

The Things we use in our Worship

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Part III



Moving on now to the sacred vessels, the two most important are the chalice and paten, but they are brought to the altar vested or wrapped up, so we must unwrap them.

On top we find a pocket called a *burse* (like a purse), its purpose is to hold a white cloth called the *corporal*. The use of the burse is relatively new, dating only to the 17th century...



but the *corporal*, from the Latin *corpus*, as it will hold the Body of our Lord, has been used since the 4th century or earlier. The corporal is spread over where the antimimension has been placed under the fair linen, and the consecration of the bread and wine will take place on the corporal.

The chalice is covered with a *veil*. Elaborate veils date only from the 16th century as before that time the chalice was covered with a second corporal. Scripture reminds us that there was a veil in the Temple in Jerusalem before the Holy of Holies. The veil shows reverence, dignity and mystery. As the veil is removed from the chalice at the Offertory, after the Word of God has been proclaimed in Scripture and our faith



declared in the Creed, the holy mysteries of God are about to be revealed. The veil is typically made of the same material as the mass vestments. It is folded and placed to the side and behind the corporal.



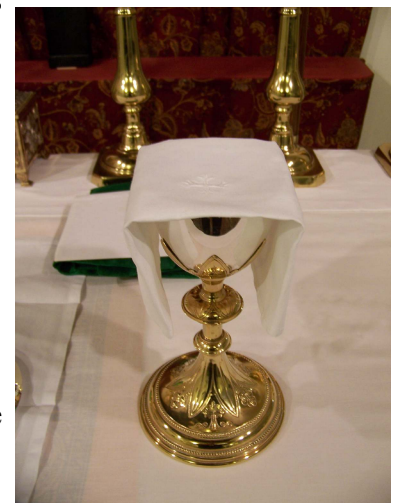
The *pall* is then removed. It is a small stiffened square of linen used to cover and uncover the chalice during the consecration. St. Gregory of Tours, in the sixth century, spoke of the sacred gifts being veiled by a *pallium*, which was probably similar to our corporal. The Latin word *pallium* simply means a covering...

We use the same word - *pall* - to refer to the covering for a casket as well (and here we see this other pall from an observance of All Souls Day, as this pall is laid on the floor or on a frame where a casket would reside at a funeral, representing all the faithful departed). But now back to the Eucharistic vessels...



We next come to the *paten*, a small, shallow disc of precious metal, upon which is placed the piece of bread, known as the priest's host, the primary piece of bread used in the consecration. The paten, from the Latin *patena* (or plate) in earlier times was much larger so that it could hold several loaves of bread, and there are records of patens weighing twenty or thirty pounds; some were made of wood or even stone and there is a reference to Pope Zephyrinus (d. 217) using one made of glass.

Under the paten we find the *Purificator*. A square of linen folded into nine smaller squares, then draped over the chalice, the Purificator will be used to purify, wipe and cleanse the chalice during and after the distribution of communion.





The **chalice**, from the Latin *calix* or cup, is used to hold the wine, consecrated as the Blood of Christ. Christ took the cup at the Last Supper, blessed it and said “this is my Body” and gave it to his disciples to drink. In the catacombs in Rome there are depictions of chalices shaped as bowls with two handles but without stems. The earliest chalices were of glass, but by the 4th century were typically of precious metals. Both St. John Chrysostom in the East and St. Augustine of Hippo in the West speak of chalices of precious metal, adorned with gemstones. The design of the chalice as we know it was set by the 14th century or so, by which time the people were no longer allowed to drink directly from the chalice and so chalices could be smaller. The front of the chalice is typically marked by a cross on the foot and the stem usually includes a knob, which makes it easier for the priest to hold while he administers communion.



The **ciborium** holds the bread that will be blessed for communion. The etymology of the word is unclear; it may come from the Latin *cibus* or food, or the Greek *kirorion* or cup. The same word, *ciborium*, has been used to describe the canopy or baldichino that may cover the altar, but that usage is no longer common. The ciborium typically resembles a covered chalice and may be used to both distribute and reserve the Blessed Sacrament.



Water and wine are brought to the altar in glass **cruets**. These cruets may be made of metal in which case they should be marked “A” for *aqua* and “V” for *vino*, but they are more commonly made of glass. The cruets are conveniently placed on their own little tray when they are on the credence table.

