

# THURIFER AT HIGH MASS

The Thurifer (Th) has the great honor to have the "angelic" office of bearing the thurible during Mass. We are told by Sacred Scripture that it is Saint Michael the Archangel himself, who bears the golden censer in Heaven before God's Throne. The history of the thurible dates back to the days of the Patriarchs of Israel. The office of incensing the Altar of Sacrifice was considered such an honor, that a Levite Priest was chosen by lot, and could perform this office only once in his lifetime. Inside the Holy of Holies in the Great Temple in Jerusalem, no one except the High Priest could incense the Ark of the Covenant, and this was done only once a year, at Passover. The Jews too, also used a three chain thurible, in some ways similar to our own.

## Basic notes for Thurifer:

### Basic Parts of the Thurible:

-The thurible is made up of these parts: Crown (metal disk that holds all three chains together at top), Crown Ring (the large ring which is connected to the Crown), Thumb Ring (the smaller ring that connects to the middle chain, which lifts the Cover), the Middle Ring (the ring that encloses all four chains, and keeps the Cover down), the Cover (which has holes and rests on top of the Bowl), the Bowl (that to which three chains are connected to and in which the Firepot is put in), Foot (the bottom part of the Thurible, connected to the underside of the Bowl), and the Firepot (the removable metal bowl in which the charcoals are placed in).

### How to Hold the Thurible:

-When holding the thurible he should hold it as such: his pinky finger should go through the Crown Ring, and his thumb through the Thumb Ring. This keeps the Cover opened about 2 inches, which allows a good airflow for the charcoals. The primary duty of the Thurifer is to ensure that the charcoals are always *white hot* for the Priest. If the Cover is kept closed, the charcoals will be deprived of a vital air draft. The thurible can also be held with the right or left hand holding the underside of the Crown, with the Thumb Ring attached to the pinky finger. Either method may be used for processions, though the first method is more correct and this is the method in the Basilicas of Rome.

-When incense is to be placed in the thurible, it is held open as such: Take hold of underside of Crown with left hand, pull up Thumb Ring with right hand, until Cover is open about 5 inches. Grasp chains firmly with left hand under Crown, and with the right hand take hold of the middle portion of the chains. Lift thurible to about the elbow level of the Priest with right hand, hold this way until Priest has blessed the incense. Then allow the Cover to close under its own weight by releasing the chain carefully from right hand.

-When the thurible is bearing blessed incense, the thurible is held in the right hand. When the thurible is not bearing blessed incense, it is held in the left hand.

### How to use the Thurible when Incensing someone:

-Take the underside of the Crown with your left hand, make sure chains are straight and even and the Middle Ring is securing the Cover. Then with your right hand take all the chains between your forefinger and middle finger (like a scissors) about 1 inch above the Cover. Your forefinger should be in front of the chain, with the rest of your fingers behind the chain (these three fingers will help "lift" the thurible). Lift the thurible to eye level, and the Crown to level of your heart, though you need not hold it against your chest. Then "flip" your right wrist up and down. This action is done with your wrist and not your arm, though a little effort is put in by your arm to start the momentum. After the designated clasps are completed, you bring the thurible down to stomach level and clasp there once, to signify you have completed the clasps. So, if you incense the Priest with 3 sets of double clasps (3 doubles), you will actually hit the thurible with chains 9 times; 2 for each set of double clasps, and then a third to show completion.

### What is Incense:

-Incense is a resin that comes from certain types of trees, like the Frankincense tree. They are resin (or tree sap), that when dried, becomes very hard, in most cases. Often mixed with added special oils and spices, the incense gives off a pleasing aroma and is expensive. There are different types of incense: Aromatic Gums; spaghetti style, Resins; like Frankincense and Myrrh, and Aromatic woods; like wood shavings. Aromatic woods are the lowest grade, usually being chemically treated wood, and therefore not real incense at all. Aromatic gums are the highest grade of incense, with Resins next. In days of the Great Temple in Jerusalem, a certain Levite family had a monopoly on making incense, keeping it a secret of how they made it!

