When Father (now Monsignor) William Helmick planned a renovation of our parish church in the late 1980s, he found it prescribed that the tabernacle should be placed somewhere other than in its familiar place, the center of the sanctuary. A lot of people found that difficult to understand. It seemed to detract from the reverence they felt for the Blessed Sacrament.

As the Pastor's brother, I rather lightly threw off the suggestion: "Go for the Gothic solution." By that I meant building a tower structure for the tabernacle, such as had often been done in late Gothic times in the 15th century. The only one I had ever seen, a beautiful, complex example, was in the Nuremberg church of Saint Lorenz, and I described it.

My thinking was that, even if given its own place in the church away from the center, such a tabernacle should never be seen as less honor to the sacrament. The idea, at that time, must have sounded attractive but a bit zany. After a couple of years had gone by without any better solutions coming to light, the tower got to seem more practical. It isn't the sort of thing you can order from the store, so in the summer of 1990 I set out to build it. It has been a long time since. Working out its symbolism has been as fascinating a task as building it. Now that the tower is finished, this account is meant to explain it.
The tabernacle (its Latin name "tabernaculum" means literally a tent, a small shelter or shed), as a receptacle for the reserved species of the Eucharist, the consecrated bread that we venerate as the Body of Christ, has become a prominent feature of Roman Catholic churches, a way of celebrating and localizing the continuing presence of the incarnate Christ to his Church. For a long time, this was seen by Protestant Christians as a very problematic element in Catholic belief and practice, and only recently does one begin to find a rather tentative revival of this practice in some other Christian communities, such as parts of the Anglican Communion. The Eastern Orthodox churches tend to have a visible tabernacle in the church, but have not generally developed forms of piety centered on veneration of the reserved Eucharist in the way that Catholics have.

Yet the custom of having a special cult of the sacrament outside the time of the eucharistic action itself does not actually go back to the early origins of the Christian Church. There has indeed always been a sense of the continuing presence of Christ in the sacrament, and the consecrated bread was preserved for such purposes as sending it to other local churches as a sign of communion with them, or for bringing communion to the sick or dying. For these purposes it was generally kept in a sacristy cupboard or some such place. The idea of reserving it in a public way for the veneration of the faithful, and introducing a separate cult of the reserved species, came up only toward the end of the 12th century, and was popularized in the 13th century. The circumstances were very peculiar.

Reception of communion had become very rare. It was one of the most distorted features of much medieval theology that it bred a depressing and deeply ingrained sense of guilt and unworthiness among people. St. Paul had said of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians, 11) that "anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of offending against the body and blood of the Lord." He clearly meant this, in context, against those whose sharing of the sacrament was not reflected in any sharing of their food or goods with the hungry or the deprived. It was interpreted instead in such a way that any of the weaknesses of the human condition came to be thought of as disqualifying a person from receiving the Eucharist.

People felt guilty about all sorts of things, and became frightened of receiving communion. There even had to be legislation requiring people to receive the sacrament once a year, the "Easter Communion." Down to very recent times, when Pope Pius X at the beginning of the 20th century began to promote more frequent communion, this was still the normal situation for most Catholics, and it was not until after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) lifted the pall of this pervasive guilt culture that the frequent reception of communion, as a habitual part of the celebration of the Eucharist, became common practice again, as it had always been for the early Christian Church.

But the depth of people's faith in Christ's true presence had triumphed in an unsuspected way. Under this great distress, devout medieval Catholics invented, late in the 12th century, an extraordinary and most imaginative response. Eucharistic communion was a value for them which they desired as much as they had been taught to fear it. They devised, to all practical purposes, an alternative sacrament, a form of communion with the living and present Christ by looking rather than by eating and drinking.

From these years date the first manuscript illuminations depicting the elevation of the Host at Mass. Priests all this time celebrated the sacrament with their backs to the congregation, with the result that the consecrated elements could not be seen by the people. Consequently the custom arose, at popular demand, that the priest should raise the consecrated Host above his head, to be seen and venerated, immediately after the words of consecration. The Feast of Corpus Christi (of the Body of Christ) was instituted, to be celebrated each year with processions of the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated Host carried
through the streets to be seen by all. At intervals during these Corpus Christi processions, people were blessed with the consecrated Host in a special vessel, the Monstrance, designed to show it surrounded by the rays of a metal sunburst. This custom of a blessing with the Host, the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, then became a regular practice of Catholic worship. People rendered fearful of actually eating and drinking the eucharistic species were thus enabled to have the sense of communicating, by sight, with the Christ who had promised his presence to them in this sacrament. As a popularly invented device to compensate for what few at the time understood to be incredibly bad theology, it was brilliant.

This was the context for the initial use of tabernacles, receptacles for reserving the consecrated Host in the church in a visible and conspicuous way, where people could venerate the Lord's presence privately and commune with the incarnate Christ in their thoughts.

The earliest of these appear in the first years of the 13th century, and the form favored initially was a metal dove (representation of the Holy Spirit) hanging by a chain from the ceiling of the church and containing the eucharistic bread. This format did not prove particularly practical, and soon there were tabernacles in the form of cupboards, sometimes called "aumbries," in the wall of the church. The tendency, naturally enough, was to ornament and elaborate them as much as possible, by way of emphasis, and the type of receptacle changed and developed rapidly over the following couple of centuries.

By the 15th century, a few enterprising parishes undertook to present the tabernacle in the form of a tower, rendered as complex and rich as the late Flamboyant Gothic could make it, standing free in its own place in the church as a magnet for people's attention and devotion. There were other ways of building the tabernacle, even then, less elaborate than the Sacramental Tower, but the towers became showpieces of any church that could build one, common especially in Flanders and elsewhere in the domains of the Dukes of Burgundy, in France, in Southern Germany. They could be built in wood, but the most elaborate of them were done in stone.

