

THURIFER AT *MISSA CANTATA*

GENERAL AND HISTORICAL NOTES

The Thurifer (Th) has the privilege of bearing the thurible during Mass and of the office of incensing the inferior ministers and the laity.

The word *thurible* is derived from *thus*, which is Latin for incense. It is generally thought, that the thurible used by the Jews was very similar as employed at Mass now, that is, with three chains, though it is unknown if the Jewish thuribles had a cover. The thurible is also considered to be a liturgical object of great value in its symbolic use, as the thuribles made by the Jews were made of solid gold. This was perhaps done so as to imitate the Altar of Incense (on which incense was burnt three times a day), that stood outside the Temple, which was made of gold plate over wood.

The history of the use of incense is very ancient, dating back to earliest ages. Incense was widely used by both the Jews in the Temple ceremonies, as commanded by Almighty God Himself, as well as by the pagan religions. In ancient times, burning incense was also used as an air freshener in countries under Roman or Asian influence; it too was used to incense the guests as a mark of respect at banquets. In fact incense was so widely used, that God Himself commanded the Jews, that the incense compound made for use in the Temple ceremonies, was to be used expressly for the Temple (*i.e.*, God), under the penalty of death, so that it could not be used for secular functions.

That the office of incensing is one of great honor is seen by the fact that the daily incensing performed in the Holies of the Temple was done by a priest chosen by lot, a task, which he could do only once in his lifetime. Whereas the incensing of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies was only performed once a year by the High Priest during the Passover rites.

Incense was greatly used by the Jews in the Temple ceremonies, and so it would only be natural for the Church to continue this usage, for the Temple rites were foreshadows of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and incense has great symbolic purpose. Like the burning smoke of the sacrificed animals of the Old Testament rose towards God in a sweet odor, so too, does incense. We read in the Psalms, "*Let my prayer be like incense in Thy sight*". Incense then, represents prayer, which rises to God in a wonderful odor, which pleases Him. While incense represents prayer, the charcoals used to burn the incense represent the intensity of our devotion, or love for God. Without a fervent, or burning devotion for God, our prayers, despite how many we might say, will not rise up to God, just like placing incense on unlighted charcoals will not provide any smoke. However, a fervent prayer will be pleasing to God and consequently do much good, just as a single, small piece of incense can fill a very large church with its enriching odor.

The use of incense is connected with the idea of sacrifice, and so the Altar is incensed twice during a *Missa Cantata*. During the Mass incense is used when incensing the Altar to show the rising of prayer to God. During the reading of the *Gospel*, incense is used to represent the sweet odor of Christ, which fills the world through the announcement of His Holy Word. Incense is used at the *Offertory*, to sanctify the Oblations after they have been prepared and the various ministers and people are incensed to signify charity towards one another and the dwelling of the Holy Trinity in their souls through grace.

HANDLING THE THURIBLE

-while processing with the thurible, Th should:

- swing the thurible gently with the cover slightly open
- not allow the thurible to swing higher than the height of his waist
- take care to walk solemnly and in the center of the aisle
- take precaution when walking around corners
- desist from swinging the thurible when ascending or descending steps

The ESLI METHOD for stabilizing a thurible before incensing a personage.

After closing the thurible, and before grasping the chains to incense someone (or something), one should ensure that the thurible is hanging level. This is especially important if the thurible that is being used has twisted chains, or is out of alignment in some fashion. Otherwise, the thurible will swing crookedly when incensing someone.

A quick and easy method for countering this is the **ESLI** Method (*i.e., ease-ly*). Each letter stands for a motion:

E= Equalize (Equalize the levelness of the thurible by holding the disk ring by your right index finger)

S= Secure (Slide the middle ring down with your left hand till it is as close to the cover as possible)

L= Left hand (Take hold of the chains under the disk with your left hand)

I= Index and other fingers (like a pair of scissors, separate your right-hand index finger from your other fingers and with your palm facing your body, grab hold of the chains between the scissors, with the index finger *in front of the chains* and the other fingers *behind the chains*. Keep those other fingers together and extended like when making a liturgical gesture; do not form these fingers into a fist. Slide your hand down the length of the chains until it is touching the cover ring).

