

**FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF FAITH FORMATION**

**August 27, 2023**

**ON INCENSING DURING MASS**

I'm sure most of you have seen incense used during Holy Mass at least once, if not more regularly. Incense is not necessary for a valid Mass, so you may wonder why we bother to use it at all. There are a few reasons for this.

One reason is that the rising of incense symbolizes our prayers rising into Heaven, giving us a sense of the sacred occasion taking place. We see this mentioned in the sacred scriptures, in Psalm 141:2 "Let my prayer be incense before you, my uplifted hands an evening offering."

In addition, the incensation at the offertory unites us, the Church here on earth, with the offerings that are to become Our Lord's Body and Blood. At a Mass that uses incense, the priest incenses the altar and gifts before the consecration. Then the priest himself, and all the people in the congregation, are incensed as well by an altar server.

What is the link between all things? Why are the gifts, the priest, and the congregation all incensed? They are all vessels for Our Lord: the host that will become Our Lord, the priest who acts in the person of Christ, and ourselves who will physically receive

Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, our bodies become sacred vessels that hold Our Lord.

Now, this is not to say that we are perfect. We are far from it, and the soul is certainly the most important part of a human being. But our bodies become sacred, as they receive the sacraments throughout the duration of our lives. This is why the casket is always incensed at a Catholic funeral; as a recognition of the sacred human body. Hopefully this gives you more of an appreciation for the use of incense during the offering of Holy Mass. It is not used just for show or because we feel like it, but because it is a valuable and beautiful tradition of our Catholic faith.



—Kate McGrath Holmquist