With the 16th-century Reformation, Protestants challenged Catholic teaching on the Eucharist at many levels, not least of which was a suspicion that Catholic understanding of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament had slipped over into superstition. Catholic reaction to this challenge was defiance, and a
renewed insistence on the cult of the reserved Host outside the Mass. St. Charles Borromeo, the powerful and ingenious Cardinal-Archbishop of Milan, conceived the idea of putting the tabernacle on the main altar of a church, as a way of further emphasizing the importance of the reserved sacrament in Catholic life. At the Council of Trent this new practice was legislated as mandatory for all Catholic churches. Cathedrals were permitted to reserve the sacrament instead in a separate chapel, but even there the tabernacle was always placed now on an altar, as a kind of centerpiece. This is where Catholics of all the subsequent centuries have become accustomed to finding the tabernacle, and it has had enormous influence on their basic sense of the character of a church building and of what goes on within it.

A building that housed a Christian congregation, right up to this time, had always been understood as Domus Ecclesiae, the House of the Church, of the Christian community of believers, the place of the community's meeting where, among other things, and most centrally, the action of the Eucharist took place. New England Congregationalists have the right translation when they speak of the Parish Meeting House. The practice of reservation that had grown up since the late 12th century had not changed that perception. But a tabernacle on the main altar of the church now transformed the building, and everyone's understanding of it, into a Temple, Domus Dei, or House of God. Catholic children ever since have grown up with this concept, of the church as "God's house," in which the congregation are guests, rather than their house, in which they carry out the practices of their faith.

Moreover, with the tabernacle directly on the altar itself, the altar became, in people's most basic understanding, the throne of the tabernacle, or of the reserved presence of Christ. Anything else that happened on it, including the action of the Eucharist itself, tended to be seen as merely incidental to its function as throne.

Catholic tradition has been very appreciative of the increased emphasis on the presence of Christ that came with this practice, and it is only in very recent times, since the Second Vatican Council, that Catholic thinking has turned toward the downside of this concentration on the reserved species almost to the exclusion of active participation in the Mass. A static rather than an active understanding of the Eucharist had resulted from the Counter-Reformation's preference for tabernacles on the altar, and it is now the effort of the Church, still rather stumbling, to get back to a more action-oriented understanding.

Result: a decision in some places in the Catholic world to get the tabernacle off the altar and out of the center of the church, so that it will not eclipse the Mass itself.

There are some voices in contemporary Catholic thinking that want to de-emphasize the cult of the reserved sacrament radically now that active participation in the liturgical action has regained central importance for Catholicism's teaching body. To myself, this seems a wrong direction, to deprive people of something that is precious to them, and to ignore the brilliant ingenuity of this popular invention of an alternative approach to communion in what were desperate theological times. The general practice, since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, of having the priest face the congregation during the Mass, with the altar drawn forward, away from the wall of the sanctuary where it has stood for these many centuries, had already made it inconvenient to have the tabernacle on the altar itself. It was an obstacle to seeing what was being done there, and in many churches the tabernacle is now set into the wall behind the altar. Where the subsequent step has been taken, to remove the tabernacle from the center and put it in its own place elsewhere in the church, the most common solution has been to put it on a side altar. No one fails to see, when this happens, that the reserved sacrament has suffered a demotion, and for those who value the practice of communing with Christ sacramentally present in the reserved species, this can be hurtful and disappointing. Why insult people?

When the question arose, with the restoration work at Saint Theresa's, of how to handle the placement of the tabernacle, my suggestion was to take that "Gothic solution," building a tower for it in its own part of the church. The liturgical documents of the Catholic Church since the Council, while not yet altogether clear on where the tabernacle should be or why, do say that when the tabernacle has a position other than at the center of the sanctuary, it should be in a "locum pernobile," an extraordinarily distinguished place in the church. Understandably enough, there is no definition of the locum pernobile. That is an artists' question which the liturgical legislators have not found it in them to answer. Given the
handsome Gothic structure of St. Theresa's church, it seemed to me that this was an opportunity to go back to the last artistic precedents we had for the purpose, the Flamboyant Gothic eucharistic towers of Pre-Reformation times in the 15th and early 16th centuries. If we could revive that precedent, using the style in which it had then developed, it should be possible to design the locum pernobile for the tabernacle in other styles and artistic situations of the present.

THE TABERNACLE AT SAINT THERESA'S CHURCH

Not many of these tower tabernacles of the late Middle Ages are left. For the most part, they were removed from Catholic churches when the tabernacle went to the altar. A few are left in place in churches in Belgium. A few museum examples, generally wooden ones that could more easily be removed from a church without being destroyed, can still be found in France. Lutherans in Southern Germany, never iconoclasts like other followers of the Protestant Reformation, tended to leave these tabernacles in place, as treasured memorials given to their parishes by their own fathers and grandfathers. The only one I have ever seen myself is in the now-Lutheran Lorenzkirche in Nuremberg, a marvelous early-16th-century structure by Adam Kraft that soars so high that its steeple eventually bends to follow the curvature of the vault overhead. But I found photographs of two splendid towers, one an imitation of the other, both in Louvain, Belgium. A couple of days drawing them out with pencil and paper were required to solve the intricacies of their construction.