### How to light Charcoals:

-There are two types of charcoal: Real charcoal, and Self-Lighting. Real charcoal works the best, but occasionally you may need to use the Self-Lites. Both methods take about 10 minutes, but real charcoal burns hotter and longer. Self-Lites are formed at the factory under high pressure, so occasionally an air bubble will be trapped in the charcoal. When this Self-Lite is light, the charcoal becomes hot, the air expands, but has nowhere to go, so the charcoal explodes into a few pieces!

-To light the real charcoal, plug in the electric coil, and turn onto High and let the coil heat up for one minute. Then place the charcoals on the coil. If you place the charcoals on the coil immediately, you will lengthen the time for the coil to heat up. When bottom side is white hot halfway, turn charcoal over to other side; when this side is completed, carefully chop the charcoal into four pieces. The whiter the charcoal is, the better it will cut. Then proceed to swing the thurible gently until charcoals are evenly white hot.

-The Self-Lite has two sides; the top, which has a star shape on top (which contains the chemical to start the charcoal), and the bottom, which is curved. To light the Self-Lites, you need a candle with a high flame. Using tongs, pass the star side over the flame. Make sure the whole charcoal catches. Then hold the star side over the flame for a few seconds at a time, with the flame touching the middle of the star. Then blow on the star very hard, until you see the star catching fire. Repeat these steps continuously until you have succeed lighting the entire star side. When finished, chop the charcoal into halves (not quarters). The Self-Lights, burn faster because they are thinner. For long Benedictions do not chop the Self-Lights, but leave them whole.

-Knowing your charcoal will help you perform your duty better!

-When it comes time to change the charcoals, they should be done outside on the Epistle side vestibule porch. Take the screwdriver and tongs with you when you go to do this and discard the old charcoals in one of the cans. Do not do this in the Sacristy, as it will smoke up the Sacristy, and will cause the surplices, walls and floor to become covered with smoke.

### Items needed for Thurifer position:

-As Th you will need more items for your position, than any other server. You need to have these items set up 15 minutes before Mass begins: Thurible (according to Class rank), Thurible Stand, Incense Jar (according to Class Rank), Boat with Spoon, metal pan, electric coil, tongs, flathead screwdriver, charcoal container.

### If Thurifer has a Boatbearer (Bb):

-Bb will always carry the boat, and will accompany Th during the *Processional* and *Recessional* on Th's left. Bb's normal position is inside the Sacristy doorway, on Th's left. Bb presents the boat to the MC and receives boat back from MC. Bb kneels to Th's left for *Communion*. Bb does not accompany Th for incensations, or for leading Tbs in and out of Sanctuary, his duty is only to hold the boat.

## Preparations before Mass begins:

-Th should be in Sacristy 15 to 20 minutes before Mass begins. He needs to have ready the items listed above in a neat and orderly fashion on the Sacristy counter and floor. **Make sure that the Epistle side vestibule door is open, so that you can discard the old charcoals.**

-10 minutes before Mass begins, Th should put three charcoals on coil. **No other server should be standing at the coil except Th; this is how surplices are ruined.** Th should not put on surplice until charcoals have been put in firepot.

-The thurible stand should be placed in the doorway to the Sanctuary, but away from the curtains!

**Th must be very careful not to start a fire! He must think what he is doing, because sometimes the charcoals throw off sparks!**

-5 minutes before Mass begins, Th goes to Sacristy with thurible and boat (We will assume in this instruction sheet that position of Bb is not present).

## Processional:

-When Priest is ready, Th gives MC boat, and holds open thurible for Priest. Th takes boat back from MC. After responding, "*In Nomine Christe, Amen.*", Th rings the bell, and then leads the Procession. Th must go at a solemn pace; neither too fast, nor too slow. Walk straight, swinging thurible gently and reverently; walk in step with the swings and hold the thurible about 6 to 8 inches from the ground. Take care to elevate the thurible while ascending steps.

-Upon reaching the edge of the carpet, Th genuflects, and then goes immediately to doorway of Sacristy, and without genuflecting, places thurible open on thurible stand and the boat on the Credence Table. Then Th goes immediately to center of carpet.

## Asperges:

-Meet MC and Priest at center of carpet, Th being at left of Priest. Genuflect with them.