You are now ready to swing the thurible to incense a person or an object.

How to swing the thurible when incensing

The method of swinging a thurible correctly in the Roman Rite is an art and skill that is perfected after some practice.

TOOLS NEEDED BY TH TO PREPARE THE CHARCOALS

In the old days of coal burning stoves, it was an easy enough task to take a few coals from a nearby heating stove or brazier. Now however, it is necessary to have several items available so that Th may actually light and heat up the charcoals. Th will need at least:

- A pair of tongs.
- A flat head screwdriver.
- A pan for lighting the charcoals¹.
- An electric circular heating coil².
- A coffee can containing a one inch layer of sand³.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE MASS

-Th should be in the Sacristy 20 minutes before Mass begins⁴.

-Th should immediately vest in his cassock, but not in his surplice. Th should always take off his surplice every time that he works with the charcoals, so as to prevent the surplice from being ruined by sparks or charcoal dust.

¹ A heavy duty baker's pan is sufficient for this. A charcoal lighting stand may be built out of channel and plate steel to facilitate this item. This also prevents one from burning a table or counter top *via* the heated baker's pan. Though a thick towel should be placed underneath the pan to help prevent this. For a diagram of a lighting stand, please write the Guild Headquarters.

² This is the kind used for heating a pot when travelling. These can be found in many appliance stores and are often priced under \$15.00.

³ The sand prevents the bottom of the can from rusting due oxidization of the used charcoals.

⁴ Th has more items connected with his office than any other server, and therefore, his duties often take longer especially before and after Mass.

- Th then sets up his work area with the items described above and immediately begins lighting the charcoals
- 10 minutes before Mass, Th, *without his surplice*, says the *Before Mass Prayers* with the other servers.

FOR SUNDAYS WITH THE ASPERGES RITE PRECEDING THE MASS

- Th then goes to the Sacristy and holds the aspersory and aspergill (which is resting inside the Aspersory) in his right hand with his left hand over his breast. He then lines up for the *Processional* at the head of the formation of servers.

PROCESSIONAL FOR ASPERGES RITE

- After responding, "*In nomine, Christe. Amen.*", Th rings the bell and then leads the *Procession*. Th should take care to process solemnly and in the center of the aisle.
- upon reaching the Foot, Th genuflects and goes to the Gospel side of the Foot, leaving adequate room for any other servers that need to come to the Foot to genuflect.
- when C and the MC reach the Foot, Th genuflects in unison with them, and then passes the Aspersory to the MC behind C.
- Th then kneels with C and the MC. After the MC, Th and the servers on the Epistle side have been sprinkled, Th stands with C and the MC.
- Th then genuflects with them, passes to the other side of C in unison with the MC (Th passes on the outside, while the MC passes inside, that is *closest* to C), takes the ophrey of the Cope and follows C while he sprinkles the clergy and congregation.
- just before the *Gloria Patri* is sung, Th turns with C and the MC to face the Altar and makes a simple bow with them during the first portion
- upon reaching the end of the Nave, Th genuflects in unison with C and the MC, and then switches sides with the MC as before. Th resumes holding the ophrey until they reach the Foot. Sometime after switching sides, the MC will return the Aspersory to Th, who will hold it in his outside hand, since he is now holding the Cope
- upon reaching the Foot, Th genuflects with C and the MC. Th bows at *Oremus* as usual, and if necessary, assists with holding the *Asperges Prayer Card* or *Sanctuary Prayer Book* with the MC in front of C
- after the oration is completed, Th takes the Card, genuflects with C and the MC, meets the MC shoulder to shoulder, leads C to the Sedilla, and then returns the Aspersory and Card to the Sacristy⁵
- after putting these items back in the Sacristy, Th then prepares the thurible as previously described for the first incensation of the Altar

FOR HIGH MASSES WITHOUT THE ASPERGES

- Th then goes to the Sacristy, and prepares the charcoals for the thurible as previously described. Th then takes the thurible and boat and lines up for the *Processional* at the head of the formation of servers

PROCESSIONAL

- when C is ready, Th gives the boat to the MC, and opens the thurible as previously described for the imposition of incense. When the imposing of incense is finished, Th receives the boat back from the MC and then takes his place at the head of the formation of servers to lead the *Procession*.
- after responding, "*In nomine, Christe. Amen.*", Th rings the bell and then leads the *Procession*, swinging the thurible as previously described.
- upon reaching the Foot, Th genuflects and then proceeds to the Epistle side of the Sanctuary to his normal position⁶ where he remains standing holding the thurible⁷

⁵ These items should not be placed on the Credence unless they will be needed later on during the ceremonies.

