

desert? Yes, *“Make a seraph and mount it on a pole...”* (Num. 21:8-9) Was the seraph meant to become a god? No. It showed, rather, the power of God and God’s intercession following Moses’ pleading on behalf of the people. We’re told in First Kings, (Chpt 6 & 7), of how cherubim, fruits, the sea, and animals were crafted. These too, not meant to become idols, were to direct one’s thoughts solely to God who created all things.

### Statues, Icons, and Paintings

Just as we use photos of family and friends, so too, do we use statues, icons and paintings to point us to our God. They are the ones who lived well the commandments, and now, through their prayer, encourage us to remain on the path that leads to salvation through Jesus Christ (see *Communion of Saints, A Church Mission, No. 9, Nov. 1, 2009*)



Do we make these statues idols? Do we pray to the saints as if they are God? Do their artful depictions replace God? They’re not meant to, anymore than a picture we snap with a phone is to be a distraction from God. They are reminders of a greater reality — of who God is, what God does, and what God will do for us who see Jesus as, *“the image of the invisible God.”* (Col. 1:15)

### Today’s Idols

We’re more likely to find false idols in the world in which we live, than in the churches in which we worship. Statues point to God and his plan for our salvation. The idols the world offers point to a very temporary fulfillment in this life. We don’t need to look far. A good, truthful

examination of conscience will show us what we place before God. Sports may fight financial security as the greatest modern idol festering in our society. This is not to condemn sports or financial security. But these, along with other things that control our minds, lives, our existence, can be idols carved into our psyche that must be banished when they come before God in any way, shape, or form. Power, a new car, greed, sex, stock options, gluttony, envy, lust, only begin the list of what controls us and moves us away from having **God First**.

Santa Claus may have come from the righteous pattern of St. Nick. But today’s culture has greatly altered and diminished its significance as an action of faith lived in union with the God who gives. Cultural mentality will attempt to move us from God, and from those things that would help us live life in the image of the unseen God, whose love never ends.

### That Creche’

What used to be considered wrongful in the eyes of many Christians, can now be found in their own yards, homes, and churches. That’s okay. It’s good, and Catholics don’t have a stranglehold on using statues to remind us of God’s love. We should be thankful that understanding of the use of statues, icons, and pictures has grown and is now appreciated by all who desire God in every life moment.

If we are upset that public displays of an important religious symbol — a group of statues — are no longer permitted, look to your front yard. Is there an image or an idol telling about your Christmas? Remember, we have far more private yards than we do public places.

## A Mission Church

*We started “A Church Mission” in September with the goal of helping us realize that the Church has always been — and is now in desperate need to be — a Mission Church. We’ve tried, in simplified words, to teach, to update, to reaffirm, what we as Catholics profess and believe. Many weeks were spent in again affirming the work of the Church, the People of God, in our celebration of the mass and Eucharist. This act, so central to our faith, is often mentioned as the main reason for many people returning to the practice of the faith or choosing to live the Catholic faith. It should move us to more fully live the life of Christ.*

*When we reflect on the early missionaries of this country, we can only imagine the many difficulties faced. The Native Americans were steeped in images of pagan gods, and now, a God is being introduced who looked like them. Their new images and symbols*

*would point to a God of love and the great reality which came alive for them in the Eucharist.*

*May our work as a Mission Church continue to enliven others with the power of the Eucharist. May we continue to grow in the understanding of our own profession of faith, that we may always be missionaries in a world seeking a God so often trapped behind the pagan gods of our own culture.*

*As the mission Church found the Native Americans embracing the faith and recreating its culture to reflect its faith, so too must we continue to grow in faith and seek ways to make Christ known for all. It’s the perfect reason to celebrate Christmas.*



# A Mission Church

## STATUES, IMAGES, and IDOLS

When the Greeks carved statues to remember important persons, they did so with a completely acceptable style. It didn't matter whether the person was thin or frail, thick and chunky, or outright fat. All men were carved with firm muscles and athletic builds while the women were displayed as appropriately blessed. The Romans didn't try to make someone he or she was not. If fat was seen, fat was carved. The glamorization of an individual just didn't happen.

Society has always dictated to some degree or another how art would be accepted. Picasso in the seventeenth century would not have survived. And so it is, that we now have many statues and paintings in our churches and religious background that probably do not provide true and accurate depictions of the person, even that of Jesus. But that's okay. They were created during a period of religious fervor and were to represent the holiness of God in some way.

So why do we have statues, paintings, icons (Greek meaning "image")? And, on the flip side of the coin, why do many Christians and non-Christians say that these should not exist and go against the first commandment of God given to Moses?

### The Commandment of God

*"I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. Exodus 20:2-5*

### The Creche' as a Perfect Example

It's hard to imagine that any Catholic Church or household has not had a Creche' (also see Manger or Nativity) present since the time of St. Francis of Assisi. From the time of that great saint, until our modern technology of mass production took place, many were homemade.

Perfect reproductions of that first Christmas, they were not. Today we find even the shepherds trimmed in gold by some artists instead of the ratty clothing that truly told the story of their poverty. Mary and Joseph look refreshed like they just came off a vacation instead of having just delivered a baby. The Magi (see Three Kings, Wise Men, or Astrologers), who traveled very long distances from the East, don't look any worse for the journey and often look like they stayed in a Holiday Day Inn Express.

### They're not Idols!

The statues of a Creche' are not crafted for the purpose of becoming idols. If they were, then we would be in defiance of this first commandment. But as the commandment states, *"You shall not carve idols for yourselves..."* The statues of a Creche' are used to tell a story, a story of God's last revelation meant for man's salvation. The statues are not God. But God is at the center of it all. Nor do we pray to the statues. They cannot provide the life of God, hear our prayers, or answer our cries.

When we properly enter into Christmas, we are not awaiting the birth of the Lord. We are remembering God becoming man, an act that finds its fulfillment in what is essential to all Christians — Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, all of which is God's working in our lives today through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### God's Own Directives

If we were to look at the following passages, we'd have to say that God directed Moses and Solomon to break his own commandments. Exodus (25:18-20) tells of God's orders to build a sanctuary in which God could live in their midst. The cover was to include two cherubim of solid gold. They were crafted, as instructed, so God and Moses could meet between them. They were not idols, becoming gods. The same is true when we consider Exodus 26:1, where the description and instruction for the Meeting Tent was given. The linen cloths were to have *"cherubim embroidered on them."*

What was Moses instructed to do after pleading for God's mercy following the Israelites' complaining in the



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