

TORCHBEARER DURING HIGH MASS (*MISSA CANTATA*) OR SOLEMN HIGH MASS

The Torchbearers (Tbs) are like the honor guard for Our Lord. During a High Mass, they take the place of the *Sanctus Candle*, an ancient Roman custom at Low Mass, which is lit from the *Sanctus* until the *Ablutions*. The Tbs also accompany Our Lord at the Communion Rail when Holy Communion is distributed¹. During processions of the Blessed Sacrament, they accompany Him on either side of the canopy that covers Him². It is the position of Tb, more so than of any other position, that adds solemnity to the Mass, who with his bright torch illuminates the Sanctuary and helps to surround Our Lord during the *Canon*, thereby highlighting and adding splendor to the most sacred part of the Mass³.

General Rules

- unity of action is very important and conducive in carrying out the various actions of Tbs' office smoothly. Great care should be taken by Tbs to work as a team, and not as a group of individuals, especially in processing, genuflecting, and kneeling.
- Tbs always turn inwards, that is, towards each other, when next to each other.
- Tbs usually walk in their proper pairs and shoulder to shoulder [unless there is a lack of room; then they do so in single file, with the highest ranking Tb always going first]
- whenever Tbs are processing, they should always be at least 4 pews away from each other [about 10 feet]; this will prevent Tbs from bunching up during processions, especially while genuflecting at the Foot of the Altar.

How to hold a torch:

- torches are always held in the outside hand⁴, and the other hand is place flat against one's sternum, with fingers extended and held together.
- when turning, the torch must be smoothly changed to the outside hand.
- one must take care to hold the torch *straight*⁵.
- whenever one is about to genuflect or kneel, the torch should be placed squarely on the floor first, then one may genuflect or kneel. However, striking the floor hard with the bottom of the staff must be avoided.

When not holding torches:

- Tbs act as the other servers in folding their hands, and in making the various bows and gestures.

When holding torches:

- Tbs do not make the sign of the Cross, nor do they strike their breasts, since they are holding objects.
- the only type of bow that they make is a simple bow, even when the other servers are making a moderate bow, since it is unwieldy to make a moderate bow when holding a torch.

Positioning the seating of the Torchbearers:

The Tbs may have their stools situated either in front of the Choir Stalls in the Chancel (centered and divided evenly on either side of the Chancel) or on the Gospel side of the Sanctuary⁶. While placing the Tbs in the Chancel

¹ In almost all of the rubrical books, the authors make mention of the Tbs departing with their torches after the *Consecration* (except for Requiem and Ferial Masses in violet vestments). This was due to the ancient and now extinct practice of distributing Holy Communion to the faithful *after* Mass (or even not at all), and not during it. Later on it did become customary to distribute Communion during Mass itself, but it was not always practiced, hence the books speaking of this departure. The books often have as an end note, buried amongst other text in relation to Solemn High Mass, that if Communion was to be distributed to the faithful, the Tbs would depart after *Communion*.

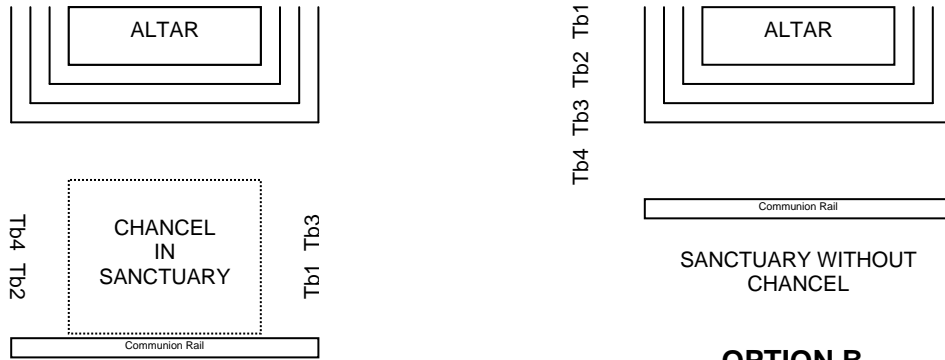
² Unfortunately, this can not often be done, due to the necessity of having to process down narrow sidewalks, rather than down the middle of the street. So they are compelled to process in pairs in front of the Thurifers incensing Our Lord.