First found was a grainy photo of the tabernacle in the Church of St. Jacques, from the latter part of 15th century. (Illustration from Fabre, Pages d'Art Chretien.) This turned out to be a copy of an earlier tower built about 1450 by Mathijs de Layens in the Collegiate Church of St. Pierre, Louvain. (Illustrations: Herman Liebaers, Valentin Vemeersch, Leon Voet, Frans Baudouin, Robert Hoozee and others, Flemish Art From the Beginning till Now, New York, Arch Cape Press, 1985; Wim Swaan, Art and Architecture of the Late Middle Ages.) The very free adaptation exercised at St. Jacques by the second builder gave me the license to handle the construction of the St. Theresa tower with equal freedom. Both towers were of stone, and having learned some while ago not to be frightened of any work in wood, I was first inclined to find out how to do it in stone myself. Architect Anthony de Castro, responsible for the renovation work at St. Theresa's, and my brother, the Pastor, persuaded me to do it in wood, covered with gold leaf.

The Louvain towers are both six-sided structures, with a first stage reaching to table height, on which the tabernacle receptacle itself can rest. This is surrounded, at a second stage, by wrought-iron grillwork. On the six piers between these grillwork panels are, in each case, two niches for statues, the niches surmounted by tall, spindly pinnacled baldachins. Above the grillwork, on each face of the hexagon, is a stone-carved relief panel, representing eucharistic themes, the main pictorial element on the tower. Spread out above these relief panels are cantilevered arches that reach out into space before the pictorial panels, supporting clusters of small pinnacles out in front at the junction of the arches, spreading
out the profile of the tower at this height, the whole embellished with intricately carved crockets and bosses. A gallery around the top of these cantilevered arches finishes off this second stage of the structure.

A new and narrower hexagon of carved open-work reaches up above this gallery as the third stage of the tower, but this time the hexagon is reoriented, so that an angle of the upper hexagon stands above each face of the lower hexagon. The reorientation is modulated by setting six piers, one in front of each face of the upper hexagon, and acting as if they were upward extensions of the lower set of piers. These upper piers are then connected to the supporting uprights of the inner hexagonal structure by flying buttresses at two levels, and these uprights, as well as the piers themselves, terminate in a further cluster of pinnacles. The arch profiles at the top of this upper hexagon, with their crockets and finials, echo those of the cantilevered arches below.

The gallery projecting out around the top of the cantilevered arches leaves a little triangular porch above each of them at the second stage level. On these porches, set between the pier extensions and their flying buttresses, are smaller towers, square in plan, of carved openwork, terminating in steeples, also of openwork, with elaborate crockets and finials. These towers-on-the-tower can be taken to represent the many mansions in the Father's house.

A further stage follows on each of the Louvain towers: yet another openwork hexagonal element, once again reoriented so that its angles stand above the faces of the hexagon below. This final hexagon rises into a further wide openwork steeple, whose finial brings the tower to its full height.

*Collegiate Church of St. Pierre, Louvain. (Illustrations: Herman Liebaers, Valentin Vemeersch, Leon Voet, Frans Baudouin, Robert Hoozee and others, Flemish Art From the Beginning till Now, New York, Arch Cape Press, 1985; Wim Swaan, Art and Architecture of the Late Middle Ages.)*

At this point, I broke with the example of the two Louvain towers. This final hexagon-and-
steeple stage, greatly extending the height of the tower, looked fine on the St. Pierre tower as it sat loftily beneath a high arch of the nave. The second Louvain tower, at St. Jacques, was set in front of an arched niche in the wall, this arch lower and broader, in its proportions not unlike the arch in front of which the tower at St. Theresa's would be placed. The high third-stage hexagon and steeple broke through the height of the arch behind it, with an unfortunate effect of ignoring its architectural setting. My inclination was to keep the tower to the height of the arch behind it at St. Theresa's.

It is of the nature of Gothic architecture that it keeps going up, and when it stops going up there has to be a reason for its stopping. I decided on a crown formation to replace the fourth stage of the other towers, and provide the reason for its ending there. The model was provided by the exterior cupolas over the apsidal chapels of the Church of Notre-Dame au Sablon, Brussels.

Other variations from the Flemish models followed. Though I would be working in wood instead of stone, I thought first in terms of doing wood-carved reliefs in place of the stone relief panels above the grillwork, but quickly realized that what this tower would need would be some color, to break up all that gold leaf, so I decided on the series of oil paintings (on wood panel). There was already a fine cylindrical bronze tabernacle at St. Theresa's which I could use for the receptacle proper, inside the grillwork. The hexagonal table
it rests on is made up from the carved marble panels that were originally part of the communion rail in the church. That meant breaking with the design of open arches that formed the base of both Flemish towers. Communion rails, as barriers between the congregation and the action taking place in the sanctuary, are one of the things that simply must go when one renovates a Catholic church for today's understanding of the liturgy. This one, like many in other churches, was precious to many parishioners. It had been given to the church in 1948 as a memorial gift for the members of the parish who had lost their lives in World War II. It seemed important to re-use it, and to associate it still with people's reception of communion. There had also been wrought-iron gates in the communion rail, and its panels were refashioned to make up the grillwork panels of the tower.

The inside of the grillwork enclosure, containing the tabernacle itself, clearly had to be the richest part of the design. There was no telling from any of the photographs of the Flemish towers what was there. I decided on an open dome, providing a light source at the top, resting on six columns set inside the angles of the hexagon. A swirling and intricate Gothic floral design was found for the inner surfaces of the dome. It was a reconstruction of the fabric pattern for a set of vestments shown in a 15th-century painting by Friedrich Herlen of Rothenberg (included in J. Engelhorn, *Treasury of Historic Pattern and Design*, New York, Dover, 1990, p. 78), and I stencilled it onto the panels.

