

THE ENTRANCE PROCESSION IS HIGHLY SYMBOLIC, REMINDING US THAT OUR LIFE IS A PILGRIMAGE TO HEAVEN.

During the first few centuries after Christianity was legalized in Rome, the pope would frequently gather with his little flock at various points in the city and then process to a different “stational” church.

Today, Mass is always preceded by a smaller procession within the church building, as a symbolic gesture that reminds the faithful of their procession or “pilgrimage” to Heaven.

THE ENTRANCE

The formal beginning of the Mass is the entrance of the ministers. Even if for some reason the ministers do not enter in a major procession from the back of the Church (the building is too small, for example), there should be some type of formal entrance. This entrance is usually accompanied by a song.

WHY DO WE SING?

The main purpose of the Opening Hymn is to accompany the entrance procession. It is not a performance and should not continue much after the procession has ended. The general rule is that once the ministers arrive at their seats, the Opening Song should soon be coming to its end.

Normally, the song should have something to do with gathering. It can also be chosen keeping in mind the theme of the day. If there is no singing, the Entrance Antiphon for the day may be read by a minister/lector or by the full congregation in unison.

THE PROCESSION

The entrance procession is normally led by an Acolyte (could be anyone if there are no servers) who's carrying a Processional Cross. Most parishes have an Altar Cross already on the altar. If this is the case, the Processional Cross is placed out of the sanctuary, in an appropriate place, until the Concluding Procession. There should only be one crucifix in the Sanctuary during Mass.

In the procession, the Cross is accompanied by the acolytes carrying two candles (on either side), the deacon carrying the Book of the Gospels (if there is no deacon, a lector may carry it), followed by the Presider. If there is no Book of the Gospels, the deacon enters, then the presider. If there are other priest-concelebrants, they go in front of the Presider and the deacon.

If there is incense to be used, the **Thurifer**, carrying the **Thurible**, goes in front of the Processional Cross.

The candles can also be the candles that are placed at the side of or on the altar, or if there are already altar candles, they can be put in a separate space. If there are no acolytes, it's only necessary to have someone carrying the Cross; no candles are necessary in the procession.

The Procession is much more than just a practical way to "get Father into the sanctuary". Remember that the Priest is a symbol of Christ. In the Opening Procession we are welcoming Jesus himself as He enters in procession (remember Palm Sunday) into our midst. We welcome Him with a song of praise.

REVERENCE TO THE ALTAR

The focal point in all Catholic Churches is the altar. It has a function, but it is also a **symbol** of Christ. All altars are anointed with Holy Chrism when churches are consecrated. Our altar contains a 2nd class relic of St. Therese. Having a relic in the altar is a reminder that when we celebrate Mass, we do so together with the Communion of Saints.

When we enter a church, we reverence the altar with a profound bow. (We reverence the Tabernacle with a genuflection.) The ministers and acolytes who enter in the Opening Procession reverence the altar with a profound bow. (Ministers carrying things, like the cross, the candles, or a book, do not bow.) The priest and deacon also kiss the altar upon their entry because it is a symbol of Christ. On special occasions the altar is incensed.

When we see the priest and the deacon genuflect, they do so towards the Tabernacle. The gesture towards the altar is a bow and then the kiss. Priest's hands are placed upon the altar as he kisses it, but the deacon only bows and kisses the altar. In our parish, since the Tabernacle is behind the altar, it looks like we are bowing and genuflecting in front of the altar, but these are two separate gestures. It is appropriate to merely do one or the other (no matter where the Tabernacle is), towards (in front of) the altar. And I think it goes without saying that bowing to the altar or genuflecting towards the tabernacle is the most appropriate acknowledgement for all baptized Catholics as they enter/exit the church.