

# THE KEYS



Church of St. Peter the Apostle  
Anglican Catholic Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic States  
[www.dmas-acc.org](http://www.dmas-acc.org)

The Rev. Canon Peter Geromel, OHI, DMin - Rector  
September 2023  
<https://stpetersacc.org>

## The Rector's Ramble (In and out of Brambles)

"The English Altar," complete with Dorsal/Dossal Curtain and Riddel Screens, what on earth?



Since my arrival here, it has been my hope that we could enhance the area around the Altar and accentuate our brilliant crucifixion icon. To do so would focus our eyes better towards the center, towards the altar. The altar is the, rightly, very center and focus of the church building. "Inasmuch as the Liturgy is the centre of the Church's worship, it is well to remember that the temple is provided for the altar and not the altar for the church: this view has been held from the beginning. The altar is therefore the focal point of the building."<sup>1</sup> An oriental carpet (very common in churches and derived first from Armenian Christian custom) was the first stage towards focusing the eyes on the center, where the altar is, rather than a wide sea of green carpet. For almost as long as I have been your priest we have discussed, slowly and intermittently, a reredos or backdrop of some sort in addition to our icon cross. Now vestry is seriously considering the first (of what

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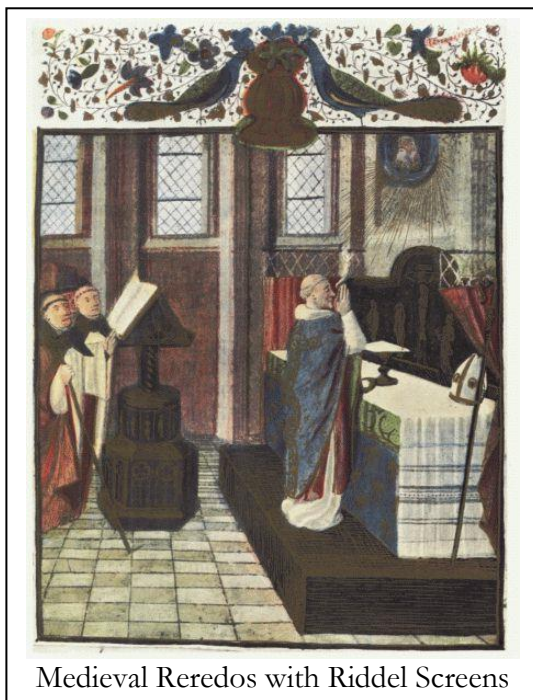
<sup>1</sup> "The Catholic Altar," Liturgy in the Parish: Six Leaflets for Popular Use By members of the Alcuin Club (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 33.

could be several) dorsal or dossal curtain (or upper frontal) and riddel screens. First of several because they are easily enough sewn and can be changed out like the altar frontals, if we wish, according to liturgical season. What are they and what is their history and significance?

In Exodus 26 and 27 we read about the Tabernacle and the Holy of holies, and the Altar. Different segments of this mobile place of Hebrew worship in the Wilderness were made up of curtains and veils – a tent really. In the early Christian churches, some aspects of this were, at some point, employed. Even today, in the Greek and Russian, Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, and Syrian churches, sanctuary veils are used to cover the front of the Holy of holies, or sanctuary, where the altar is. These are drawn back liturgically, at various times. Not surprisingly, this was the case in the Western church as well, at some point. “Above [the altar] was a canopy supported upon pillars between which, for the sake of protection and dignity, curtains were suspended and, during the most solemn moments of the Liturgy, closely drawn.”<sup>2</sup> Such canopies became fixed and solid items eventually at basilicas and even at St. Peter’s in Rome. “By the fourteenth century miniatures and contemporary accounts show that in many places there remained the four columns around the altar, together with their connecting beams and rods, but the canopy itself had been either raised high above them or removed altogether; between the pillars three of the four original curtains continued, but the westernmost” covering the area in front of the altar “had disappeared.”<sup>3</sup> This is the origin, in brief, of the Dossal Curtain and Riddel Screens.



