

THE STRIPPING OF THE ALTAR

The altar is covered with the symbols of our faith. Each is placed there with purpose and care. They are signs of a faith that is joyous and alive. But tonight, we remember how Jesus was humiliated and suffered before his death. It is not right that the altar remains unaffected.

(At the beginning of Stripping of the Altar,
the candles are extinguished as the Psalm is read.)

Reading: Psalm 22

Jesus was stripped of his clothes and mocked by the soldiers. Then they led him out to be crucified. We therefore strip the altar of its life and meaning – as was our Lord.

Flags and banners have always been a symbol of a king's realm and the royal presence. Jesus said, "*My kingdom does not belong to this world.*"

Our King goes out to suffer. His presence is taken away. Remove the flags and the banner.

The offering plates are symbols of our thankfulness to God. We give because God first gave to us—from the depth of God's love. John said, "*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...*" **Jesus goes out to offer himself to us. Take the offering plates away.**

At his Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, "*I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*" As they ate bread and drank wine, he gave the meal a new meaning. "*This is my body... this is my blood...*" he said.

Our Lord goes to drink the cup of woe. Take away the bread and wine, just as Jesus was taken away to suffer and die.

The missal stand holds the altar book of worship, and the Scripture readings rest on the lectern where the Word of God is read.

John wrote, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"

The One we worship will be rejected. The Word made flesh goes to stand silent before his accusers. Remove the missal stand, the altar book, and the Scripture readings.

In his life, Jesus showed us how to live as children of God. He brings brightness and joy to our lives. As he said, "*I am the light of the world; any who follow me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.*"

Our Lord goes to Calvary where the light of his life will be snuffed out. Take the candles away.

The cross is lovely and empty. The four Evangelists state, "*They crucified him.*" Jesus went out carrying his own cross, to hang there and die. His death is not lovely; his cross is not empty.

Our Savior goes to give his life as a ransom for all. He bids us to take up our cross and follow him. Take the altar cross away.

David wrote in the Psalm, "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*" The altar is a banquet table where our Lord is the host. Here we are in the presence of the King—only the finest will do here. So, the altar and furnishings are covered with fine linen and beautiful adornment.

But the meal is over. Our Host, our King goes to the cross. Strip the altar bare.

BENEDICTION

Jesus said, "*I will not leave you desolate: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also.*"

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.
Amen.

Darkness... silence....

(The congregation is asked to leave in silence.)