

THE HOLY PLACE

The sanctuary and the altar have been, throughout the spiritual development of the Church, gradually hidden and separated—not by an ecclesiastical, bureaucratic mandate—but by the Christian sense of the sacred; by a real sense of the awesomeness of the mystery of God. St. John Chrysostom and all the Fathers constantly call the altar the “terrifying table,” and the mystery of the altar “terrifying mysteries,” “the terrifying sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ to which we have to approach with fear and trembling.” This is sacred terror and not fear of the unknown. It is a mystic trembling in the presence of heaven: “Take off your shoes,” said God, “for the place where you stand is holy.” (cf Exodus 3:5).

The more secularized we become, the more our vision of the sacred and the holy becomes blurry and even blinded. The closing of doors and curtains is not setting apart the clergy as if in a special class, shutting off the People of God from participation. It is, rather, a forceful revelation that there is a mystery and that we cannot see or experience this mystery by physical contact. No human eyes or physical sight can penetrate or comprehend it. Only love and the surge of the soul on the wings of faith can meet the Lord and God of all.

“I shall enter into Your dwelling place; before Your holy temple I shall bow in fear of You.”

(Psalm 5:7)