

INCENSE, SIGN OF THE CROSS AND GREETING

The use of incense is an expression of reverence and prayer and is often referred to in Sacred Scriptures. Incense may be used, if desired, in any form of Mass, during the entrance procession or at the beginning of the Mass to incense the cross and the altar. The priest places the incense into the thurible and blesses it with the sign of the Cross. Before and after incensation, a profound bow is made to the person or object that is incensed, except for the incensation of the altar and the offerings for the sacrifice of the Mass.

When the entrance song is concluded, the priest stands at the altar and together with the whole congregation makes the Sign of the Cross. Then he signifies the presence of the Lord to the gathered faithful by means of the Greeting. By this Greeting and the people's response, the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest.

Signing by the cross was a gesture practiced by Christians as early as the second century. By the fourth century it was incorporated at many points in the celebration of the sacraments. Yet, the signing at the beginning of the Mass appeared in the Roman Liturgy only with the medieval introduction of the prayers at the foot of the altar. A greeting extended by the presiding minister, however, is among the most ancient elements of the introductory rites. At Rome it served as the introduction to the opening prayers of the Mass. The traditional form in the West has been, "The Lord be with you," a text of biblical origin.