



1. Aumbries and Things

What is an aumbry for? An aumbry is a small cupboard or safe built into a wall, particularly in a church, where it is used for the safekeeping of consecrated items. In St Mary's, there is one in the wall of the Lady Chapel. It contains three flasks of oil blessed by the Bishop, some water from the River Jordan, and, most importantly, a small box (a pyx) of Communion bread and a flask of wine, both of which will have been consecrated at a regular service of Holy Communion.

The practice of keeping consecrated bread and wine is called 'the reservation of the Sacrament'. If any members of the congregation are unable to attend the Eucharist in church through sickness or infirmity, an authorised minister may administer the sacrament to them at their homes.

Reservation of the sacrament in English churches was suppressed at the Reformation as tending towards 'superstition', but revived by the Oxford Movement in the last century, when it led to much controversy and even litigation in the Church Courts. Reservation was eventually allowed, most usually for communion of the sick, though also in some parishes for veneration.

Apart from aumbries, the sacrament may also be reserved in a tabernacle, i.e. an aumbry set on the altar, or a hanging pyx, i.e. a container suspended from the roof above the altar, a practice widespread in England before the Reformation.

A light, in a church, symbolically denotes the presence of Christ, the Light of the World. The purpose of the sanctuary lamp kept burning before the aumbry in St Mary's is to signify the presence of the Holy Sacrament. Some Christians believe God as Christ to be present in a special way in the substance of the consecrated bread and wine (this is known as 'the Real Presence'). The lamp alerts those who follow that tradition to show veneration to the Sacrament, usually by genuflecting, i.e. bending the knee as an expression of the abasement of the self before God.