

TRINITY NEWS

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Liturgy 6 Smells ...

***A**nd the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Revelation 8:4*

Incense rounds out the sensual experience of the Liturgy with the sense of smell: not only the mind, but the whole body participates in the experience, affirming the importance of our bodies and of the physical world as God's creation.

Incense has been used at worship from the most ancient times, and was an important element of the liturgy of the Jerusalem Temple: Jesus and the early Jewish Christian Church would have been quite familiar with it. It is mentioned at the beginning (Zachariah, John the Baptist's father in the Temple; the magi bearing frankincense), and at the end (the heavenly altar in Revelation) of the New Testament – and at several points in between,

The first record of the use of incense in Christian worship appears in the diary of a nun Spanish nun Egeria (ca. 380 AD) on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, though it must have started well before that.. Apparently it was something she was unaccustomed to in the West. By the 11th century though, the use of incense had become established everywhere and is was used by all Christians until the Reformation when it was abandoned by most Protestants until the liturgical revival of the 19th century.

Incense symbolizes the “prayers of the saints” that accompany the offering up of the elements of the bread and the wine, the offerings of the people, of the ministers and the people themselves at the Eucharist. The altar, the place where the offering is made is censed at the beginning of the Eucharist; the gospel book is censed as we glorify God for its proclamation among us; the bread, wine and collection are censed at the offertory, then one by one, the participants. The thurifer (the acolyte carrying the censer, or thurible) or the deacon (if there is one) first censes the presider, then other ministers, then the choir and finally the congregation. We are thus all offered up together in union with Christ's one offering in this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Let my prayer be set forth in your sight as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Psalm 141