

**The Catholic Church of St Mary the Virgin**  
(Anglican Use)

Arlington, Texas

Directions for  
thurifer and boat boy

*These directions are supplemental to the "Directions for all altar servers". Neither takes the place of the other. They must be read together and all directions in both are to be followed.*

29 December A. D. 2001

**Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam**

## General instructions

The thurible (more commonly called the “censer” in the Roman church) is perhaps the most complicated piece of equipment used in the liturgies of the Church. Moreover, it is active in the sense that it doesn’t just sit there. The combustion of the incense is like the burning of the candles, but requires more care and work on the part of the person in charge of it, the thurifer.

The thurible has several parts, and for clarity in what follows these parts must be named. When reference is made to the “thurible”, this entire assembly is to be understood. There is a base having a kind of large cup with a foot which is the part on which the thurible rests when not suspended by its chains. A fire pot is set into the cup part of the base. The cover goes over the base to conceal the fire pot. The three chains attached to the base, by which the entire thurible may be suspended, are the suspension chains. These chains are connected at their upper ends to a “disk” which, in fact, is not a flat disk. There is a ring on the top of this disk. Further, a single chain is attached to the cover, passes through the disk, and has a large ring at this further end. This is the cover chain. There is, finally, a heavy ring through which all four chains pass, and is free to slide from just above the cover to just below the disk.

The cover ring has only one function. It is solely for hanging the thurible up by the hook at the top of the thurible stand, or on the bracket in the sacristy. It should not be used to carry the thurible by hooking a finger or thumb through it. The proper way to carry the thurible is by grasping all the chains in the hand, just below the disk.

The large sliding brass ring should be kept just above the cover. Hence, it is always as far down as possible when the thurible is closed. To open the thurible, the ring must be slid all the way up and held there by the hand that is holding the thurible. (This is ordinarily the left hand, although the thurible will be carried by the right hand except in the entrance procession.) Then the cover is raised by pulling up the cover chain using the ring on its further end. The large ring and the chains can all be grasped by the left hand while the right hand steadies the foot of the thurible when the celebrant is putting incense on the coals. When the thurible is closed by letting the chain down, the ring must then be slid as far down as possible.

Although it seems at first somewhat awkward to do so, the thurifer genuflects, kneels, or bows from the waist just as others do, even though he is carrying the thurible. The thurible is carried in the right hand, except in the entrance procession, when it has not yet been blessed. The other hand is kept flat on the breast, fingers more or less together, over the breast bone.

The smoke from the thurible carries a large volume of gummy solids in suspension. Some of this condenses on the relatively cooler parts of the thurible and is somewhat fluid so long as the thurible is hot. If your cotta brushes this gummy stuff, it will be stained. Some of the matter can be taken out by wiping with a cloth moistened in alcohol, but the stains will not wash out. Avoid this problem by keeping the thurible away from yourself and others.

The thurifer has charge of the boat boy. In procession, the boat boy should usually be to the thurifer’s left and one half step behind him. When standing, as at the Gospel, they line up together. The boat boy should carry the boat in both hands and keep the cover closed except when the celebrant is spooning out incense.

## **The proper technique of swinging the thurible**

The proper technique of swinging the thurible consists first of all in the proper grip on the chains. The thurible is ordinarily *carried* in the right hand, grasped just below the disk, but when it is to be swung the thurible is first switched to the left hand, again with the hand just below the disk. Then the right hand grasps the chains just above the cover. The proper grip at this point is very important. The hand is turned palm up, with the thumb and the forefinger held together. The other three fingers are held together, but apart from the forefinger. The chains are then passed between the forefinger and the middle finger, far down towards the palm. The hand is then turned vertically. Now the thurible is hanging by the chains which pass over the backs of the last three fingers. The point of this way of doing things is to keep the hand, particularly the forefinger and thumb, clean of the gum that collects on the chains just above the thurible. The left hand continues to hold the chains just below the disk.

The swinging consists of two distinct motions, first bringing the thurible up, and then swinging it forward. The proper height for your hand while swinging is about at the top of your chest, not higher than your shoulder, not so low as the breastbone. The hand is brought up to this height and then the thurible is swung the proper number of times. One does not pause at all between these motions of first raising and then swinging, and they should flow into each other, but they are distinct. If three single swings are called for, the thurible is brought up and swung once, then lowered, then brought up again and swung again, and so on. Three double swings means to bring the thurible up, swing twice, lower it, raise a second time and swing twice, and finally down, up, and a double swing. Each swing should be through about 45 degrees. The left hand should be holding the slack chains back so that there is little if any contact between them and the thurible on the back swing.