-Kneel at MC's signal.

- After Priest has sprinkled Gospel side servers (or MC signals), stand, genuflect on MC's signal, then switch sides with MC on the outside (Th always crosses farthest away from Priest), take hold of Cope's edge and then follow Priest for *Asperges*.
- Turn and bow at *Gloria Patri*.
- Turn and genuflect on MC's signal, then switch sides again. Take hold of the Cope's edge again and then follow the Priest back to the Sanctuary.
- Upon reaching foot of Altar, genuflect on MC's signal, and then take Aspersory from MC *behind* Priest. Remain next to Priest during *Post Asperges Prayers*.
- After *Prayers*, genuflect on MC's signal, allow Priest to go past MC, then meet MC shoulder to shoulder, and take the Prayer Card from him while proceeding to Sacristy. Place Aspersory and Card on table in Sacristy, do not place it on the Credence Table, because there is not enough room and it is not needed any longer. Take thurible from stand, and put stand next to counter.

### **Preparatory Prayers at Foot of the Altar to 1st Incensation of Altar:**

The normal position for Th during Mass, is in the doorway of Server's Sacristy. Th goes to doorway without genuflecting, unless he is going into a part of the Sacristy out of view of the Altar.

- Th goes to his normal position and stands during the *Preparatory Prayers*, because he is holding the thurible. Neither does he make the sign of the cross, or strikes his chest at "... *mea culpa*," but Th does make the responses, bows appropriately during *Prayers*, and all other times during Mass.

The thurible is not to be swung during the Mass, except during the *Epistle*, to heat up the charcoals for *Gospel* or in cases of urgency. The thurible is only to be swung when being used for its sacred function; to bless. When it is necessary to swing the thurible, it must be done inside the doorway, out of the congregations view, as this can distract attention from the actions on the Altar.

- Immediately after the *Preparatory Prayers* are completed, the MC meets Th at foot of Altar on Epistle side, Th on right and MC on left {for all imposings of incense Th is on MC's right; but for any other function, Th is always to MC's left}.

- Present boat to MC and without bowing, immediately ascend steps to Predella. Hold thurible open for Priest until he blesses the incense, then close the cover, and secure the middle ring.

- Give thurible to MC and then go to left side of Priest. Genuflect with him, supporting his left elbow with your right hand. Accompany Priest to Epistle side, and then back to Tabernacle, genuflect and then move to the Gospel corner of the Predella, while Priest incenses the Gospel side. Remain at the corner while Priest moves towards Tabernacle. Beware of the Priest coming back the second time immediately; he incenses the Gospel front of the Altar twice. After second time, accompany Priest to Tabernacle, genuflect and then immediately descend Altar steps *per breviori* to foot of Altar on Epistle side, leaving room for MC on your right (Th stands to MC's left during *Incensations*)

- MC descends from Predella and meets Th on his right, both make a Very Profound Bow together {90° angle, head and upper body bent like an "L"}, and MC incenses Priest. When incensing of Priest is concluded, both make a Very Profound Bow again. Th receives the thurible back from MC, then resumes normal position until the *Gospel*.

### **Gospel Imposition of Incense to Sermon:**

- When MC comes to Epistle foot of Altar, retrieve boat from Credence Table, and meet MC on his right. Repeat steps for imposing incense, but this time Th keeps the thurible and descends from Predella *per breviori*, places the boat on the Credence Table and meets Acolytes holding their Processional Candles in front of their stools.

- Th then leads Acolytes to carpet, Th on Gospel side. When MC has descend Predella to Epistle side of carpet, Th signals with one clap a genuflection and then leads Acolytes to Gospel side foot of Altar.

- Th takes position on the left, and immediately hands thurible to MC. Th signs himself at *Gospel*, and makes responses.

- When MC descends from Predella to Th's right, Th receives thurible back from MC, holding cover of thurible open.

- Towards end of *Gospel*, when Priest changes tone, MC will take thurible. After Priest kisses the Missal, MC and Th repeat incensation steps for Priest.