³ This is shown by the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* and by the various rubricians who graduate the number of Torchbearers depending on the degree of solemnity of the feast (e.g. 1st class feasts: no more than eight; normal circumstances: 4 to 6; Requiems and feriales: no more than 4).

⁴ There is an exception to this rule: For processions of the Blessed Sacrament, Tbs hold their torches in their inside hand, that is next to Our Lord as they are on either side of the Canopy. However, if Tbs process in front of the Thurifers, they hold their torches in the outside hand as usual.

⁵ This is especially true when they are kneeling *recta linea* (in a straight line). It is very visually distracting to see one torches held at one angle, another at a different one, etc.

certainly has some practical advantages⁷, most small churches do not have a Chancel. In some cases the Sanctuary



OPTION A

OPTION B

may be so small, that one has to innovate a way of accommodating the Tbs either in the front pew or even by seating them against the Communion Rail. On this sheet, the two most common options are given for the placement of the Tbs, which depends on the layout of the Sanctuary; option A (sitting in the Chancel) is the optimum choice when space allows for its use.

Tbs should always be in the Sacristy at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.

Tbs must complete these tasks within the first 5 minutes:

- they must vest in Cassock and Surplice, and remember to say the Vesting Prayers for each item.
- they should have the correct number of stools lined up in the proper place in the Sanctuary. There ought to be sufficient room between each stool, so that Tbs may sit without being pressed together.
- the torches must be checked to see if the candles are high enough to last from the *Sanctus* until the *Ablutions*⁸; they should be no lower than 2 inches high. The candlewicks must also be checked to verify if they are long enough to burn correctly [they should be no lower than ¼" high]; if not, they will have to be carefully excavated with a knife.
- if there are at least 4 Tbs, then Tb1 should delegate the various tasks amongst the other three Tbs. Tb1 must also ensure that Tbs' stools are set up correctly, and that the torches are in good condition. When verified, Tb1 should report this to the MC.

In the Sacristy:

- when these tasks are completed, Tbs then line up for the *Processional*. Tb1 lines up the other Tbs shoulder to shoulder into their designated pairs and numbers, also ensuring that both Tbs match per pair in height. Tb1 should also designate the odd numbered Tbs on the right, and the even numbered on the left. Tb1 and 2 lead the formation of Tbs, then Tb 3 and 4 and so forth.

The Procession:

- when C has finished vesting, the MC will signal with a single clap, then Tbs turn and make a simple bow towards the Processional Cross⁹, while the MC says, "*Procedamus in pace.*" Tbs then respond with the other servers: "*In nomine Christi, Amen.*"
- each pair of Tbs follow after Cb and Acolytes at a distance of 4 pews, walking shoulder to shoulder, solemnly and at a moderate pace.

The location of Tbs' genuflection upon entering the Sanctuary:

⁶ Cf. Fortescue, pg. 107.

⁷ One of these advantages concerns the staging of the Tbs in front of the Foot when entering or leaving the Sanctuary. Staging at the Foot often leads to a conflict of action with the Acolytes, especially during the switching of the Missal and the Chalice Veil after the *Ablutions*. In this case, it is necessary for Th to time his arrival into the Sanctuary, so as not to interfere with the Acolytes' movements. However, sitting and staging in the Chancel eliminates this possible conflict and is thereby conducive to a smoother and more dignified ceremony.

⁸ If there is a procession with the Blessed Sacrament, they will need to be even taller; in this case 4 inches is recommended.

⁹ Or Sacristy Cross if there is not a Crossbearer.

- a. If Tbs sit on either side of the Chancel, each pair genuflects at the front portion of the Chancel, and then pair off outwardly (Tb1 turns right, Tb2 turns left) to their stools, with the first pair proceeding to stools furthest from the Altar, the second pair to the middle stools, and etc.
- b. If Tbs sit against the Gospel Sanctuary wall or against the Communion Rail on the Gospel side, they proceed to the Foot, genuflect in pairs, turn inwards (Tb1 to his *left*, Tb2 to his *right*¹⁰), and then continue to their stools shoulder to shoulder. Tb1 takes the stool closest to the Altar, Tb2 the next one and etc.

During Mass:

-Tbs respond, stand, kneel, genuflect, turn and bow with the other servers. Tb1 should lead Tbs in turning and bowing towards the Altar at the proper times, otherwise, Tbs face across the Sanctuary.