The following are the general rules for the number of swings to be given. To the Blessed Sacrament, and only to the Blessed Sacrament, three triple swings are given. The celebrant (or a concelebrant) is given three double swings. Any group is given three single swings.<sup>1</sup> Thus the congregation receives three single swings, as do the altar servers when incensed as a group. A single person who is not a celebrant receives a single double swing. The MC incensed alone thus receives one double swing. When three sets of swings are given, the first is directly to the person (or group), the second somewhat to the left, and the third to the right.

As soon as the incensing is completed, the thurible is switched back to the right hand.

## **The ritual of the solemn sung Mass**

### **Before the entrance procession**

The thurifer, as all the servers, should be in the sacristy fifteen minutes before the scheduled time for Mass. Before vesting, he should check the rims of the bowl and the cover. If there is any gummy residue on them, he should clean them with alcohol, so that the bowl and cover will not stick

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<sup>1</sup>However, if the group is the celebrant with one or more concelebrants, the group receives the three double swings that would be accorded them if they were incensed individually.

together. This is an important matter, as wrestling a sticking cover loose can cause live coals to fly out of the firebox, which never happens without damage to someone or something. The alcohol and disposable rags are available in the sacristy and used for this purpose. Disposable rubber gloves are also available. Wearing gloves, or at least on the hand that holds the rag, will keep resin from getting on the hands. If the thurifer does get resin on his hands, he should clean them with alcohol and wash with soap and water. He vests in cassock and cotta after seeing to the cleaning of the thurible.

From five to ten minutes before the scheduled time of Mass, he lights at least one tablet of charcoal, using the alcohol burner.<sup>2</sup> The coal should be definitely lit, but not glowing all over, as it would then burn out before the Gospel. The coal is dropped in the fire pot and the thurible closed. He should also see to it that the boat is fully charged with incense, and that the boat boy has his vestments in good order. Although the Master of Ceremonies is in charge of all servers, the thurifer has immediate responsibility for the boat boy in particular.

### **From the entrance procession to the Gospel**

The thurifer leads the entrance procession. As soon as the MC rings the sacristy bell, the thurifer opens the door to the aisle and starts out. He walks in the center, with the boat boy to his left. The boat boy must be thought of as an appendage to the thurifer. The thurifer therefore walks in the center; he does not walk to the right of center so as to make room for the boat boy. The entrance procession is not considered a solemn procession, so incense is not put in the thurible and the thurible is carried in the left hand, without any swinging. The right hand is kept flat on the breast.

The procession goes out and turns left so as to pass in front of the first pew. At the center, another left turn is made and the procession goes into the sanctuary. The thurifer stands left of center, allowing room for the celebrant to come up at the very center of the sanctuary.

The celebrant will go up to the altar to kiss it. As he is coming down, the thurifer turns towards the celebrant and opens the thurible. He holds the disk in his left hand. The boat boy will come up on the first step and open the boat, holding it a few inches away from the thurible and pointing the boat directly at the celebrant. The thurible and the boat should be held up at a convenient height, so that the celebrant need not stoop to put the incense on. When the celebrant has finished loading the thurible with incense and has replaced the spoon in the boat, he will bless the incense.<sup>3</sup> The thurifer immediately closes the thurible (remembering to slide the ring all the way down) and hands it to the celebrant by offering it to him with the thurifer's left hand.

The celebrant incenses the altar. As he comes down from the altar, he hands the thurible to the thurifer, who takes it in his right hand. The thurifer remains in his place, facing forward, while the celebrant goes over to his chair. Exactly as the celebrant reaches his chair, the thurifer turns directly toward him. They bow to each other. The thurifer incenses the celebrant with three double swings. They bow to each other again. The thurifer and all other servers still at the foot of the altar then turn

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<sup>2</sup>The hottest part of the flame is just *above* the visible tip of fire. Holding the charcoal in the flame is not the quickest way to light it.

<sup>3</sup>The rubrics actually call for the thurifer to prompt the celebrant by saying "Pray, sir, a blessing." Father Hawkins does not need this prompting; visiting celebrants may.

to the left and walk to their seats. The boat boy and the thurifer go all the way back to the stand, where the boat boy puts up the boat and the thurifer hangs up the thurible. Both then go to stand in front of their respective seats. The boat boy is seated next to the stand, and the thurifer is on the bench next to him.

