoism, pandemic abortion, genocides, and frequent mass murders? If it has hardened, I need to contemplate this image of Christ on the cross as the soldiers did in the context and presence of his eternal sacrifice in the celebration of the Mass, allowing it to ignite the fire of my faith that I too may say from the depths of the love of my heart--Truly you are the Son of God, the King of Kings, my savior and the savior of the world.