

Thurifer

Incense Bearer

The use of incense is an ancient tradition in Jewish and Christian liturgy. This fragrant smoke is rich in symbolism of the Deity, of purification, and the ascent and durability of prayers to God by His people. For the Church, burning incense is a symbol of repentance and prayer, and it is also used to honor certain liturgical items and to honor all worshipers and worship leaders. If one could possibly visualize prayer, incense comes closest to the concept: this great, powerful whitish cloud billowing up and thinning out. Prayer, like incense, not only travels up, it travels out.

Basic description and duties

As the server charged with this responsibility, remember that you should deport yourself with dignity and humility. This is not the place for theatrical displays.

Preparing the Thurible

The following preparations occur in the sacristy:

- Line the thurible with foil to ease clean-up.
- *At least fifteen minutes before the service begins*, take a single piece of charcoal in the tongs; use a match or taper to light the charcoal. (It is usually easier to light if the briquet is held at a 90 degree angle to the surface and the match or taper is held “on edge”.)
- Self lighting charcoal can sometimes give off a shower of sparks, so be careful!
- The charcoal should be placed in the thurible with the ridged side up.
- The charcoal will develop a white surface as it burns.

Holding the Thurible for Processions

- All Souls has two types of thuribles, a single chain type and a multi-chain type; the single chain type is easier to control.
- To grip the thurible, hold the hand out straight, palm at right angle to the floor.
- Spread the fingers slightly and grasp the chain just below the ring; the spread of the fingers down the chain increases control of the swing.
- Try to avoid placing the thumb or fingers through the ring.
- Using the wrist as a pivot, swing the thurible in a gentle arc, taking care to keep the arm high enough to avoid the thurible hitting the floor. Try to avoid excessive movement of the elbow and shoulder
- At corners, control is improved by converting the swing into a tight circular motion as you turn; try to avoid hitting the furniture at all times.

Gripping the Thurible for Censing

- Extend the left hand, palm facing up; drape the chain over the left hand.
- The thurible will be in front of your left hand, extending down a few inches; continue to hold the chain in your right hand.
- Grasp the chain against the palm of the hand, swinging the thurible by a slight rotation of the wrist; allow the chain to play loosely in the right hand so that it hits the body of the thurible with the swing to create a musical sound.
- Always remember to bow before and after the act of censing.
- *A Final Caution: The thurible is hot. Use care in handling it to avoid burns.*

The Entrance Procession

- Carry thurible to the back of the nave; if there is a boat bearer, that acolyte will carry the incense boat and spoon; if not the thurifer will carry it in the free hand against the chest.
- Immediately before the procession, present the incense boat to the priest, who will place a spoonful of incense in the thurible and bless it. Close the lid after the blessing.
- Assume your place at the head of the procession; the boat bearer should be at your side away from the thurible.
- The procession will normally begin at the first verse of the hymn (after the prelude); however, if the hymn is short, you should determine whether the Celebrant wishes to begin the procession during the prelude.
- The thurifer should establish the pace of the procession—one of unhurried dignity.
- Walk swinging the thurible in a gentle arc; pause and reverence briefly at the center of the sanctuary entrance and turn right, taking care not to hit the pews with the thurible.
- *Remember at this point you are still in view of the congregation and continue at a dignified pace swinging the thurible until you reach the passageway to the sacristy.*
- Place the thurible on the counter, leaving the top aside to prevent build-up of residue and sticking of the top; close the sacristy door to keep the smoke out of the chancel.
- Enter the choir area; access is easier to the sacristy from the Epistle side if space is available; if not cross over, reverence the altar, and enter the choir pews on the Gospel side.