- Th follows MC to carpet, with Acolytes behind Th. MC, Th, Ac1 & 2, leaving enough room for Priest to go through. When Priest descends from Predella, MC signals a genuflection. Wait for Priest to go through, then MC goes to Sedilla, and Th leads Acolytes to Credence Table. Then Th exits Sanctuary through Sacristy door.

### **During the Sermon:**

- During the *Sermon* only the Thurifer is allowed to leave the Sanctuary. Immediately after the *Gospel*, proceed to vestibule porch to discard old charcoals. Do not attempt to reuse these, as they will continue to smoke, and will not last to the *Offertory*, which is the most important incensation of the Mass. Scrape out the firepot of any remaining incense or charcoal debris. The cleaner the firepot, the better the incense will smell when it is being burnt.

- After cleaning out the firepot, proceed back to the Sacristy, close both Sacristy doors and put two to three charcoals on the coil.

Prepare charcoals as normal, but remember that *Sermons* often take 45 minutes, so do not start the charcoals too early. Th must make the decision when to light the charcoals.

- Refill the boat if necessary at this time.

### **Credo to Offertory:**

- When Priest begins *Credo*, Th should have charcoals completed or almost completed. Th should be at normal position. Th genuflects and kneels at appropriate times during *Credo*.

- When Acolytes come back to Credence Table after presenting the cruets, Th retrieves the boat from Credence Table, and meets MC on MC's right. At the *Veni Sanctificator* (when Priest makes an arc with his hands over the Chalice), MC and Th ascend to Predella immediately without bowing.

- Repeat imposition steps, except the Priest without genuflecting, incenses the Oblations (Host and Chalice) first, genuflects and then proceeds as normal; the incensation steps are then repeated
- After MC gives the thurible back to Th, MC leads Th to center of carpet, with Th on MC's right.
- MC signals genuflection, and then MC ascends to Predella.

### Incensation of Clerics and Servers:

#### General Rules:

- Th always makes a Simple Bow before and after he incenses a person.
- Th incenses all servers from center line, so he must genuflect when switching from Epistle to Gospel side servers (Clerics).
- There are two different rules for the incensation of MC and servers; 1. with Clerics in choir, 2. without Clerics in choir. In both cases all incensations are performed from the center of the Sanctuary or Choir floor, another words Th is always in line with Tabernacle.
- 1. When Clerics are in choir, Th genuflects with MC and then descends Choir steps to Choir floor, standing in front of the middle kneeler, then he incenses Clerics according to rank: Priests: 2 doubles, Deacons: 1 double, Other Clerics: 1 single each; Th bows to each Cleric before and after incensations, and incenses each Cleric individually. Th then proceeds back to Sanctuary floor, genuflects and incenses MC with 1 single, then Th proceeds to incense other servers as listed below.
- 2. When Clerics are not in Choir (as is usually the case), Th incenses MC immediately after MC ascends to Predella with 1 double. Remaining at center of carpet, Th incenses Ac1 & 2, Cb (& Bb) with 3 singles in this manner: 1st single down the center, 2nd single to left, 3rd single to right (like making the cross). Th waits for Cb to meet him on his right, Th signals a genuflection and incenses the Tbs in the same manner. Th genuflects, and descends Choir steps to Communion Gate, Th then incenses Congregation in the same manner.

### Beginning of Preface to Hanc Igitur:

- When Tbs are lined up in their proper pairs, Th signals genuflection with one clap, and then leads Tbs to Sacristy passing Epistle side Altar (Th should lead Tbs in and out of Sanctuary in a solemn manner).
- Th lines up Tbs in Sacristy hallway with torches, in their proper pairs. When Priest begins the *Sanctus*, Th leads servers back into Sanctuary (on 1st Class Feast days, Th may lead Tbs back into the Sacristy via the halfway point in church, if so he must leave hallway just before *Sanctus* is begun).
- Upon reaching Sanctuary, Th goes to foot of Choir steps and waits for Tbs to assemble in their designated positions; Th must ensure that Tbs are kneeling on their cracks, or they will be uneven.
- Th signals a genuflection and then signals a kneel, Th then goes immediately to his normal position.
- When Ac1 rings bell for *Hanc Igitur*, Th opens thurible, and assisting server places three spoonfuls of incense into thurible.
- Th then goes to Epistle corner foot of Altar (the angle), and remains standing, until MC signals a kneel.