Because the tabernacle tower houses the sacrament in its separate way, so that the church building itself will not be perceived exclusively as Temple (Dwelling House of God), the tower itself acquires a strong aura of Temple within the church, and this needed to be underlined. The two main symbols of the Temple, in Jewish tradition, are the angels, seraphim, standing guard over the sanctuary, and the Solomonic columns (twisting spiral columns) set before it. Angel statues, each with a musical instrument, stand in the niches set into the piers on the upper level.

The spiral columns are inside, supporting the dome. And since in Gothic architecture one should never look for simple symmetry, I used three different designs for the six columns. Two are a "single twist" (a spiral that returns upon itself at each circuit), two are a double twist (two strands winding around each other), and the remaining two a triple twist. The single and double twist columns have a good deal of ornament carved into them: wheat and vine motifs on the single-twist columns, floral designs on the
double-twist, and they are further decorated with inset glass mosaic pieces in spiral lines that twist around them in imitation of the Cosmatesque mosaic ornament that one commonly finds in Roman churches of the Middle Ages.

The triple-twist columns have a different origin. Mr. Anthony de Castro, architect of the church restoration, Portuguese-born and proud of all things Portuguese, had loaned me a book by Carlos de Azevedo with pictures by Chester E. V. Brummel, *Churches of Portugal* (New York, Scala Books, 1985). In it I found a picture of the Church of Jesus, Setubal. Like much Manuelean architecture in the Portugal of the Age of Exploration, it imitates the rope forms familiar to seafarers in its architectural details, and had rows of triple-twist columns marching down either side of the nave. I copied these, doubling the proportional height so that the three strands wound around each other twice on each column instead of only once as at Setubal. I did not want any further ornament to obscure the reference, as these columns constitute a footnote within the tower in honor of Tony de Castro.

Many details of carving in the tower were suggested by illustrations in *Pugin's Gothic Ornament*, the invaluable 1831 sourcebook of drawings from Gothic buildings by Augustus Charles Pugin (reprinted New York, Dover, 1987). I chose to imitate the ogive (reverse-curve) arches of the St. Jacques tower in Louvain, rather than the simpler pointed-arch design of the earlier tower at St. Pierre, for the cantilevered arches above the paintings and for the top of the upper-level hexagon. A special concern, for which I drew on Pugin's book, was the foliage carving underneath the projecting cantilevered elements. For the flying buttresses connecting that hexagon with its surrounding piers, I was first tempted by the ones around the crown design I had borrowed from Notre-Dame au Sablon in Brussels, but decided instead on those in the central tower of the Church of Saint-Ouen in Rouen, with their cusps extending below the crockets on their ogive sweeps. That tower had other kinds of influence on the top of my tower as well (illustration from Francois Cali, *L'Ordre flamboyant et son temps*, Paris, Arthaud, 1967.)

The door-frames around the grillwork panels have convex strips of openwork carving set over a concave molding. The original model for the vine design came from Pugin. I had to design for myself a wheat pattern to complement it.

**THE PAINTINGS**

I intended that the paintings should be done by someone else. It was only when I realized that no volunteers were coming forward that I ventured on doing them myself.

The tower built in 1450 by Mathijs de Layens for the tabernacle of the Collegiate Church of St. Pierre in Louvaïn had its series of carved stone relief panels designed to relate to the themes of the Eucharist. Shown were the Agony in the Garden, the Betrayal by Judas, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Nailing of Christ to the Cross, and his Death on the Cross. In other words, every one of the scenes related exclusively to the theme of Christ's sacrificial death. Important as that theme is, other themes are as essential to our understanding of the Eucharist. In designing the series of paintings on the St. Theresa tower, I wanted to supplement the sacrifice theme with the banquet theme of Christ's sharing his life and all he has with ourselves, the example of service he gives in the Last Supper and at every stage of his life, and the veneration Christian people bring to the sacrament. Without getting in all the themes I would like, I came out with this sequence of panels:
1. The Marriage Feast at Cana.

2. The Multiplication of the Loaves.

3. The Last Supper.


5. The Disciples at Emmaus Recognizing Christ in the Breaking of the Bread.

6. The Adoration of the Mystical Lamb.

The paintings are done on wood panels over a gesso surface. All the pictures are based on earlier models, in an effort to keep consistent with the stylistic language of the tower, but I've felt free to adapt the traditional iconography. One of my models, that for the Multiplication of the Loaves, gave me a shape for the frame that seemed ideally suited for the position of the panels, each with a 14-inch square surmounted by an S-curve arch, giving each picture a kind of over-story. But the pictures would not work out neatly to this pattern. Two of the themes, interior scenes in narrowly limited spaces, had no use for the overstory, so in those cases I filled the overstory with carved and gilded Gothic tracery over a solid color background.

The Emmaus scene (Right rear) was the first I did, in fact the first time I had ever attempted the painting of human figures, and I followed quite literally the familiar Rembrandt composition from his 1648 painting now at the Louvre in Paris. The two disciples recognize with astonishment the risen Christ, the stranger who has explained to them, from the prophets, his death and resurrection as they walked with him from Jerusalem. Their recognition comes in the breaking of the bread, a sign of the Eucharist he had shared with them at the Last Supper when they last saw him alive.
Next I did the **Marriage Feast at Cana** (Left rear), basing it on a painting, now in New York's Metropolitan Museum, by Juan de Flandres, a Flemish master brought to the Spanish court in the late 15th century. Marked out in the St. John's Gospel (ch. 2) as the first of Christ's miracles, the changing of water into wine, to provide joy at the marriage feast, prefigures the cup of the Eucharist, Christ giving us his life to share among ourselves. I preferred a more symmetrical scene than the original, and so sketched in an additional area to Juan de Flandres' room, and added the further figure of a wine steward.