## **The Gospel**

After the MC has read the second reading, he turns around to go up to the altar and take up the book of the gospels. As he turns, all other servers rise. The thurifer and the boat boy immediately take up the thurible and the boat and go to the celebrant's chair. The thurifer leads, walking on the pavement. They should move somewhat quickly, so that the celebrant is kept waiting for as short a time as possible; this is not the time to have a stately pace. In crossing in front of the altar, the thurifer and the boat boy pause, together, for the briefest instant to bow in reverence to the Sacrament in the tabernacle. They continue on the pavement until they are past the ambo. Only then do they turn left and go up to the celebrant, who is still seated in his chair. The thurifer opens the thurible and the boat boy opens the boat. Again, both are held at a convenient height while the celebrant spoons incense on the coals. He will also bless the incense before the thurifer closes the thurible. When this is done, the thurifer and the boat boy turn around and retrace their steps until they are standing in front of the altar, in the positions they took when they first entered in procession.

The celebrant comes to the center of the first step to pray briefly. He then turns around. At the same time, all servers turn around. For each server, the turn is made towards the center, so the thurifer and boat boy turn right. The procession begins in the usual order, the thurifer leading, with the boat boy to his left.

The thurifer stops one full pace short of the first pew. The torchbearers pass on each side of the thurifer and stop and turn to stand at the head of the first pew. The instant they have passed him, the thurifer and the boat boy in one motion turn left and step back. They are thus facing south, and line up with the torchbearer on that side, that is, the sacristy side of the aisle. The crucifer and MC then pass in front of them, and the celebrant comes to a stop in front of the thurifer.

The celebrant announces the Gospel. After singing "The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to ...", he takes the thurible from the thurifer, who gives it to him with his right hand. Ideally, the left hand should be used to hold the thurible back at about the middle of the chains, so that the celebrant can take hold of the chains just above the thurible with his right hand and take the chains farther up with his left. He incenses the book and then hands the thurible back to the thurifer. During the proclamation of the Gospel, the thurifer holds the thurible chains by his right hand, swinging the thurible at full length but gently. The left hand is kept flat on the breast.

When the proclamation of the gospel has ended, the MC walks back to the sanctuary. The torch bearers turn and follow him, and the crucifer follows the torch bearers, in the same order as the entrance procession. As soon as the crucifer has passed, the thurifer also turns towards the altar. He does not go into the sanctuary, however, but wheels around the celebrant so as to end up on the other side of the celebrant and facing the pulpit. The boat boy throughout this maneuver keeps at his left side. The celebrant then turns and goes up to the sanctuary, passing in back of the boat boy and the thurifer. When the celebrant has mounted the pulpit, he turns and faces the thurifer. They bow to each other and the thurifer incenses the celebrant with three double swings. They bow to each other again.

The thurifer and boat boy turn and go up to the sanctuary. At the center of the pavement, they pause to bow in reverence to the Sacrament in the tabernacle. They replace the boat and the thurible on the stand and go to sit in their respective seats while the sermon is preached.

### **After the sermon, to the Eucharistic prayer**

When the sermoner has come down from the pulpit, all watch the MC and stand when he does. The Creed, the prayers of the faithful, and any anniversary blessings follow. As the Creed begins, the thurifer and boat boy take up the thurible and boat and go into the sacristy. The crucifer steps back and opens the sacristy door for them and makes way for them to pass in front of him.

In the sacristy, fresh charcoal is put in the fire pot. Once again, it should be started but not glowing all over. The boat boy recharges the boat with incense. They return to the sanctuary at a time when they will be least noticed. The best moment is just as the prayers of the people are ending. As soon as the instruments are replaced on the stand, the thurifer and the boat boy kneel with the others on the first step of the altar during the anniversary blessings. Then all sit during the announcements. Again, all servers should follow the MC, rising from the kneeling position and sitting just when he does.