The Gospel Procession

- Go to the sacristy at the end of the Psalm; get the thurible from the sacristy (there should be enough incense remaining from the entrance procession, but you may need to add some). Remember to reverence the altar on your way to the sacristy.
- Remain out of sight until the end of the Epistle.
- Go with the thurible to the center of the sanctuary entrance immediately at the end of the Epistle; pause briefly and reverence the altar.
- Turn and take position near the top of the chancel steps; turn to face the altar.
- Crucifer will take position between you and the altar.
- When the book acolyte turns, turn and begin the procession down the center aisle.
- Two pews before the second structural column stand aside on the Epistle side, facing the aisle; remainder of the party will pass you. (The Alleluia Tract may end before you reach this spot.)
- You should be standing slightly behind the deacon or priest, who will be facing the back of the nave.
- After the elevation of the book, grasp the chain a short length above the thurible, bow to the deacon or priest and present the thurible for censuring of the book.
- Bow when the deacon or priest returns the thurible.
- Keep the thurible moving in a gentle circular motion during the reading.
- After the reading, lead the procession back to the chancel, pause briefly at the sanctuary entrance, reverence the altar and return the thurible to the sacristy
- At this point, you will need to add charcoal to the thurible.
- Add a coal, lighting it as directed above.
- Leave the top aside to prevent build-up.
- Return to the sanctuary, close the sacristy door, and return to your seat for the homily.

The Offertory

Preparing for and serving during the Offertory

- Go to the sacristy after the Peace; get both the thurible and incense boat.
- At the end of the offertory anthem, go to the sanctuary entrance, reverence, and enter the sanctuary; stand on the Epistle side between the rail and the sedilia.
- After the presentation of the oblations and alms, come forward and hand the incense boat to the priest.
- Lift the top, holding the thurible by the chain at a level for the priest to place incense in it.
- Priest will return the boat to you and bless the thurible.

- After the blessing, close the top and hand the thurible to the priest, bowing.
- If there is no boat bearer, place the boat on the Epistle side radiator. Otherwise, the boat bearer will carry the boat during the censuring and return it to the sacristy.
- Priest will cense the altar and return the thurible to you.

Censuring the celebrant and assistant(s)

- Go to the front center, facing the altar.
- Bow to the celebrant and assisting priests/deacons (as a group) before censuring.
- Swing the thurible three times to cense the celebrant; two times to cense the deacon (whether an ordained priest or deacon); and once for the sub-deacon.)
- Bow after censuring.

Censuring the sanctuary acolytes

- Remain in position, turn to the Gospel side, bow to the acolyte(s) and swing the thurible once in this direction; bow after censuring.
- Still remaining in position, turn to the Epistle side and repeat as above.
- Reverence the altar and turn to face the congregation.

Censuring the choir and congregation

- Walk down the chancel steps to the center floor of the nave; turn to face the altar.
- Turn slightly to the Gospel side and bow; swing the thurible once and bow.
- Turn to the Epistle side and repeat.
- After the bow, walk up the chancel steps, turn, face the congregation, and bow. Swing the thurible once down the center aisle, once to the Epistle side, and once to the Gospel side. Bow to the congregation.
- Turn and walk up the chancel to the sanctuary entrance and reverence. Go to the sacristy to secure the thurible.
- Return to your seat and kneel for Holy Communion.

The Retiring Procession

- Immediately upon the blessing, go to the sacristy and get the thurible; if the incense has been consumed so there is no smoke, add about a half spoon of incense.
- Go to the sanctuary entrance; pause briefly, turn, and take position as for the Gospel procession.
- The crucifer will signal the turn.
- Lead the procession down the center aisle.

It is customary to lead the procession up the Epistle side aisle; stop near the front of the pews and face the

congregation for the dismissal, swinging the thurible in a gentle circular motion.

- *Note: The thurifer also leads other processions.*

When there is a Boat Bearer

- The boat bearer is often a child who has expressed interest in serving.
- The server should be instructed to bow and present the boat to the priest when incense is to be placed in the thurible; to bow to the sanctuary party, choir, and congregation during the censuring; and to return bows.
- Always keep the bearer on the side away from the thurible to avoid injury and allow free movement.
- The bearer will normally accompany the thurifer during the censuring of the sanctuary party, choir, and congregation.
- Children may behave like children; the thurifer should be alert to the need to take the bearer to the sacristy to prevent disruption of the service.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion covers the elements of a typical Sunday Eucharist. There will be differences for solemn processions and festivals.



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