With my third painting, the **Last Supper**, situated over the front of the tabernacle, I ventured out more freely in adapting my models. The basic scene is derived from the central panel in the Last Supper triptych which Dirk Bouts painted, between 1464 and 1467, for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament at their Collegiate Church of St. Pierre in Louvain, the very church where the eucharistic tower that has been the principal model for my whole project was built. The triptych can still be seen there. I kept pretty much to the arrangement of the Apostles around the large square table, and could not do without the wonderful tile floor (the orthogonal lines of early Renaissance perspective). But there was a duplication problem here. There is a Last Supper stained-glass window in the church, between the chapel and the sanctuary, that shows the moment of communion. I didn't want to compete with that window, and so decided on a foot-washing Last Supper, the example of loving service which, in any case, is a eucharistic theme worth emphasizing in its own right.

Being dependent on models, I found one in a much earlier painting, one of the multiple small scenes of Pacino di Bonaguida's Tree of the Cross altarpiece of around 1310, now in the Academic Gallery at Florence, and this enabled me to move Christ out from his central position behind the table in Dirk Bouts' communion scene, and bring him around in front, where he kneels to wash Peter's feet. (Pacino, in an age of multiple scenes within a single painting, had Christ *both* distributing communion behind the table *and* washing Peter's feet.)
This still didn't finish the matter. I was anxious to use the over-story that my frame permitted, and took up another frequent convention of late Medieval painting, placing the scene of religious significance inside a church. This happens more frequently with portrayals of the Virgin Mary than with other themes, underlining the relation between Mary and the Church. The painting I drew on was just such a Madonna in Church, one side of the diptych painted for the Abbot Christiaan de Handt by an unknown master in 1499, now in the Museum of Fine Arts of Antwerp. This entailed a reorientation of the entire scene, in fact of both scenes, church and supper. It gave me the opportunity to set the scene of the Last Supper and Washing of Feet beneath the lofty Crucifix on the rood screen of the church.

With that taste of freedom, I went much further afield in the three other paintings.

For a scene of the Passion of Christ, the essential sacrifice theme, I had another duplication problem. A massive stained-glass Crucifixion fills the window above the sanctuary in St. Theresa's church.
Choosing once again not to compete with fine work already in the church, I chose a Carrying of the Cross (front Right) finding my model this time in a fresco, the original of which had life-size figures, done between 1365 and 1370 by Spinello Aretino for the Church of Santa Croce in Florence.

I kept the biblical figures in this painting -- Christ, his mother Mary and the group of mourning women, St. John, Simon of Cyrene helping to carry the cross -- and the overall composition, editing out all the haloes that were in the original. Off to the right in Aretino's painting was a nasty gathering of mocking scribes and pharisees, and I didn't want that. Instead I wanted a modern-dress grouping of sympathizers, to balance the mourning biblical women on the left. Two soldiers in splendid armor in the foreground are essentially constitutive of the architecture of the painting, but across the middle ground a throng of soldiers, pouring out from the gate of Jerusalem, hurry Christ along to his death. I had nothing against the Italian soldiers of the 14th century whom Aretino had placed in this position, so I changed them to a series of the persecutors of all ages, beginning with some Roman soldiers, moving along through Goths and Vandals and other predators, to finish with Nazi storm troopers of the 20th century. The cluster of soldiers near the right of the picture comes from what is arguably the most famous photograph from World War II, the Nazi soldiers ushering Jewish children, at gun-point, out of the Warsaw ghetto to their deaths in the gas chambers. Nearby them to the left is a Nazi concentration-camp commandant leading a group of his colleagues on a tour of his realm.

Above the lofty walls of Jerusalem, in Aretino's fresco, rises a stylized Temple of Jerusalem. Once again, my instinct was that this should not be put on the Jews. In handling those New Testament texts that bristle with accusation against the Jews, my rule for preaching is always to take these strictures as directed to the community of faith -- ourselves, the Christians -- and questioning our own faithfulness in living the faith we profess. That question is always more pertinent when we address it to ourselves rather than to someone else. Hence I started looking for a recognizable Christian church to put up over that wall. I was working my way through Gothic cathedrals, when I decided: no, I didn't want to do that. The solution instead was to fill the over-story of the painting with the Tower of Babel, in the form made familiar by Bruegel.
For the **Multiplication of the Loaves**, I had as model the lovely picture by the unknown "Master of St. Catherine," central panel of a triptych on the Miracles of Christ, from the last quarter of the 15th century, now in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. This is the picture that gave me the basic frame shape for all the panels in this series. His group of biblical figures, Christ blessing the loaves and fishes provided by a young boy in the crowd and sending the apostles to distribute them to the people, stand a bit too far back in the picture for my taste, so I brought them forward. Two Apostles distribute the bread, and I kept them, though in different positions, as also the stick figures of Christ preaching from a boat and walking on the waters out on the lake, the heavenly city of promise in the background, and the presiding figure of God the Father in the over-story above.

All the other figures were dressed up for the 15th century, and that had noting to do with my purpose. What I did instead includes identifiable persons. It was a question here: who should be invited to the multiplication of the loaves? It is a question of the local Church in this parish, and of the universal expression, in the Eucharist, of the love of God in Christ, given to all peoples.

I put my own recently deceased parents in the right foreground. Behind them is Sister Virginia Kelleher, headmistress of St. Theresa's school, and with her a number of school children in their uniforms. A bit above, on the right, is a group of Haitian refugees, protesting their incarceration in a Florida camp, drawn from a newspaper photo I found on a front page of *The New York Times*.

Having included them, I looked for a corresponding Asian group, expecting to find a suffering group of Vietnamese. Instead, I found a photo of Korean Catholics, all in their Sunday best, seated on the lawn of a stadium awaiting a Mass during a papal visit to their country.