⁶ Most rubricians place Th's normal position as being in front of (between Ac1 and Ac2) or rather near the Credence. However, this is often impractical in most sanctuaries because of space limitations. In this set of instructions, Th's normal position will be placed in the Sacristy doorway on the Epistle side. This allows Th easy access to the Sacristy to perform his various charcoal duties, while staying out of the Acolytes way when they perform their duties at the Credence. If your

PREPARATORY PRAYERS TO THE FIRST INCENSATION OF THE ALTAR

-during the *Preparatory Prayers*, Th remains standing at his normal position. Th makes the responses and various bows with the MC and other servers, however, because he is holding an object, he does not make any gestures with his hands.

-when the *Preparatory Prayers* are finished, Th meets the MC on his *right*⁸ side on the Epistle side of the Foot and gives him the Boat.

-both then immediately ascend to the Predella, and Th opens the thurible for C to impose incense. After C has blessed the incense, Th then closes the thurible and gives it to the MC.

-Th then goes to the left of C, without genuflecting, by going behind him. Th genuflects in unison with C and the MC as required, holding his right hand under C's elbow for every genuflection. Th must ensure to move as one unit with C and the MC by:

- turning with C towards the reliquaries (if any) when he incenses them
- remaining shoulder to shoulder with C or the MC as required (e.g., upon reaching the Gospel side of the Predella, Th usually needs to remain on the front corner while C incenses the Gospel front of the Altar).
- if C is wearing a "gothic" Chasuble, Th should hold the edges with the MC while C is incensing. However, the edges are released and then retrieved before and after each genuflection.

-when C begins incensing the Epistle side of the Altar the second time (after the last genuflection), Th descends *per breviorum* to the Foot, then proceeds *in plano* to the Epistle side of the Foot, and stands to the *left* of the MC.

-Th then makes a profound bow in unison with the MC before and after he incenses C.

-Th then receives the thurible back from the MC and then returns to his normal position

INTROIT TO THE GRADUAL

-during this interval, Th remains standing in his normal position and keeps the cover of the thurible slightly open, but does not swing it.

GOSPEL IMPOSITION AND ACTIONS

-When the MC signals C to rise from the Sedilla, Th goes to the Epistle side of the Foot and meets the MC there as before.

-Th and the MC ascend to the Predella, and incense is imposed as usual. Th however, takes the Boat from the MC, and descending *via* the Epistle Altar steps, goes to the Credence, puts the Boat there, and then leads the waiting Acolytes to the Foot. However, Th does not swing the thurible during any of the *Gospel* actions.

-upon arrival at the Foot, Th takes position on the front, *left* side of the box formation.⁹

-when the MC descends with the Missal to the center of the Foot, Th signals a genuflection¹⁰, and then leads the Acolytes to the Gospel side of the Foot. Th should again be on the front, left side, immediately against the Foot.

-when the MC has descended *in plano*, Th then gives the thurible to him¹¹. Th does not bow while C and the MC perform the incensing of the Book of the *Gospels*.

church does not have a side Sacristy door, either on the Epistle or Gospel side of the Sanctuary, then Th departs *via* the Communion Rail Gate, which remains open during Mass, except during the *Distribution of Holy Communion*.

⁷ A thurible stand should not be used in the Sanctuary during Mass. The thurifer's title is exactly what it states: *to bear the incense* (*ifer* in Latin means: *to bear*, like Lucifer: *Lightbearer*), he should therefore hold the thurible at all times when it is not being used, except after the *Pater Noster*, when Th's office comes to a conclusion.

