

## Ceremonial in Anglican Worship

Most ceremonies, however useful, are inessential and should not become causes for dispute.

Nevertheless, the 1928 Prayer Book does mandate a few ceremonies, such as the **sign of the cross**, **standing for the gospel**, **kneeling for communion**, and **giving a ring at marriage**. These ceremonies, along with the use of vestments, were bitterly opposed in the 16th and 17th centuries by the English Puritans, but they became universal in Anglican churches.

Aside from these few Prayer Book ceremonies, almost the only ceremony traditionally enforced by the Anglican Church is **bowing at the name of Jesus**.

The 1603 Canons of the Church of England mandate that:

...when in time of Divine Service, the name of our Lord Jesus shall be mentioned, due and lowly reverence shall be done by all persons present, as it hath been accustomed; testifying by these outward ceremonies and gestures... inward humility, Christian resolution, and due acknowledgment that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is the only Saviour of the world....

This generally is interpreted to mean that if one is standing or sitting he or she should bow the head when the word 'Jesus' is said in the course of worship.

**The most common customs used in Anglican churches are as follows:**

**Bowing:** At the name of **Jesus**, at mention of '**Trinity**', and when the **three persons of the Trinity are mentioned together** - 'Father, Son, and Holy Ghost'; when the **cross** or the **celebrant passes in procession**; when **passing an altar on which the Sacrament is not reserved**; when **someone bows to you**.

**Genuflection:** At the ***Incarnatus/Incarnation*** in the Creed (not because of the mention of blessed virgin Mary, but because we remember then that Jesus Christ came down from heaven); when passing by the Blessed Sacrament (*e.g.*, when entering or leaving a church); when greeting a Bishop formally. Our Lord gets a genuflection on the **right knee**, the Bishop gets the **left knee**.

**Sign of the Cross:** In general this is done when receiving a blessing, when ending a great prayer, and when hearing or speaking the gospel.

When receiving a blessing would include: the **Benediction** at the end of Morning or Evening Prayer, the **Grace** before a meal; **Absolution** after confession; the **Blessing** at the end of the Eucharist; when the Bishop gives a **Blessing in Procession**; when the congregation is blessed with the Blessed Sacrament at **Benediction**; when **Blessing oneself with holy water** on entering the church; just as you are about to **Receive Holy Communion**.

When ending a great prayer includes the end of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and the Gloria in Excelsis and often when ending private prayer; entering the church; and at the beginning and end of the day.

When **hearing** or **reading** the Holy Gospel; the beginning of gospel canticles at the Daily Offices - the Benedictus Dominus Deus in Morning Prayer and the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* in Evening Prayer (all from St. Luke), at the Benedictus qui venit ('Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord' after the *Sanctus* – perhaps because these are words from the Holy Gospel, though perhaps because of the word 'blessed').

The sign of the cross in the Anglican Church is made with the fingertips of the right hand moving from forehead to chest to left shoulder to right shoulder (and then back to the chest).

At the beginning of the Holy Gospel the sign is made with the thumb upon the forehead, lips, and heart, to show that we should **receive the gospel into our minds, proclaim it with our lips, and love it with our hearts**. The general meaning of this ceremony is that whatever we are doing or saying or receiving in conjunction with it is a blessing from God to us in virtue of the power of the Holy Cross.

**Posture:** The Missals and Prayer Books give some instructions for posture during divine worship, as in rubrics mandating that all stand for the **Holy Gospel** and that **Holy Eucharist be received kneeling**. Otherwise there is considerable liberty and variety of practice. One common rule used to be: **Stand to Sing, sit to Listen, kneel to Pray**. This rule, however, has one exception; that is one stands to listen to the Holy Gospel.

## **Candles & Lamps in Church**

Light is something that most people take so much for granted, that we hardly give it a second thought. Nowadays most of our houses are lit by electricity, but not long ago people relied on gas, oil, and candle power for artificial light. The need for light is fundamental. There can be no life without light. It will come as no surprise, then, to learn that images of light and darkness recur throughout the Holy Bible.

Almost the first thing that we read in the Old Testament (Gen.ch.1v.2) is that in the beginning "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep." The very first action of God in creation was to say, "Let there be light, and there was light and God saw that the light was good."(v3).

In the New Testament too, light is a key image. The Gospel according to St. John describes Our Lord as "the light". Not the light created by God, but the Creator Himself ! Our Lord, too, uses the image of light to teach His disciples, when He says that we should shine as lights exposed on hilltops, and not hide our faith.

### **Altar Candles and Processional Lights**

The number of candles used to decorate altars can vary, but traditionally they are in combinations of two, four and six. A useful rule of thumb is that the more candles, the more important the altar is likely to be. Side Chapel altars normally have two, or sometimes four candles (two being lit for low mass, all four only being lit on high feast days). The High Altar would have anything up to six candles (seven when the Diocesan bishop is present).

The more obvious symbolism is that the altar represents the throne of God, from which the light of Jesus Christ shines upon His gathered people. You may also find it helpful to meditate upon what the number and arrangement of the candles might suggest. Candles carried in procession are a simple, but effective way of honouring both the Cross which they accompany, and also the Celebrant as he represents the person of Christ. Their use adds both dignity and colour to the Church's worship.

### **Lamps in Church**

A White Lamp indicates the presence of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. The perpetual presence of the Blessed Sacrament means that Holy Communion is always available for the sick and the dying. It also reminds us that, as we enter the church we are immediately reminded of Our Lord's promise – to be with us always to the end of the world! A Red Lamp burns before a statue or Icon of a saint.

