

Understanding the Mass Incense and Thurible

Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

*Today our topic is the **Incense and Thurible**.*

Last week, we learned about altar servers, who help the priest in the celebration of the Mass. One of the tasks that an altar server can be responsible for is to carry the **thurible**, a special metal container (also called a censer) that holds charcoal and **incense**. Incense is a sweet-smelling material that, when burned, releases fragrant smoke.

Incense has been used since before Christian times as a sign of respect and honour and as a symbol of prayer rising before God. God instructed Moses to burn incense in the Tabernacle, and King Solomon burnt incense in the great temple in Jerusalem that he built. And when the Three Kings visited Jesus as a baby, one of their gifts to Him was incense.

In the Mass, we use incense over the gifts, the priest and the people as a sign of reverence. There are several moments that the priest - or someone else serving at Mass - will use the thurible and incense in an action that is called *incensation*.

At the beginning of Mass, the priest may incense the altar. This is to acknowledge the altar is the place where the sacrifice of the Mass takes place, and as a sign of the holiness of God.

Before it is read, the book of the Gospel may be incensed. This is to remind us that these are holy words, they are the Word of God, for in them God speaks to each one of us.



And at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the offertory gifts, the priest and the congregation - all of us - may be incensed.

Before or after an incensation, a bow is made to the person or object that is incensed (except when incensing the altar and the gifts for the Sacrifice of the Mass). The thurible is swung back and forth three times (only) for the gifts for the Sacrifice of the Mass, the altar cross, the Book of the Gospels, the Paschal candle, the priest and the people.