
What Makes a Place Sacred?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

I hope all of us have special places in our life. It might be where, as a child, we built a fort or a dollhouse. It might have been that cozy chair where we learned to enjoy mystery stories. It might have been where we had that first kiss. Special places are memorable.

But, what makes a place more than that? What makes a place sacred” really holy? That is to say, what makes it set apart? What makes it somehow blessed?

Sacred places are where we meet something beyond ourselves. They are not always conventionally religious places. I think of the beaches of Normandy, or even many of the battlefields of the Civil War. Men lost their lives in those places; they gave up everything they had, for a cause. It is their very devotion, a devotion to something beyond their individual comforts and their future successes, that has made those bloody places holy. Sacred places are costly places.

I think of awesome places outside our comfortable homes that we call holy. Wide beaches, where our eye meets the mystery of the horizon. Mountain views, where the clouds move constantly into new and mesmerizing configurations. And, of course, I think of churches.

Traditionally, of course, churches are expected to be holy. Even if one is not traditional, one thinks of churches as holy. Even a non-churchgoer expects to walk into a church and feel something different, even if he or she has never been there before.

And they are. Churches are holy. Our Cathedral of St. Philip is sacred. But our building, our sacred space, is not holy only because of expectation or architecture or silence or time apart.

Our cathedral is holy because holy things have happened there. And the buildings know it. Those events and experiences are real; they make a difference. At the Cathedral, people's births have been celebrated, and their deaths have been mourned. At the Cathedral, we have rejoiced in good and boisterous times; and we have been disappointed with pain and betrayal.

In churches, prayers have been offered. Weddings and meals have been offered. Even bitterness and anger have been offered. All those offerings make the actual, physical place holy. The actual physical place has provided the space for our human struggle to meet divine grace.

Every time you offer a prayer at the Cathedral of St. Philip, you help make the place holy. Every time you rejoice here, every time you cry here, you make the place holy. And every time it costs you to be here, you are consecrating this space. Yes, holiness costs something; it always does. Holy places occur when we have paid something, when we have given something, when we have left something of ourselves here. Thus, as always this time of year, I ask you to give financially; if you want to

know holiness, give something.

In a few days, we will invite the homeless of Atlanta into our sacred space. We will remember those who have died on the streets of Atlanta at our annual Requiem Eucharist for the Homeless, on November 1, All Saints Day. If you have not been part of this dramatic evening, you should come and offer something. The homeless do. They bring their struggle, and their pain, and they even make financial offerings at the Offering; they give what they have. In so doing, their prayers too, and their lives, become part of what makes the Cathedral of St. Philip a sacred place. Welcome them on November 1. Together, all of us, continue to make this a sacred place.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Reverend Sam Candler

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