

The Uniqueness of the Presider's Chair

In our celebrations there is a hierarchy of ministries: presider, deacon, liturgical ministers, and the assembly. There has always been visual elements that highlight this hierarchical order, such as the vestments they wear and the chairs they use.

The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* calls for the presider's chair to be unique from all the other chairs, the deacon's chair similar, but still unique from the other ministers. The seating of the assembly should be uniform and different from those of the presider, deacon and other minister who are seated in the sanctuary.

The presider's chair is the most unique, for it is about the person for whom the chair is reserved. Like the "Chair of Peter" in Rome, it is not the chair, but the person who fills the chair. In Rome, Pope Benedict XVI fills that chair. When we speak of the "Chair of Peter" we are referring to the current pope. Every diocese has one church with a special chair called the "cathedra" used only by the local bishop, thus giving that church the name "cathedral". This chair represents the three fold role of the bishop to *govern*, to *sanctify*, and to *teach*. He is the one we look to for guidance in the local church.

The size of the local church (all the faithful who live in the diocese) makes it difficult for the bishop to be present to all throughout the diocese. Therefore, parishes are established to make the local church present to smaller worshipping communities. In each of these parish churches a special chair is placed which represents the bishop's presence and authority to the community.

Pastors are appointed to lead these communities and to represent the bishop by taking the presider's chair in our celebrations. The offertory collection should be placed at this chair (not at the foot of the altar), for this is the seat of the local *governance* of the community. The pastor provides the role of *sanctification* by presiding at Mass and the sacraments. He is the *teacher* of the faith as he gives the homily and instructs the community.

Deacons have their own unique ministry within the diocese and should have their own unique chair which sits beside the presider's chair. While deacons help pastors in their sacramental responsibilities (baptism, marriage, prayer services, etc.), they should always use their own chair which represents the deacon's role of servant to the community, pastor, and especially to the bishop.

The "Chair of Peter", the cathedra, and the presider's chair are reflective of Christ's three fold ministry to *govern*, to *sanctify*, and to *teach* the faithful who gather in our churches.