

Several years ago as we were planning the renovation of our church, people asked, “Will we have to lose our tree?” We had a big maple in front of the building that provided shade from the sun and beauty for the eye. In the end, we cut down three trees – two in front of the church and one in front of the rectory. But a lot of people felt attached to that big maple, so we looked for ways that it could live on. Now it will, in three different ways. First, many members have purchased seedlings from that tree, as part of the “Munchin Maples” project. New trees in many yards around Cameron are children of the one that used to stand in front.

Second, we saved the trunk. The Mennonite carpenters who built our altar furnishings and new pews have now finished the new cross that you see hanging over the altar of our church today. It holds the same cross that used to be on the wall by the front door of the church. That was a gift from Gertrude O’Connor many years ago.

Third, there was enough wood left over from the tree that the carpenters are making small crosses that we will soon have available for use as devotional items at home. So yes, we lost our tree, but we gained something more.

Catholics have a tradition of hanging a crucifix in our churches. A lot of other Christian churches hang a cross without an image of Christ. It’s not like we believe in the death of Christ and they believe in the resurrection. We all share the same faith in that regard. In fact you can’t have one without the other. The death of Jesus is a tragedy without the resurrection, and the resurrection has its power because it follows death. Catholics have found much consolation by meditating on the suffering of Christ because it reassures us that God understands our suffering and promises a greater glory.

We’re supposed to celebrate mass in the presence of an image of Christ on the cross. That’s why we have been placing the processional cross in the sanctuary. Now, though, we have a permanent image of the crucified Christ above the altar, so the cross that leads the procession will be set to the side during mass. Whenever we use incense, we will incense this cross together with the altar. The altar is the place where we participate in the sacrifice of Christ, which is so powerfully represented by the cross.

On the last Sunday of each church year, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, we profess our belief that Jesus is Lord because of his incarnation, death and resurrection. Saint Paul says to the Corinthians, “Christ has been raised from the dead. In Christ all shall be brought to life. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father. . . . The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

This particular cross will always remind us of death and resurrection. The maple tree that gave life to the front of our church has died. But it has received new life, a central place to focus our faith when we come to worship. The cross of Christ proclaims the resurrection.