When the announcements end, the MC will stand and all servers stand at the same moment. The boat boy stands in front of his seat. The thurifer turns to his right and faces forward. The torch bearers take the gifts from the oblationers and the torch bearer bearing the cruets takes them to the thurifer. The thurifer takes out the stoppers. He and the bearer bow to each other. The thurifer puts the stoppers on the credence table, towards the front on the right hand side, allowing room for the cruets to be set down in back of them later on. He now looks up to see, if he can, whether the celebrant has asked the MC for the box of hosts, also on the credence table. If he sees that the box is needed, he takes it up and goes up to the second step to give it to the MC, unopened. They bow to each other and the thurifer waits there until the MC returns with the box. The thurifer takes it from him and they bow to each other. The thurifer replaces the box on the credence table. The thurifer then takes up the thurible, and the boat boy takes up the boat.

The celebrant prepares the chalices. The MC will bring the cruets to the side and the crucifer will take them from him, replace them on the credence table, and go back to stand beside his seat. At this moment, the thurifer and the boat boy go up to the second step, facing directly to the celebrant, and wait for him to turn towards them. When he does, they immediately walk directly up to the celebrant in front of the altar. The celebrant puts more incense on the coals and blesses it, the thurifer and boat boy handling the thurible and boat in the usual way. The thurifer hands the closed thurible to the celebrant and then both he and the boat boy turn around and walk down to the second step. There they turn around, always turning towards each other, and stand. In retreating from the celebrant, they must turn around and walk. They must not attempt to walk backwards down to the second step.

The celebrant incenses the altar, walking all around it. As the celebrant, having made the circuit of the altar, turns at the center of the altar, the thurifer goes up and takes the thurible from the him. The thurifer then steps back one pace. He and the celebrant bow to each other, and he incenses the celebrant. The boat boy should go up with the thurifer, but not advance all the way, so that he does not have to step backward when the thurifer does.

Having incensed the celebrant, the thurifer and the boat boy walk to the celebrant's left, going down to the second step of the predilla. The MC should be waiting on that same step, at the side. The

MC and thurifer bow to each other, and the thurifer incenses the MC with one double swing. They bow to each other again. If the MC is for some reason busy and is not ready to be incensed, the thurifer should not wait, but should go on to incense the congregation. If the MC is not incensed at this time, then he is not incensed at all. The thurifer does not attempt to remedy the deficiency.

Having incensed the MC, the thurifer turns to the left and goes down to the pavement, exactly in the center. He bows to the congregation and then incenses them with three single swings. They again bow to each other. The thurifer and boat boy turn to their right and walk along the pavement. At the corner they turn and face the other servers. The crucifer will be standing in front of the sacristy door and the torch bearers will be putting the lavabo bowl, towel, and water cruet on the credence table. As soon as all the servers turn to him, the thurifer bows to the group and they to him, and the thurifer incenses the group with three single swings. The thurifer and the boat boy then walk along the pavement back to the stand, where they deposit the thurible and the boat. The servers who are at the credence table pass by them, walking forward on the first step of the predilla. The thurifer and the boat boy then stand in front of their respective seats.

After exhorting the people “Let us give thanks ...”, the celebrant chants the preface to the Canon of the Mass. Most usually, this preface concludes with a section that begins with the word “Therefore”. This word is the cue for the servers to start moving to the front of the altar. The servers should nonetheless watch the MC, particularly at solemnities such as Christmas, which has a special preface that does not contain this word. The MC should give a glance to the servers when the celebrant has nearly finished the preface and it is time to move into position.

At the word “Therefore”, the thurifer immediately takes up the thurible and he and the boat boy go to the foot of the altar. The boat boy does *not* take the boat with him. One torch bearer precedes them, and the other follows. At the foot of the altar, the thurifer stands exactly in the center, and the boat boy stands to his left.

### **During the Eucharistic prayer**

When the Benedictus (“Blessed is He ...”) ends, the thurifer steps up on the first step of the predilla and kneels down on the second step. The boat boy kneels beside him to his left, or may, if he wishes, kneel on the first step if the smoke will bother him too much. It can become very heavy when one is kneeling near the thurible.

After the words of institution (“... which will be given up for you.”) the celebrant will elevate the consecrated host. As he begins to raise the host, the thurifer begins to incense the Blessed Sacrament, using three triple swings. Similarly, the thurifer incenses the Precious Blood when it is elevated, again using three triple swings.

After the Eucharistic prayer has been finished and the great Amen sung by the congregation in response, all servers rise. The torch bearers return to their places. The thurifer and the boat boy go back and put the thurible and boat on the stand. Upon rising from his kneeling position, where he has rung the bells, the crucifer steps back and to his left and faces forward. He is at this point actually behind the reredos. In this way, he allows the thurifer or boat boy ample space to replace the thurible on its stand. He may, indeed, take the thurible from the thurifer to do him the service of putting it back, but he should not take it from the boat boy if the thurifer has given it to the boat boy to put up.

