

Roughly half an hour off of I-65 in northern Alabama, situated in a rural area of Coleman county on the top of a hill is the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Inside is the largest monstrance in the Western Hemisphere, the second largest in the world.

Built between 1996 and 1999 at the direction of Mother Angelica of EWTN fame, the Shrine is remarkable in that it is situated in the middle of the Bible Belt.

Just off the parking lot, is what appears to be a garden walk. Viewed from above it is in the shape of a ciborium or a monstrance - the sacred vessel used to contain the Blessed Sacrament. In stations set up around this garden are images and Scriptural reflections - 6 from the Old Testament, 6 from the New Testament - tracing the Biblical history of the Holy Eucharist.

They are titled: The Stations of Eucharist ... and I'd like to run through them briefly.

The first is titled: MELCHIZEDEK, THE KING OF SALEM: FORESHADOWING OF A EUCHARISTIC PRIESTHOOD. In the first book of the Bible - Genesis - Abraham encounters this mysterious priest of God Most High, who offers bread and wine as a sacrifice.

The second is: THE JEWISH PASSOVER: THE PASCHAL LAMB: PREFIGUREMENT OF THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE. Taken from the book of Exodus, as the Israelites prepare to depart Egypt, they are protected by the blood of the lamb.

The third is: THE MANNA: PREFIGUREMENT OF THE EUCHARIST, THE NEW MANNA. Manna was the heavenly bread that fed the Israelites for 40 years in the desert as they wandered on their way to the promised land.

The fourth is: THE OLD TEMPLE: PREFIGUREMENT OF THE EUCHARIST, GOD DWELLING AMONG MEN. The Temple in Jerusalem was a magnificent structure that housed the Holy of Holies - where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and sacrifices and prayers were offered to God throughout the day.

The fifth is: ELIJAH AND THE HEARTH CAKES: PREFIGUREMENT OF THE EUCHARIST, FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY. When Elijah fled the wrath of Queen Jezebel, God provided the prophet food for his journey.

The sixth is: BETHLEHEM, THE HOUSE OF BREAD: BIRTHPLACE OF THE BREAD OF LIFE. Bethlehem, birthplace of King David, and birthplace of our Savior Jesus Christ ... the name Bethlehem means "House of Bread."

At this point, the Stations move to the New Testament with the seventh: THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA: WATER TO WINE, WINE TO BLOOD. This is Jesus' first recorded miracle, and the first sign in John's Gospel.

The eighth is: MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES: THE EUCHARIST, FOOD FOR THE MULTITUDES. Jesus' miracles throughout the Gospels foreshadow the eternal banquet in heaven.

The ninth, which we heard in today's Gospel is: THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE: JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE.

The tenth is: THE LAST SUPPER: PROMISES FULFILLED.

The eleventh is: THE ROAD TO EMMAUS: JESUS, RECOGNIZED IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD. All images from the Gospel that point us to the Eucharist.

And finally, THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB: THE EUCHARIST IS THE PLEDGE OF ETERNAL LIFE. From the Book of Revelation.

Each of these "Stations" point to the Eucharistic bread and wine which we offer in sacrifice at every Mass ... and receive as Jesus Christ: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Celebrated roughly 70 days after Easter.

It is our understanding that the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, is the source and summit of our Christian life. It is the supreme Sacrament, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament signs. It is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in our midst ... fulfilling His promise to be with us always.

Whereas Holy Thursday commemorated the institution of the Eucharist, today we celebrate the continual and enduring Presence of Christ in His Most Sacred Body and Blood.

And as we approach this altar, to receive Him in this Most Sacred Food ... the Holy Bread of Eternal Life ... and the Chalice of Everlasting Salvation ... let us ask for ... and receive ... the blessings of mercy, love, and grace ... poured out for us and for our salvation.