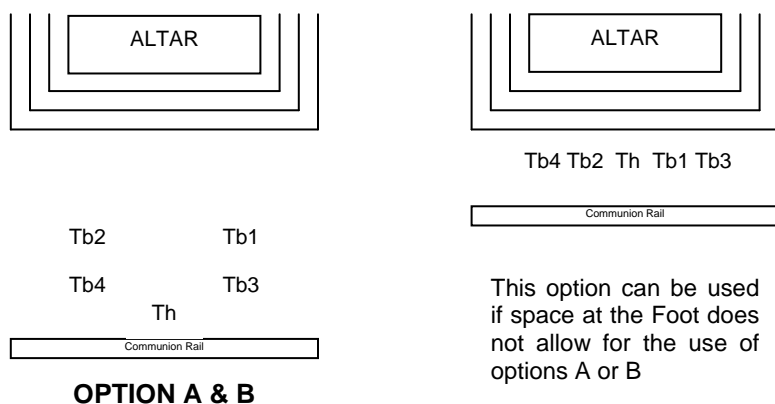
During the Gospel:

-when C moves to the Missal to sing the *Gospel*, Tbs turn towards the Missal for the reading. When the reading is completed, they turn to face across the Sanctuary again.

During the Offertory:

-after Th incenses the servers on the Epistle side of the Sanctuary, Th will bow to Tbs, who make a simple bow back to him, then Th will incense them, and Tbs will bow to Th again.

- a. Tbs then immediately step forward from each side, as two converging lines, to the center of the Chancel and form their respective pairs into two parallel lines, standing in line with the edges of the Altar and facing it.
- b. Tbs then immediately proceed shoulder to shoulder to the center of the Sanctuary, in front of the Foot, form their respective pairs into two parallel lines, standing in line with the edges of the Altar, and facing it.



-Th signals, all Tbs genuflect in unison with Th, then all Tbs turn inwards, and follow Th to the Sacristy in pairs, shoulder to shoulder, keeping a distance of 4 pews between Th and each pair of Tbs.
 -upon reaching the Sacristy, Tbs retrieve their torches, and Tb1 lights them while each Tb holds his own torch. Tbs then resume their former formation with Th at the head.

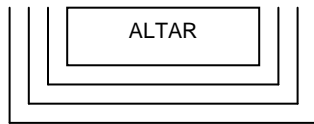
At the Sanctus:

-when the *Sanctus* begins, Th leads Tbs into the Sanctuary, who are walking shoulder to shoulder, each pair at a distance of 4 pews, holding their torches straight and in their outside hands.
 -upon reaching the Sanctuary, Th goes to the center of the Sanctuary, while Tb1 and Tb2 go to his sides (Tb1 to his right, Tb2 to his left), each about 3 feet from him. The other Tbs line up *recta linea*¹¹ next to Tb1 and Tb2 accordingly, with an equal space between each Tb¹².

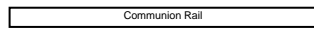
¹⁰ This should be practiced until the Tbs do this instinctively, as it is in the *opposite* direction in which they are accustomed to turn while serving Low Mass.

¹¹ A *straight line*. In this case, a horizontal line across the width of the Sanctuary. The rubricians give two different arrangements for Tbs for the *Canon*, both of which are diagramed above. The one that is most practical due to space limitations within the Sanctuary should be employed.

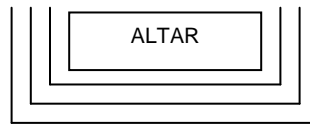
¹² Prearranged landmarks (e.g. tile cracks, alignment with Altar items, etc.) should be used for the placement of Tbs, especially Tb1 and Tb2, as they are the anchors for the others. In some Sanctuaries, it may be necessary for Tbs to kneel shoulder to shoulder, on the 1st Altar step, or even on the 1st Altar steps on the sides of the Altar.



Tb4 Tb2 Tb1 Tb3



Usual positioning



Tb4
Tb2

Tb1
Tb3

Or Tbs may be positioned like this on each side of the Altar if space allows



Another option

-Tbs then genuflect on Th's signal, and then kneel on the floor at his signal. Tbs should hold their torches at their sides, not directly in front of them, with the bottom of the staff resting against the floor¹³. Tbs must also ensure torches are being held straight.