Riddel Screens and Upper Frontal for Lent according to the Medieval English tradition



Medieval Reredos with Riddel Screens

Indeed, once upon a time, the altar was away from the east end a bit and there would be shrines behind it, where some cathedrals today have a “Lady Chapel”. The pilgrims and those wishing to venerate the relics behind the altar could go around behind the altar (which was away from the east wall) and do so, but, for decency’s sake, a reredos of some sort would be raised up high and the riddel screens would remain, to guard the dignity of the main altar. Indeed, at one time, the processional cross would even be set up on a stand behind the altar after the acolytes and sacred ministers processed there. The holy week veneration of the cross presumes that the crucifix to be venerated would be set up, peeking above the curtains and Lenten white veil (which was set up during this holiest time of the year) and then brought down to be venerated by the faithful. There was no “altar cross” as we know it now! Similarly, all altars in the eastern churches are away from the wall so that the sacred ministers can process around or move behind as needed for liturgical functions. It was so in the West as well.

Why is our traditional Anglican altar so close to the wall then? In England, the altars were set up snugly against the walls in the 1600s under Archbishop Laud’s direction. At the start of the Reformation, the altar tables had been brought further out away from the east

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 35.

wall and set up in the chancel so that those receiving communion could gather around. But the dignity of the altar was found to be violated and profaned a generation or so after the Reformation and, for dignity's sake, Archbishop Laud, following what was for him contemporary Roman and Lutheran practice in Europe, had them returned again and set even more closely against the east wall and an altar rail set up. Centuries later, some, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wishing to return to the medieval practice and, in some respects, the early Church practice, reinstituted the Dossal Curtain and Riddel Screen. It is not so well known in America as it is in England. It did not catch on as much in the Episcopal Church, but we have some fine examples from the 1920s in America of this brilliant practice.

The plans being discussed by Vestry include treatment of the fabric for fire resistance and a Fire Marshall certificate licensing us in this regard.

### *News and Information*

September 13<sup>th</sup> - Vestry Meeting at 7:30 PM, preceded by Mass at 7 PM. Poem Study meets at 6 PM, prior to mass rather than after!

September 17<sup>th</sup> - Bilbo Baggins Birthday Party, 4 PM.

September 21<sup>st</sup> - St. Matthew's Mass, 12 Noon.

September 25<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> - Fall Clericus meeting at St. Peter's.

September 28<sup>th</sup> - Michaelmas, 12 Noon.

SEPTEMBER, 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>LEGEND: HC - Holy Communion; FHE – Festal Holy Eucharist; HE - Holy Eucharist; SS – Sunday School; PG - Prayer Group; EP – Evening Prayer; MP – Morning Prayer; P&amp;HU – Prayers and Holy Unction</b>					[1]	[2]  5:00 p.m. HC
[3] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE  TRINITY XIII	[4]	[5]	[6]  6:00 p.m. HC	[7]  12 noon HC	[8]	[9]  5:00 p.m. HC
[10] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS  TRINITY XIV	[11]	[12]	[13]  6:00 p.m. Poem study 7:00 p.m. HC 7:30 p.m. Vestry	[14]  12 noon HC	[15]	[16]  5:00 p.m. HC
[17] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS  4:00 p.m. Bilbo party  TRINITY XV	[18]	[19]	[20]  6:00 p.m. HC	[21]  12 noon HC	[22]	[23]  5:00 p.m. HC
[24] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS  TRINITY XVI	[25]	[26]	[27]  6:00 p.m. HC	[28]  12 noon HC	[29]	[30]  5:00 p.m. HC

IN THE LORD'S SERVICE

If you cannot fulfill your assigned duty because of an urgent reason, PLEASE SECURE A REPLACEMENT.

	September 3	September 10	September 17	September 24	October 1
<b>Coffee Hour</b>	C. Pappas	V. Williams	C. deRosset	L. Olver	B. Von Claparede
<b>Sat. Epistoler 5</b>	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield
<b>Epistoler 8 a.m.</b>	C. Von Claparede	G. Mauney	D. Drysdale	C. Von Claparede	D. Drysdale
<b>Epistoler 10 a.m.</b>	P. Williams	T. Paisley	G. Terrell	P. Williams	T. Paisley

**Altar servers and ushers will be assigned as available before each service.**

2023 Vestry (term end): Allen Butterfield (?25), Dan Drysdale (?23), Lisa Olver (?24),  
Ted Paisley (?24), Mike Slayton (?25), Phil Williams (?23)