

Today the choir is singing “**O Come to the Altar**”. But what is the significance of the altar? The altar is one of the most sacred components of the church, though it is often one of the most overlooked.

There are over four hundred references to altars in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

This must mean an altar is much more than just a table at the front of the church. It is God’s table.

In the Old Testament, altars were built as a memorial of places where we encountered God to help future generations remember, where one could beg forgiveness, as a place of worship, where covenants were made with the Lord, and to request an intercession. Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, and many more built altars.

Obviously, our altar looks nothing like this today. Many altars imitate the layout and the orientation of the Jerusalem Temple which helped to dramatize the meaning attached to the sacrificial death of Jesus. The altar now is a representation of Christ’s presence among us, and like the burnt offerings of yesteryear, communion becomes a re-presentation of His sacrifice.

Around the altar are our altar rails. It is here that we answer the “altar call” which originated in the Methodist Church. It is a time for us to come for prayer, forgiveness, and dedication.

Although we have relaxed our rituals, many still treat the altar and the holy things placed on the altar with reverence. But in many modern churches, the altar is more symbolic than functional. Now we see the altar as a symbol of the table used during the Last Supper. Altars are seen as places where the divine and human worlds interact, where God becomes one with us when we commune with Him, where we meet with God in prayer, and where we remember all He has done for us. The altar is where we are supplied with the grace and strength that we need to persevere in the race of faith.

When we come to the altar, we must genuinely desire to give ourselves wholly to the Lord. We must put everything on the altar for Him, make way for the transformation, and say, “Lord I come and present myself to You!” We must lift ourselves up as a living sacrifice.

Abraham’s building of the altar represented his saying: “I’m accepting Your promise. I trust You, Lord.” And just as surely as God met Abraham and brought him back to the altar of promise, so He wants to meet you today. O Come to the Altar!

Near The Cross by Fannie J. Crosby

1. Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain—
Free to all, a healing stream—
Flows from Calv’ry’s mountain.
 - *Refrain:*
In the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.
2. Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and Mercy found me;
There the bright and morning star
Sheds its beams around me. Refrain
3. Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
Bring its scenes before me;
Help me walk from day to day,
With its shadows o’er me. Refrain

Near the cross I’ll watch and wait
Hoping, trusting ever,
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river. Refrain

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There a precious fountain—
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Flows from Calv’ry’s mountain.
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Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.
5. Near the cross, a trembling soul,
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