The thurifer then goes to stand in front of the crucifer's seat, and the boat boy, to his left, will stand in front of the thurifer's seat. The crucifer now stands left of the boat boy, facing the altar. He will have to be in this position when the time comes to ring the bells at the celebrant's communion.

### **During the communion service**

At the celebrant's invitation to the congregation to give each other a sign of peace, each server greets at least one other server. The greetings exchanged should not be overly demonstrative, and should be concluded before most of the congregation have concluded theirs. After the chant "Therefore let us keep the feast, [alleluia]" the servers all kneel on the first step, the same time at which the congregation kneels.

About the time that the "Lamb of God" verses are chanted, the celebrant may go to the tabernacle to take out the ciborium with the reserved Sacrament. All should keep their eyes on the tabernacle as this is done.

The crucifer rings the bells once just before the celebrant consumes the host. All the servers then rise. The thurifer and the crucifer ordinarily are the cup bearer and the paten bearer, respectively, and they kneel on the top step facing the front of the altar. The MC kneels farthest to the right (if he communicates at this Mass), the cup bearer next to him, and the paten bearer next to the corner of the top step. The other servers kneel on the top step, on the side. The celebrant communicates all the servers in the body of Christ. The MC has ordinarily taken Holy Communion at the earlier Mass, and he will take up the priest's chalice as soon as the celebrant starts communicating the Sacrament to the servers. The MC will administer the Precious Blood at least to the cup bearer and the paten bearer. When the cup bearer and paten bearer have both received the Blood of Christ, they rise. The cup bearer goes up to the center of the altar and genuflects in adoration of the Precious Blood, even though he has just received the Sacrament. He takes up the chalice and the purificator laying in front of it. If the MC has not administered the Precious Blood to the torch bearers and the boat boy, the cup bearer will do so before they rise and retire to kneel on the first step. The cup bearer then goes to communicate the Precious Blood to the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

### **After communion**

When the cup bearer has finished administering the Precious Blood, he turns to go up to the altar. If either the MC or the cup bearer finishes before the other, he waits facing the altar until both have finished communicating the Precious Blood. They then mount the altar steps together, the cup bearer on the left, and go up to altar. The cup bearer first places his chalice on the corporal, and lays the folded purificator he has been using in front of the cup. He waits until the MC has done the same. Both then genuflect to reverence the Sacrament.

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<sup>4</sup>At this point, the more detailed "Directions for paten bearers" or "Directions for cup bearers" should be consulted. The rest of these directions assume that the thurifer is the cup bearer, which is the ordinary case. If the thurifer is the paten bearer, he should consult the instructions at this point in the "Directions for the crucifer".

The cup bearer then goes to the credence table, takes up the water cruet, and bears it up to the MC. The MC takes it from him and they bow to each other. The cup bearer remains standing there, ready to take up the communion paten when the celebrant has cleaned it and put it to his left. The MC will usually see to it that the communion paten is moved to the left of the Altar Missal. The cup bearer takes up the paten in two hands and carries it to the sacristy. The paten bearer opens the door for him. The communion paten is placed on the counter by the sacarium (sink).

The celebrant next cleans the ciborium, covers it, and puts it to the side. The cup bearer takes it up and carries it to the sacristy. Lastly, the cup bearer will take up the chalice which he used at communion, after it is purified by the celebrant and put to the side. When the cup bearer then returns from the sacristy, he brings along the celebrant's biretta and puts it on the crucifer's seat. He also closes the sacristy door. He then goes up to take the water cruet from the MC, unless it has earlier been handed to the crucifer. Taking the cruet from the MC, the cup bearer bows to him and replaces the cruet on the credence table and stoppers it. The cup bearer then kneels on the first step with the other servers.

After the celebrant's blessing, and when the congregation has finished its response to the dismissal ("Thanks be to God"), all the servers rise. The thurifer and the boat boy take up the thurible and the boat and go to the foot of the altar, to stand in the same places they took when they first entered. They genuflect when the celebrant does. They turn when the celebrant does, and the thurifer, the boat boy to his left, leads the procession to the sacristy. The thurible is carried in the right hand, but it is not swung. The thurifer opens the door to the sacristy and holds it while all the rest of the party enter. He then enters and shuts the door in back of him.