⁸ Normally Th would be to the *left* of the MC, but out of practical consideration (so as to avoid having Th cross to the other side of the MC when on the Predella), Th is placed on the *right side* of the MC. This occurs every time both ascend to the Predella to have incense imposed.

⁹ All in this formation should be shoulder to shoulder. The formation would look like this:

Th MC
Ac2 Ac1

If due to space limitations a line formation is used instead, Th takes position on the left side of the center. The formation would appear as such: Ac2 Th MC Ac1

¹⁰ With a single clap, not by snapping his fingers. Th can do this by slapping his left hand (which is free) softly on top of his right hand (which is holding the disk).

-when the MC returns *in plano* on the right side of Th, Th then receives the thurible back from the MC¹² and holds it in his right hand with the cover slightly opened, however he should not swing the thurible at all during the reading of the *Gospel*.¹³

-when C has reached the ending of the *Gospel*, Th then gives the thurible to the MC, makes a profound bow with the MC before and after the incensing of C and then receives the thurible back, but now holding it in his left hand, since his office for the *Gospel* has come to an end.

-Th then leads the Acolytes back to the Foot as before, but this time the MC signals the genuflection.

-after the genuflection, Th leads the Acolytes back to the Credence, and then returns to the Sacristy to prepare a new batch of charcoals for the *Offertory*.¹⁴

IF THERE IS A SERMON

-if there is a *Sermon* immediately after the reading of the *Gospel*, Th should not begin lighting new charcoals until the *Sermon* is a third of the way finished¹⁵. Meanwhile, Th should be sitting in his normal position for the first part of the *Sermon*.¹⁶

DURING THE CREDO

-Th should have his new batch of charcoals prepared and be in the doorway with his thurible ready before the *Credo* begins.

-during the *Credo*, Th bows and also genuflects in unison with C and the other servers.

-after the *Credo*, Th remains standing in his normal position.

OFFERTORY INCENSATION OF THE ALTAR AND PERSONS

-after the Acolytes have descended from the Altar with their cruets, Th gives the Boat to the MC and goes to the Epistle side of the Foot with him as usual.

-when C begins the *Veni, Sanctificator* prayer (when C makes an arc and then joins his hands), Th and the MC then ascend to the Predella, and incense is imposed as usual.

-C will incense the Oblations first, without previously having made a genuflection. He will then incense the Altar as usual.

-Th will join the MC for the incensation of C as usual, and after the MC has returned the thurible to Th, Th will turn inwards with the MC and then proceed shoulder to shoulder with him to the Foot. Th will genuflect in unison with the MC, go to the center of the Foot, bow to the MC, incense him with one double and then bow again. When Th incenses the other clergy or servers, whether in the Sanctuary or in the Chancel, he should do so *in line* with the center of the Altar¹⁷.

-Th will then incense the other personages in this order:

- Clerics in major orders in the Chancel
- Servers on the Epistle side of the Sanctuary
- Servers in the Chancel (*i.e.*, Torchbearers)
- Schola (however, only if they are in cassock and surplice)
- Clerics in minor orders in the Chancel
- Congregation

¹¹ Th should never give the thurible to the MC while he is still on the Predella, as this looks extremely tacky, and causes both Th and the MC to stretch their arms to accomplish this ungainly motion.

¹² The rubricians are in agreement with this: It is the thurifer's office to hold the thurible during the reading of the *Gospel*, and not the MC's.

¹³ This is unanimously agreed upon by all of the rubricians. This is a practical consideration for the reader of the *Gospel*, be he the Celebrant or the Deacon; an over abundance of incense makes it very difficult for the reader to chant without choking or coughing.

¹⁴ If Th knows that there will not be a *Sermon* immediately after the *Gospel*, he should start his second batch of charcoals for the *Offertory* during the reading of the *Epistle*.

¹⁵ Most sermons last about 20-30 minutes.

¹⁶ Th should bring a stool out of the Sacristy during the *Sermon* and return it when he leaves the Sanctuary. In this way, his motions in and out of the Sacristy will not be impeded during Mass.