A Blue Lamp signifies a statue of Our Lady Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Lamps help focus our attention and are welcoming and warming symbols of radiance. The Seven Lamps hanging in the Sanctuary before some altars represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Ghostly Strength, Knowledge, True Godliness and Holy Fear.

### **Oil in Church**

Oil is used in Church in two ways: we sometimes burn it in votive lamps, and we anoint people with it. In both cases its use can be traced back to the earliest times. In the Old Testament we read of prophets and kings being anointed with oil, while in the New, we see oil being used to on one who is both--Jesus Christ.

The Christian Church adopted the use of oil from both Jewish and pagan practice very early in its history. While anointing with oil largely fell from favour in the Church of England at the time of the Reformation, its use was restored in the nineteenth century.

The importance of oil in the Anglican High Church is without question, and it has its proper place in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Unction (or the anointing of the sick) and in the Ordination of priests, It is also used at the Consecration of Bishops and in the Solemn Consecration of certain items set apart for worship, such as Altars.

## **Incense**

Incense is made from various aromatic resins and gums taken from trees and other plants. When burned it gives off scented smoke. In church it is normally burned in a Thurible or Censer. Because it is difficult to burn on its own, and to create the perfumed smoke, it is burned on charcoal.

Most of Christianity uses, or has used, incense in worship. All the Eastern Orthodox Churches burn incense at most of their services, or liturgies. In the 'west' the Roman Catholic Church burns incense at many of its services, although its use is not as common as it once was.

The Church of England used incense throughout its history, until the mid 1600s, when it fell into disuse generally and subsequently became illegal. From that time, though, it continued to be used in worship in isolated instances, such as in York Minster, and since the mid 19th century its use has spread and increased. It forms a normal part of ACC liturgy and worship.

## **Incense and Liturgy**

Liturgy is the formal public worship of the Church – its work. The Liturgy of the Church is made up of the liturgy of each individual Christian, and should be the best that we can possibly offer to God. Christian worship flows out of our love of God and our desire to express that love. As such we should worship Him with “all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength”. Good liturgy is designed to stimulate just such a response in us, by exciting the senses and feeding our imagination. The use of incense enables

even fuller participation in the liturgy by stimulating the sense of smell. It also provides colour, movement and sound as the thurible is swung and its chain ‘chinks’ and ‘tinkles’.

Symbols in liturgy help to point our minds in the direction of invisible realities, and speak to us in a language often richer than words alone. As a symbol, incense is exceptionally rich in associations. Of its many possible associations, two are particularly worthy of mention here.

In St. Matthew 2:11 we read of the Magi bringing Frankincense (a particular type of incense) as a gift to the Christ child. The words of that well-loved Christmas carol “We three kings”: “Incense owns a Deity nigh” mean that incense is a sign of our belief in the Real Presence of Christ, the Son of God. What was good enough for the Magi is surely good enough for us!

In the Book of Revelation, or Apocalypse, the burning of incense appears to be an important part of the worship of heaven. In chapter 5 verse 8 we read of “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the Saints” This whole book is full of symbolism. Many commentators believe that Saint John, the writer of the book, was strongly influenced by the worship, or liturgy, of his own church. When we burn incense we remind ourselves that our prayers, like the incense, ascend to the throne of God and mingle with the prayers of the Saints in heaven.

### **The Offering of Incense**

At the heart of worship in the Temple at Jerusalem was sacrifice. The sacrificial offering was usually a living thing such as a lamb or bird, but the fruits of the earth were also offered, including incense. In the Temple there was even an altar specially set aside for the burning of incense. With the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 the sacrificial worship of the Old Testament came to an end.

The necessity for much of it had already been brought to an end several years before, by the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Our human need to offer thanksgiving and sacrifice to God remains, however. In our daily lives, Christians have the opportunity to give the best of themselves back to God in the service of each other. In our worship we have the opportunity to offer tokens that represent ourselves. Incense is a token of the best that we have to offer.

In 2nd Corinthians 2:15-16 we read “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” In the Eucharistic Sacrifice we join our offering with that of Christ Himself on the

cross, as at the hands of the priest He offers Himself to the Father on our behalf. The burning of incense in the Mass reminds us that Christ's sacrifice is real, and just as effective for us who are alive today as it was when He died on the cross.

### **When we burn Incense**

The most natural and appropriate time to burn incense is when the Lord comes among us in Person in the Mass. In the same way, at the service of Benediction you will find incense burned then. It is also burned at particular points during Divine Service, notably during the *Te Deum* and *Benedictus* at solemn celebrations of Mattins, and during the *Magnificat* at Solemn Evensong. It is occasionally used at other times also, such as at funerals, and when objects, people and places are blessed.

### **Bells**

The church generally has three sets of bells: the tower bells, the Sanctus or Sanctuary bells, and the Sacristy bell.

The **Tower bell** or bells are rung for five minutes one half hour before public service and then again for the five minutes immediately before. The tower bell also is traditionally tolled solemnly for funerals and joyfully after weddings and on other joyous liturgical or public occasions.

The **Sanctus Bell** (so called because it is rung during the *Sanctus* at the Eucharist) varies in character: it may be a small silver bell (especially for a bishop), a group of bells (campanili), a gong, or a switch connected to the tower bell. The Sanctus Bells are rung during the liturgy to call attention to an important moment.

The bells are used because people's attention does tend to wander. When a priest is celebrant, the bells are rung: three times at the beginning of the Sanctus, during the Canon at the genuflections and elevations at the consecration of the Host and Chalice.

The **Sacristy bell** is rung as a signal that the priest is about to enter the sanctuary from the sacristy. It is a signal for the congregation to stand.

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