During the Consecration:

-during the *Consecration*, Tbs make only a simple bow for each time C genuflects before and after each *Elevation*.

If Communion were not to be distributed to the faithful:

-this rarely happens now, however if for some reason Communion were not to be distributed to the faithful, Th would lead Tbs out of and back into the Sanctuary after the *Consecration of the Chalice* as described below for **After the Distribution of Communion**, with a single knee genuflection¹⁴.

At C's Communion and during the Communion of the Faithful:

-when C consumes the Sacred Host, Tbs make a simple bow.

The Tbs may then:

- A¹. Remain in their present position of *recta linea* (or of parallel lines) in the Sanctuary and receive Communion there.
- A². Following Tb 1 & 2's lead, stand, turn towards the Altar and in single file return to their stools in the Chancel, kneel and receive Communion there.
- B. Go to kneel on each side of the Predella and receive Communion there¹⁵.

-when C consumes the Precious Blood, all Tbs make a simple bow, and then remained bowed for the 2nd *Confiteor*, though they do not strike their breasts for each *mea culpa* nor for each *Domine non sum dignus*.

-the MC (or Th if they kneel on the Predella) holds the Plate for the Tbs; the Tbs do not hold it for themselves as they are holding the torches.

-in all cases, the outside Tbs (which should be Tb1 & 2), after receiving Communion, immediately rise and without any genuflection, follow C with Blessed Sacrament to the Communion Rail (inside the Sanctuary), where they stand at each end, holding their torches in their outside hand (towards the Rail). These Tbs should keep their eyes downcast in reverence of the Blessed Sacrament that they accompany.

-when C has distributed Communion to the last communicant, both Tbs go in unison with C back to their positions with the other Tbs. Tb 1 & 2 do not genuflect at all while performing this action¹⁶, they simply return to their positions and kneel immediately.

During the Ablutions:

-when C has closed the Tabernacle and the MC has signaled all to rise, the Tbs stand, and then take position in the same manner as at the *Offertory* either according to option A or B.

¹³ If Tbs are kneeling on a step, it may be easier for them to hold their torches by placing their torches on the step above.

¹⁴ SRC 41353. The Blessed Sacrament is not considered to be exposed to the *inferior ministers*, who are *in plano* and not on the Predella.

¹⁵ If this option is used, the Tbs approach the sides while the other servers line up at the Foot. They genuflect on the MC's signal¹⁵, kneel, recite the *Confiteor*¹⁵, then stand and genuflect on MC's signal again, ascend to the Predella, kneel and receive Communion there.

¹⁶ This is because they are accompanying the Blessed Sacrament and so the rule applies for Tb 1 & 2 as it would for Ac1 & 2 with the Crossbearer.

- when all are ready, Th signals all the Tbs to genuflect, then all turn inwards and process out behind Th as usual.
- upon reaching the Sacristy, the Tbs extinguish their torches and put them away.
- Th then leads them back into the Sanctuary, where the Tbs line up again as at the *Offertory*, then Th signals a genuflection and the Tbs return to their stools in the same manner as upon entering the Sanctuary during the *Processional*.

During the remainder of the Mass:

- the Tbs act as usual.

During the *Last Blessing*:

- when the MC signals all to kneel during the *Last Blessing*, the Tbs kneel facing each other across the Sanctuary.

During the *Last Gospel*:

- after the Tbs have signed themselves for the *Last Gospel* (having made the proper responses), they line up as for the *Offertory* according to option A or B.
- the Tbs genuflect in unison when "*Et Verbum caro factum est*" is said.

Recessional

- the Tbs genuflect on the MC's signal and then turn inwards to face the Nave, but first allow the Acolytes and Crossbearer to pass through the pairs.
- when the Acolytes and Crossbearer have pass through completely, the pairs of Tbs each follow at a distance of 4 pews, walking shoulder to shoulder.
- when the Tbs reach the Sacristy, they line up as before the *Processional*.
- at the MC's signal, the Tbs bow to the Processional Cross, then to C and then kneel to receive C's blessing.

After Mass Duties

- when the *After Mass Prayers* have been said, the Tbs then put away their stools and do whatever other duties the MC assigns to them.