### **After Mass**

In the sacristy after the Mass, the thurifer and the boat boy remain standing with the thurible and the boat until the celebrant has led the group in a short prayer. The boat boy then puts the boat up and the thurifer hangs the thurible, closed, on its bracket.

At the Sunday solemn Mass, the Angelus immediately follows. The servers take off their cottas as quickly as they can and go out with the celebrant. All stand in front of the pulpit until the closing hymn has been concluded. The celebrant goes forward to the center of the pavement and the servers move forward until just past the pulpit, forming up in two ranks, in any order.

At the verse "And the Word was made flesh," all genuflect. When the Angelus is concluded, all turn and genuflect towards the Sacrament in the tabernacle, then go to the sacristy. The thurifer then puts off his cassock and cotta. Every server is responsible for hanging up his cassock and cotta, and any other vestment he has taken off the rack.

The thurifer is further responsible for cleaning out the fire pot. The entire thurible and the teaspoon (*not* the spoon used with the boat) and perhaps the tongs are taken out the outside door next to the sacristy. A block of some kind is kept there to prop the door open. The fire pot is lifted out with the spoon or the tongs. It is *very* hot and must not be touched with the fingers. Using the tongs or spoon, the thurifer knocks as much of the coals and incense as possible out onto the drainage block beside the door. The spoon is used to dig out as much of the gunk in the fire pot as is reasonably possible with two or three minutes labor. The entire thurible is then reassembled and it, and the tools, are brought back to the sacristy. Be sure the outside door is shut. The tools are put away. The thurible is again hung on its bracket, now open all the way. If necessary, the clothespin

may be used to hold the cover chain so that the cover stays up. The thurifer may wish to wash his hands at the sacrarium, or use alcohol to wipe his hands if he has gotten gum on them. It would also be a service to the next thurifer to clean the rims of the bowl and cover, but this should only be done with the firebox removed, as alcohol has a relatively low flash point and might possibly be ignited if the firebox was still very hot.

## **In solemn procession**

On some occasions, the entrance procession will start not in the sacristy but in the church foyer. There is otherwise nothing different about this procession. Incense is not put on the coals before the procession, and the thurible is carried in the left hand without swinging.

Solemn processions are those which, after the entrance procession, begin from the altar and make the circuit of the church. After all have lined up at the altar in the usual way (except that the crucifer remains at the foot of the altar instead of putting the cross up), the celebrant will reverence the altar and then put incense on the coals in the usual way. He then chants an antiphon to the processional hymn. As he turns around, all turn with him, turning towards the center. The thurifer leads the procession, the boat boy walking to his left and a half step behind. During the procession, the thurifer carries the thurible in his right hand and swings it moderately while holding it at full length, that is, the hand just under the disk. The left hand is kept flat on the breast, as usual.

The course of the procession is directly up the main aisle, then left to go down along the aisle on the south side of the church. The procession then turns left and passes in front of the altar all the way to the north aisle. The Sacrament in the tabernacle is *not* revered as the procession passes in front of it. Turning left, the procession passes up the north aisle to the back of the church, where it turns left again. Finally, another left turn is made and the procession ends by passing down the main aisle. Again, all go into the sanctuary and take the places they held before the solemn procession began. There then occurs what is called a “station” at the foot of the altar. Theoretically, it is a pause in the procession to chant a prayer. In this case, the station ends the solemn procession. When the prayer ends, the celebrant will incense the altar but without putting new incense on the coals. The Mass then goes on in the usual way.

The only great difficulty for the thurifer in solemn procession is pacing the procession properly. He is the one who sets the pace for the whole procession, which ideally should arrive back at the altar just before the processional hymn ends. Were all processional hymns of more or less the same length, there would be little problem. But, in fact, they vary widely. It is absolutely essential that the thurifer look at the processional hymn before the ceremonies begin and make a thoughtful estimate of how long the hymn will take. He may wish to consult with the choir director about this. The thurifer then paces the procession to match the length of the hymn.

A thurifer who is willing to take real care about this matter of pacing will even, well in advance of the ceremonies, try walking along an aisle of the Church while himself singing a verse or two of the hymn. Trying different paces, he can get an idea which pace is needed for the desired result, considering the entire length of the procession’s circuit and the number of verses in the hymn. After leading a few such processions, experience will enable him to estimate the proper pace just by looking at the hymn and perhaps humming through one verse.