A group of starving Jewish prisoners, just released from a concentration camp at the end of World War II, stands in the center of the picture. I would have hesitated to include a Jewish group in any other Christian sacramental context, but the multiplication of the loaves is a context to which they too could be invited without any suggestion of proselytism.

Several groups of St. Theresa's parishioners are included, and more parish children. Another photo from *The New York Times* had a trio of Tibetan children in Lhasa, the two older of them holding a
toddler by the hands to teach him to walk, and they had to have their place in this scene. Just below the group of Haitians are several Kurdish refugees coming out over the hills of Northern Iraq during the crisis of 1991, one carrying his young daughter, another his aged father. The agonized woman beside them is a refugee of war in Azerbaijan.

One further picture, at the rear of the tower, is based on Jan van Eyck's famous altarpiece of 1432 for St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, the Adoration of the Mystical Lamb. The Lamb stands on an altar in an open landscape, and is, as in Van Eyck's painting, surrounded by angels bearing the instruments of the Passion -- cross, pillar, scourge, nails, crown of thorns -- while two further angels in the foreground swing golden censers of incense.

But the altar is the one in St. Theresa's church, and the baptismal font in front, with its flowing golden fountain of new life, is the one in St. Theresa's chapel.

Van Eyck included a representation of the whole Church in the three panels of his picture, but I didn't need all that, having it already in the Multiplication of the Loaves picture. Instead, I chose a limited number of figures particularly representative of this parish.

It is venerable custom to include portraits of donors in such pictures as this. Two years after his dear wife Mary's death, when our parish was first preparing for the major restoration of the church, Bill Russo made a generous memorial gift to provide for a new tabernacle. This was well before we had the idea of this tower. The photograph Bill provided when I suggested including his picture and Mary's in this painting showed such devotion between wife and husband that I felt it represented the sacramental beauty of marriage in a very special way. I did my best to represent it so in the right foreground, trying to make up what I could not manage in the expression of the faces by the clasped hands. I would love to have included also Joseph Henzler, whose wife and son, in 1947, had given the parish, as memorial for him, the handsome marble setting which now forms the background to the tower, but I was unable to obtain a picture of him.

Persons who have been of special service in the parish came next: Tom Crosby, who for years headed the St. Vincent de Paul Society; Henry Scagnoli, who supervises the finances of the parish; Richard Bunbury, who provides the music; Susan Abbott, who directs the religious education program.

Clerical figures are prominent in van Eyck's portrayal of the assembled Church. I included, in the middle distance where they are really too small in scale for any attempt at individual faces, Pope John Paul

As parish community, we share with one another our faith and support one another in our pain. Three young men whose early deaths were heartbreak for their loving families kneel in the left foreground, relying on the promises of Christ's giving them himself and the assurance of the resurrection: Danny Murray, whose heart inexplicably failed him early in his college years; Christopher Dyson, victim of an automobile accident on a sad Good Friday afternoon some years ago; and Paul Anderson, for whom the parish prayed at every Sunday Mass through his long struggle with leukemia. After we had already decided to include them in the painting, we were all shocked by the murder of Paul McLaughlin, Assistant District Attorney in Suffolk County and a parishioner of St. Theresa's, shot to death nearby, who lost his life in his effort to protect the children of our most exposed Boston neighborhoods from the plague of drugs.

And because the former communion rail utilized in the construction of the tower was a memorial to parishioners killed in World War II, many soldiers and sailors of that era are included. I wanted to have servicemen of the Korean and Vietnam wars as well, and tried to make them recognizable by using the figures from their monuments in Washington, D.C.

The buildings in the distance are St. Theresa's church and the campus of Boston College. And in the over-story the Holy Spirit presides, as in van Eyck's painting, spreading his golden rays over the scene.

**THE STATUES**
Carving statues was another thing I had not been able to imagine myself doing when I started the tabernacle tower. I figured someone else would have to do that. For about a year I corresponded with some of the woodcarvers in Bethlehem, who carve handsome olive-wood statues for Christmas cribs and other religious uses. I wanted very specific things, which they didn't feel ready to do, so I decided to give it a whirl and see how it would work to carve them myself.

With twelve places for statues around the actual tabernacle level of the tower, the most obvious thing would have been to put the twelve Apostles there, and in fact I had looked about for ready-made Apostle statues. But we already have a rich set of Apostles in the stained glass windows of the church, so something else that would be catechetical, casting light on what we keep in the tabernacle, seemed better. The choice eventually made take some explaining.

I hesitated to have both the Annunciation and the Visitation, Mary and Mary, for the same reason, to keep away from duplication. Yet both these themes -- the Archangel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she has conceived and carries within her the Child who is Son of God and Savior, and Mary's visit to her elderly cousin Elizabeth, pregnant with the child John the Baptist, who recognizes Mary as Mother of her Lord when the child in her own womb leaps for joy -- have much to tell us of who this Jesus is whose sacramental Body we reserve in the tabernacle. That seemed to justify the two Marys side by side.

This was how the medieval sculptors of the great Gothic cathedrals thought. It is a consistent practice that these four figures -- Archangel, Mary, Mary, Elizabeth -- are lined up right beside each other. The example I used as model, pictured here, is from Reims Cathedral, four life-size stone statues beside the principal door of the church. Similar groups appear alongside the doors of the cathedrals of Chartres and Amiens and many others. The commentators on Reims all note that these two pairs of statues seem to be by different sculptors. The carver of the Annunciation figures used relatively simple robes on his statues, and specialized in the radiant Gothic smile that characterizes a special group of 13th-century sculptures. The sculptor of the Visitation worked in a more Classical tradition, with the voluminous robes of Greek and Roman times.

