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Growing up in both Singapore and Australia as a Eurasian meant feeling neither really "at home" in the Asian or Western worlds. Instead, my Eurasian cultural identity is tied closely to religion – the most common in the local Eurasian community being the Catholic faith.

Key moments of our upbringing are marked by the sacraments of the church. We spend the days counting down to Christmas – the time of year that Eurasian traditions are showcased in all its *Kristang*-influenced glory. (The *Kristang* community have mixed Malay Portuguese heritage.)

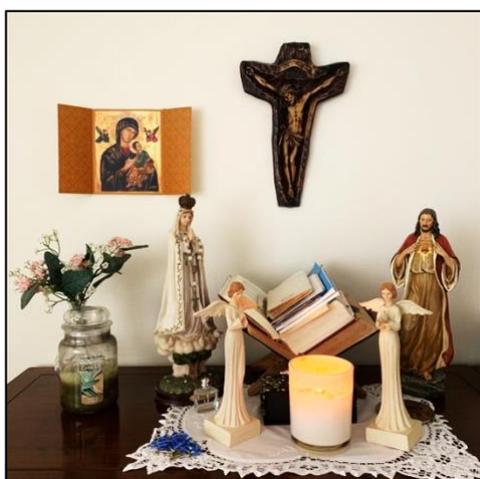


Celebrating Christmas with the family

The Catholic faith is steeped deeply in art and symbols, where a multitude of imagery and prayer items form the décor of grand cathedrals and churches, and even humble households.

Our daily lives usually revolve around passing by an ornament of the Sacred Heart or a crucifix on the front door, a picture of the Last Supper by the dining

table, and a home altar in a corner, adorned with various statues of Jesus, Mother Mary, or various Saints, along with rosary beads, dried palm leaves, a candle, and sometimes fresh flowers.



Home altar

The home altar is a place of personal and family worship. It is where daily prayers and worries are laid, and where words of gratitude are spoken. The home altar is personalised and differs in every household.

In my home, it is currently found in my parent's bedroom, and offers a feeling of comfort and peace whenever you enter the room (but that's not to say that religious décor does not permeate the rest of the house too).

The home altar has become as permanent a fixture in my idea of "Home" as any other piece of lived-in furniture. And with "Home" in mind, I was immediately drawn to the Altar Sideboard that once was used for Taoist deity worship and ancestor worship, and later converted for Catholic prayer and contemplation.

Its gilded teak frame is intricately carved with the three stellar gods of Daoism: Hock (God of Happiness), Lock (God of Wealth), and Siew (God of Longevity). Surrounding these deities are common symbols of the Peranakan Chinese – auspicious Chinese carvings of the dragon, phoenix, and *qilin* – the mythical



Altar sideboard.

Singapore, early 20th century. Gilded teak, paper, glass mirrors. ACM, 2005-01479, Purchased with funds from Friends of ACM through Gala Dinner 2005

creature usually depicted with features of various animals. At its heart is an image of the Holy Family, one of the key devotional images in Catholicism.

Cross-cultural and multi-religious all at once, this altar sideboard signifies to me what it means to be at a crossroads between the Asian and Western worlds – always adapting and shifting your ideas of self and beyond.

I imagine it belonged to a household that was steadfast when it came to the need for devotion and gratitude, but open-minded enough to accept where their search for faith led them. Where it might have once held prayer bowls, joss sticks, and offerings, these were later replaced by Catholic figurines, rosaries, and a bible. But no matter the prayer items, the altar was the heart of the house – where one could seek peace, give thanks, and truly feel "at home" with their identity.