### Consecration:

- When Priest bends over Host and Chalice, do not bow, but remain erect. At the *Genuflections*, make a Profound Bow, and during the *Elevations* incense the Blessed Sacrament and the Precious Blood each with 3 doubles.
- Wait for the MC to signal, then stand, resume normal position while holding thurible in left hand without swinging it.

### Pater Noster:

- When Priest says, "*Per omnia saecula saeculorum*," Th genuflects in doorway, and then puts thurible on stand. Th then resumes normal position.

### Priest's Communion to Communion of Servers:

- When Priest receives Sacred Host, make a Profound Bow. When Priest straightens, Th goes to Credence Table and retrieves Communion Plate (if a second Sacred Minister will be distributing Communion, then retrieve both Plates) and then leads remainder of servers to foot of Altar.
- Th should be on Epistle side at far right, with Bb on his left and Cb in the center of carpet.
- After receiving Communion, Th waits for MC and Priest to leave Predella and then signals servers to stand, descends to Sanctuary floor, Th signals a genuflection, leads servers to normal positions and then signals a kneel.
- After Th has made brief thanksgiving, he goes to Sacristy and puts on one to two charcoals on the coil for the *Recessional*. He then takes thurible to vestibule porch and cleans firepot. Th must be back in Sanctuary kneeling, before Priest is finished distributing Communion.

### Ablutions to Last Gospel:

- When Priest closes Tabernacle, MC signals servers to stand. Th *without* thurible, but with hands folded, goes to center of carpet, genuflects and then descends Choir steps to center of Choir floor.
- When Tbs are lined up in their proper pairs, Th signals a genuflection, and then leads Tbs out of Sanctuary as at *Preface*.
- When Tbs have put torches back on rack, Th *now holding* the thurible, lines up Tbs in hallway, then immediately leads Tbs back into Sanctuary past the Epistle side Altar.
- When Th reaches foot of Choir steps, he waits for Tbs, then signals a genuflection. Th then resumes normal position.
- After servers sign themselves for the *Last Gospel*, Th retrieves the boat and goes to the Epistle edge of the carpet and remains there. Th genuflects during *Last Gospel*.

### Recessional:

- When Priest and MC are together at carpet, Th gives boat to MC and holds open thurible for Priest. After imposing of incense, MC gives boat back to Th, and going around the Acolytes and Cb, Th descends Choir steps to center of Choir floor.
- When MC signals, Th genuflects, turns and then leads servers out of Sanctuary for *Recessional*. Th recesses out in the same manner he processed in, slowly and solemnly.

### In the Sacristy:

- At MC's signal, bow to Processional Cross, then with other servers to Priest after MC. Kneel for the blessing, put the thurible on the stand, and then say the After Mass Prayers.
- Th then needs to ensure all thurible items are placed back neatly in their proper place, the counter is wiped off and the floor swept clean of charcoal debris (if Th has Bb, he assists Th with these duties).
- Ensure Epistle vestibule door is closed and locked.

## Supplement to Thurifer Instruction Sheet

The method for the *Procession* as described in the sheet is tolerable, but the more correct way for the Thurifer to perform this is by one of three ways:

- Th leads *Procession* carrying Aspersory in right hand, and upon reaching foot of Altar, genuflects at center and then immediately goes to left hand side for *Asperges*.
- Ac1, Ac2 and Cb lead *Procession*, with MC and Th holding the edges of the Priest's Cope (like Deacon and Subdeacon at Solemn High Mass) and upon reaching foot of Altar genuflect and perform *Asperges* as usual.
- Th carries thurible and another server to his left (replacing Boatbearer) carries Aspersory, both at head of *Procession*. It is an option as to which server would then assist MC and Priest with *Asperges*. It would be more practical to have the server carrying the Aspersory do so.

The method of the *Recessional* as described in the sheet is tolerable as well, but it is often more correct on a Sunday, that Thurifer does not carry thurible during *Recessional*, his office having ended at the *Consecration*.

However, on all feast days on which a High Mass is said, without an *Asperges*, the method as described in the sheet is allowed.