

Making an Altar for Home

adapted from Sharon Ely Pearson's article

With most of us in the United States (and world-wide) staying safe by staying at home, we are now worshipping virtually with our faith communities via Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, church websites and other platforms. While meeting in this way has proved wonderful for staying connected with the practice of coming together for Sunday services, weekday prayers such as Compline or Morning Prayer, not being in our sanctuaries together has been hard.

We know that the Church is not a building, but a community gathered in prayer. We've also realized that our homes can be places of prayer. So as we near the end of our Lenten journey and prepare for Holy Week, perhaps it's time to create a prayer space at home that is available any time of day or night to anyone in your household. In the midst of the chaos of homeschooling and worries of this world right now, working together as a household to build a home altar or sacred space may be an excellent way to create order and peace.

It is quite simple and can be done with what you already have at home most likely. Find a surface in a low traffic area with something like a small table, portable tray table, or low bookcase.

- **Cloth:** a placemat, tablecloth, or any piece of fabric. I like to try to match the color of the church season if possible. So now it is a dark purple for Lent. I've used one of the scarves that my granddaughter likes to play with when she comes to visit. With Holy Week I will find something red – probably the red scarf!
- **Candle:** real or battery operated (which might be good if you have small children) to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World. For me it also symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit and helps me quiet my mind and center my thoughts.
- **Cross:** any shape, type, or media. I'm fortunate in that I have a number of crosses in my home that I could use. If you don't have a cross, you could always make one out of paper, two sticks tied together with twine, even popsicle sticks. It could be a crucifix (with Jesus on it) or plain.
- **Icon:** a holy image of a saint or biblical figure. Not everyone will want (or have) an icon, and that's okay.
- **Object from nature:** a stone, flower, shell, acorn, etc. This reminds us of God's creation that surrounds us always. I have a hazelnut, also a connection to **St. Julian of Norwich**.
- **Flowers:** Most of our churches have flowers on or near their altars – again, a reminder of God's creation and abundance. During Lent and Holy Week I don't have flowers – but watch out for Easter!
- **Prayers:** I like to have a Bible and Book of Common Prayer nearby as I usually read a lesson appointed from the day or read the Daily Office. But sometimes a little card with a prayer on it is nice too. Near my desk I have a bulletin board where I keep lots of clippings and postcards of prayers that I have collected throughout the years that have meaning to me. Perhaps there is a prayer that you like especially; write it on paper or an index card.
- **Bowl with paper and pen.** I don't have this, but I know some people do. They might write names of people or thanksgivings on a slip of paper and put it in the bowl as part of their prayer practice. They can serve as reminders and become a household "collection of prayers."