There is a vast difference of scale here, which radically simplifies my figures. The Reims statues have all lost hands over the centuries. The Archangel Gabriel there has lost one of his wings. To fit in the tabernacle niche, his wings had to be differently configured anyway. In the older Gothic tradition, the Archangel carried the scepter, or staff, of a herald. That is what I gave him. Later, in the Renaissance, he was usually shown carrying a lily, but that seemed silly by comparison. I saw no reason for Mary to bring a book along to the Visitation, and preferred that she and Elizabeth should be reaching out to each other.

My figures had to be considerably thinner to fit in their niches, and they had to twist around as much as possible in order to peek around corners. If I had gotten the olive-wood statues that the Bethlehem carvers make, I would have been inclined to leave them in a clear finish, to show the interesting grain of the wood. But the basswood that I used has no very distinct grain -- without any further coloring it gives a very good flesh-tone. I thought it best to color the statues. Gabriel especially, messenger from heaven
announcing the Incarnation of the Son of God, should arrive dressed for the occasion. The original Gothic statues had bright coloring, of which only the faintest traces now remain.

The niches are paired on each pier, and that makes it easy to pair off statues, as I had with the Annunciation and Visitation. The piers on the two sides (four niches in all) represent the **Old Testament sacrifices that are mentioned in the Roman Canon** (the First Eucharistic Prayer of the current Catholic liturgy): Abel, Abraham and Melchisedech. Abel and Melchisedech get one statue each, on the Left pier, Abraham the two niches on the pier to the Right: one in which he prepares to sacrifice Isaac, his son, the other with the angel intervening to stop the sacrifice, providing the ram as alternative offering.

The **First Eucharistic Prayer**, as we use it at Mass, a translation of the old Roman Canon, asks:

"Look with favor on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchisedech."

**Abel**, second son of Adam and Eve, rather than their first son Cain, gained the favor of the Lord. The story is in Genesis, chapter 4: "He [Abel] tended the flock, and Cain worked the land. In due season Cain brought some of the fruits of the earth as an offering to the Lord, while Abel brought the choicest of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord regarded Abel and his offering with favor, but not Cain and his offering." And in his anger, Cain murdered Abel, his brother.

I found it difficult to discover a model for the Abel statue. There were plenty of paintings and statues in the tradition of Cain murdering Abel, but none of Abel offering the lamb from his flock. Eventually I settled on a 15th-century statue by Tilman Riemenschneider, which he presented as John the Baptist carrying the Lamb of God. I figured John and Abel would have looked reasonably alike, and that the Lamb of God reference for Abel's sacrifice was pretty appropriate for prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ.

**Melchisedech** also figures in the book of Genesis, chapter 14. Abraham [Abram] had defeated the four kings who had captured all his flocks and herds, recovered his property and driven his enemies far away. "Then the king of Salem [which would later be Jerusalem, 'Salem' being the word for 'Peace'], Melchisedech [the name means 'The Just King'], brought bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he pronounced this blessing on Abram: 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of the heavens and the earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tithe of all he had won."

The bread and wine offered by Melchisedech have always reminded Christians of the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and Melchisedech himself has been taken as the prototype of the priest, even Christ himself being told, in the words of Psalm 110, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech." The *Epistle to the Hebrews* devotes the whole of chapters 6, 7 and 8 to an explanation of the symbolism of Melchisedech as it applies to the priesthood of Christ.

My model for the Melchisedech statue was a stone relief carving on the inner wall of the Cathedral of Reims, which shows Melchisedech, in the vestments of a Christian priest, offering communion, the
bread and wine, to Abraham, who stands facing him in the next niche at Reims dressed as a Crusader knight. I thought he should have a crown to identify him as King, and dressed him in a chasuble of gold leaf.

Abraham offers the most important of these prefiguring sacrifices. We are still in the Book of Genesis, this time chapter 22, a story commented on in many other parts of the Scripture. "Some time later God put Abraham to the test. 'Abraham!' he called to him, and Abraham replied, 'Here I am!' God said, 'Take your son, your one and only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a sacrifice on one of the heights which I shall show you.' Early in the morning Abraham saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his men and his son Isaac; and having split firewood for the sacrifice, he set out for the place of which God had spoken....

"Abraham took the wood for the sacrifice and put it on his son Isaac's shoulder, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke. 'Father!' he said. Abraham answered, 'What is it, my son?' Isaac said, 'Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for a sacrifice?' Abraham answered, 'God will himself provide a sheep for the sacrifice, my son.' The two of them went on together until they came to the place of which God had spoken. There Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on top of the wood. He reached out for the knife to slay his son, but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham!' He answered, 'Here I am!' The angel said, 'Do not raise you hand against the boy; do not touch him. Now I know that you are a godfearing man. You have not withheld from me your son, your only son.' Abraham looked round, and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns in the brambles. He went, seized the ram, and offered it as a sacrifice instead of his son."

My model for the Abraham and Isaac is a lifesize marble statue by Donatello, one of several he made for the famous campanile, the bell tower designed by Giotto, of the Cathedral of Florence.

Donatello's statue has often been criticized as unsatisfactory, even unfinished. It seems not entirely his work, but largely that of an assistant. It is not clear whether his Abraham is still about to sacrifice his son or has already received the angel's message. But the composition is all Donatello's, and a powerful one. I tried to clear up the ambiguities by making Abraham look astonished as he turns to the angel, and drawing back the knife. An unclothed Isaac like Donatello's didn't seem right for us here at St. Theresa's, much as it would have expressed Isaac's vulnerability.