¹⁷ This is very practical, as it saves Th time, that would be otherwise lost by his walking to each side of the Sanctuary, and it is also cleaner looking, as it prevents excess motion from taking place.

IF THERE ARE TORCHBEARERS

-after incensing the various personages, Th will take position in the center of the Chancel, ensure that the Tbs are lined up correctly, and then signal a genuflection for himself and the Tbs.

-Th will then lead the Tbs to the Sacristy (where the torches are located)

-when the Tbs are positioned and ready, and C has begun the *Sanctus*, Th will then lead the Tbs back into the Sanctuary, taking his position in the center of the *recta linea* formation of Tbs.

-when all of the Tbs have arrived, Th signals all to genuflect and then to kneel.

-Th then returns to his normal position

HANC IGITUR

-when the bell is rung for the *Hanc igitur*, Th has Ac2 (or the Boatbearer if there is one) impose one spoonful of incense, closes the thurible, puts the boat on the Credence, and then takes position at the Foot of the Epistle side of the Altar steps (or the Epistle "angle", if there is one)

CONSECRATION

-when the MC signals for all to kneel (which should be at the *Qui Pridie*), Th kneels in his position in unison with the other servers

-during the *Consecration* action, Th bows for each time C genuflects, and incenses the Sacred Species each time They are elevated with three doubles. During the entire action, Th should keep the thurible at readiness by having the chains in his right and left hand as he did for the entire *Offertory Incensations*

-after the *Consecration* action has ended, and the MC has signaled for the servers to stand, Th then returns to his normal position

PATER NOSTER

-after Th has turned and bowed for *Oremus*, and C has begun the *Pater Noster*, Th then makes a single knee genuflection, and then returns the thurible to the Sacristy

-Th then returns to his normal position, again making a single knee genuflection upon returning

DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

-after C has consumed the Sacred Host, Th then goes to the Credence and retrieves the Communion Plate, holding it in front of him, and facing plate-side up (not against his chest)

-when the Acolytes go to change the Communion Rail cloth over, Th then goes with the Crossbearer to the Foot, taking his position on the far right side of the Foot.

-when all are in position, the MC then signals for all to genuflect and then kneel

-when C consumes the Precious Blood, Th makes a simple bow in unison with the other servers, and then recites the 2nd *Confiteor* with the other servers. During this time, Th does not strike his breast for each *mea culpa*, nor does he sign himself with the Cross, since he is holding the Plate.

-after the *Indulgentiam*, Th stands, genuflects, ascends to the Predella and kneels in unison with the other servers

-during the *Domine non sum dignus*, again, Th does not strike his breast, because he is holding the Plate

-after all the servers on the Predella have received Communion, and the MC and C have descended to the Foot, Th signals all to stand, then he turns towards the Altar (left), and signals all to genuflect at the Foot.

-then Th leads all to the Epistle side of the Sanctuary in single file, taking his place in his normal position, and the signals all to kneel. Th remains in this position throughout the *Distribution of Holy Communion*.

DURING THE ABLUTIONS

-when C has closed the Tabernacle, and the MC signals all to stand, Th goes to the Foot, genuflects and then proceeds to the center of the Chancel. Th ensures that the Tbs are lined up correctly, signals all to genuflect, and then leads them into the Sacristy as before.

-when the Tbs have deposited their torches, Th leads them back into the Sanctuary, ensures they are all in proper formation, signals a genuflection, and then returns to his normal position.

LAST GOSPEL

- after Th has signed himself at the beginning of the *Last Gospel*, Th goes to the center of the Chancel and takes his position there without genuflecting.
- Th genuflects when C does during the *Last Gospel*.

RECESSIONAL

- upon the MC's signal, Th genuflects in unison with the other servers, and then leads the *Recessional* formation back into the Sacristy.
- Th then takes up the position that he held in the Sacristy just before the beginning of Mass. Th bows to the Processional Cross upon the MC's signal, then to C, and then kneels for C's blessing.

AFTER MASS DUTIES

- Th then says the *After Mass Prayers* with the other servers and then properly puts away all of the items that he used connected with his position. If necessary, Th should even sweep around the area in which he was working with the charcoals.
- Th is then dismissed with the other servers.