For the angel, I had no model, but simply sketched out what I thought he should look like, standing on his rock outcropping to give him a little height above Abraham. I almost dressed him in white, then thought of giving him gold, like my Archangel of the Annunciation and like Melchisedech. But that threatened to be too much gold. As compromise, for an angel's work-clothes, I got some silver leaf, and gave him a gold-leaf fringe. It was a bit unplanned, after Abraham got his blood-red clothes, standing in his green niche, that I gave the angel his green wings to contrast with the red niche. And when I made his big head of hair blond, it seemed too much of a cliche. Once I made the hair red, I realized I had a rather Irish angel, with his green wings and red head. For the ram, with its horns tangled in the brambles, I found a model in a painting that I came across with no indication of its source.
For the four niches down below on the two back piers, I had already rather half-heartedly settled on having the four Evangelists, as alternative to possible combinations of John the Baptist and various prophets, when my attention fell on the stained-glass windows of the Cathedral of Chartres. There, in the lancets under the rose window in the North transept, the four Evangelists are riding piggy-back on the shoulders of four Hebrew Prophets: Matthew on Isaiah, Mark on Daniel, Luke on Jeremiah and John on Ezechiel. That was just the thing, a self-explanatory symbolism of the relation between the Old and New Testaments. The stained-glass windows provided only very approximate models for the statues, with the positions of limbs often coming out quite different between the two versions. But it worked, and with the insertion of these last four statues the tabernacle tower can now be pronounced finished, after eight years in the making.

Next to appear on the tower were the angel statues in the set of six niches in the upper story.

When Moses pitched the tent for the Ark of the Covenant in the desert, when Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem, when the Temple was restored after the return from exile in Babylon and when King Herod expanded the Temple to its greatest magnificence, one of the features, described and required in the Scriptures, was that angel figures, the Cherubim, should stand guard over the Holy of Holies. Those angels became, in that way, a principal identifying mark of the Temple, dwelling-place of God, and so sooner or later we had to have some angels on the tabernacle.

(The other traditional mark of the Temple is the Solomonic columns, spiral columns set before the entrance to the sanctuary. It used to be believed, though it was only a legend, that twelve spiral stone columns in the old Constantinian Basilica of St. Peter in Rome had been brought from the Temple in Jerusalem. Those stone columns were used again in the Renaissance rebuilding of St. Peter's and the huge bronze twisting columns that Bernini built to support the baldachin above the papal altar there are over-size copies of them. I took in that symbol earlier in the building of the tabernacle tower, putting the spiral columns inside the grillwork around the tabernacle itself, to support the inner dome.)

I looked at all kinds of angel figures to find a model, and finally settled on one from what is called the Angel Column in the transept of the Cathedral of Strasbourg. Dating from about 1225-1235, this column has three levels of full-size stone figures on all four sides: the lowest level the four evangelists, each standing on a pedestal that contains his symbol; the next level four angels with musical instruments that I would identify as a primitive tuba (it can also carry the name "cornetto"); and the top level three more angels who carry the instruments of the Passion, and on the fourth side a figure of Christ as merciful Judge, showing his wounds and seated on a throne whose base represents the resurrection of the dead.
The first of my angels to be carved has the same instrument as the Strasbourg angels. All of them are dressed in a manner based on those angels. I had already settled, in finishing the angel I carved to go with the Abraham statue down below, on giving these angels silver-leaf suits (with a bit of gold-leaf trim). The musical instruments, all the same at Strasbourg, needed to be varied, so there is one with a trumpet, another with a horn, both of these old versions of these instruments before they began to get bends and valves. The rest have stringed instruments: a lute (the large pot-bellied instrument plucked by hand like a guitar: this was the most common of all instruments for many centuries, brought back to Europe by the crusaders from the Middle East, where it goes by the name "al oud", and in constant use well into the 18th century), a rebec (the smaller pot-bellied instrument, obviously based on the lute but held under the chin and played with a bow like a violin), and a fiddle (another bowed instrument looking more like a violin but actually a somewhat earlier instrument that I got from a 15th-century drawing).

I didn't like the wings on the Strasbourg angels, very stiff and formalized to my way of thinking. (They had to get rid of their haloes too, of course.) I wanted wings that would spread more naturalistically (I trust none of these angels would get the idea that these things would work and make him air-worthy), and break up the straight lines of the upper part of the tower. So I went to Tilman Riemenschneider's and Claus Sluter's various angels and after looking over a lot of them just did what came to mind with the wings of these angels. With these, the tabernacle tower could now be pronounced finished, after eight years in the making.
The reader will have a sense of the glee with which I've gone about the many discoveries and inventions that went into this tower. It was designed as a free-standing structure, with the intention that people should feel free to walk around it and view it from all sides. For a while, the marble reredos of the original side altar was covered over with a drapery, but it was my feeling that that original work, integral to the design of the church, with its Sacred Heart image and the inscription below, complemented the eucharistic theme of the tower beautifully. The narrowness of the step that stood around the tabernacle in its first few years turned out to be a danger. People standing on it to look at features of the tower were likely to step back without realizing the step was there. We widened the step and put the railing in on the sides so that people would not fall off. I have always been anxious to see that things people have contributed to the church as memorial gifts over the years be kept in use. The need for a rail created the opportunity to bring back what had originally been the communion rail in the chapel, and keep that treasured object associated with people's reception of communion.

The tabernacle is meant to give the people of this parish the best of both worlds: the revived sense that the Second Vatican Council gave us of the Eucharist as action, the central active expression of the community's faith, made more intelligible by having the altar stand on its own in the sanctuary, without the complication of the tabernacle, as place of the parish assembly's worship; and at the same time a really splendid celebratory place for the reservation of the consecrated Host, to be a focus for people's private prayer and expression of their belief in the continuing presence of Christ in his Church. May it serve that purpose and give joy for years to come.