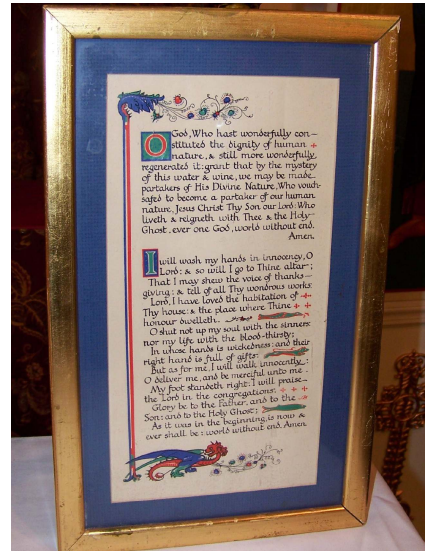
The **credence table** holds most of the vessels that are to be used in the Mass until they are needed and then the vessels are returned to the credence after they are used. The credence is a small table on the epistle-side (the south side) of the altar. The word *credence* comes from the Latin *credere*, to believe or trust. Originally it referred to a small table where food was tasted to make sure that it was safe and trustworthy before presenting it to the king. The same word gives us “credenza.”





On the credence table we also find a **lavabo bowl** and **lavabo towel**. When the priest has completed the offering of the gifts and has censed the gifts and the altar, he washes his hands, assisted by the acolyte, who brings the bowl and the cruet of water to pour a small amount over his hands. As he washes his hands he says verses of Psalm 25 (LXX): “I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord, and so shall I go to thy altar...” This action is named for the first word of this passage in Latin, *lavabo*, “I will wash...”

This psalm, along with the prayers to be said at the cleansing of the vessels after communion, is on the **altar card** on the epistle-side of the altar. The Last Gospel, the first fourteen verses of John’s Gospel, read at the end of Mass, are on the altar card on the gospel side of the altar. It is also common to have a card in the center with the words of Institution and many other prayers.



Near the credence table we find the **censer** hanging on a stand, which holds a censer or thurible (from the Latin word for incense)...



And along with the censer, a bowl of incense (called a **boat**) and a **spoon**. We use incense to show that something is holy - the people of God have always done this - it is scriptural - it is symbolic of our prayers rising to God (in Ps. 141 we pray, “let my prayer be set forth in thy sight as the incense and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice”). Both the Holy Prophet Isaiah and St. John the Evangelist spoke of incense in recounting their visions of worship in heaven.



There are also a couple of bells to mention here. Not far from the credence table, near the Epistle side of the altar, we keep the ***Sanctus Bells***. These bells are rung at the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of the Sanctus (and hence their name), just before the consecration begins within the Eucharistic Prayer, at the elevations of the Host and Chalice, and again at the Priest’s Communion.

A wooden rattle (called the *crotalus*) or **clacker** is used instead following the Gloria on Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday, when the joy of the bells would be inappropriate.



Near the door of the Sacristy (the room where preparations are made for the services) there is another bell, called the *Sacristy Bell* or *Vestry Bell*, and it is used to announce that the priest is on his way to begin Mass.

We use additional vessels in the distribution of Holy Communion. The first we might call the *sanctus infantia calix* in Latin, but we prefer to simply call it the “*holy baby cup*.” After the consecration we place the people’s hosts in a silver baby cup that the priest holds so that he may intinct the host into the chalice as he gives communion. There is nothing ancient about this practice; it was suggested by the late Fr. David Lynch, formerly of St. Augustine’s in Denver, as a convenient way to distribute communion by intinction without a deacon present.





We also use a *spoon* to give communion to our youngest members. While the use of the spoon is thought of as a Byzantine practice, it has been commonly used in the West for giving communion to the sick. In our case of giving communion to babies following baptism it is by far the most convenient method possible. Our spoon is made of silver and depicts the cherubim.

As Communion is distributed we have adapted an old Sarum custom (Sarum referring to the rite of Salibury Cathedral in England before the Reformation, which was merely a local variation of the Roman Rite). You notice that two acolytes hold a white cloth under the chins of those who are receiving to make sure that no particles fall away. While this custom is commonly used in the Byzantine Rite (with a red cloth), in Sarum use it was called the *housing cloth*, from the Anglo-saxon “husel” meaning “sacrifice,” and was draped over the altar rail.

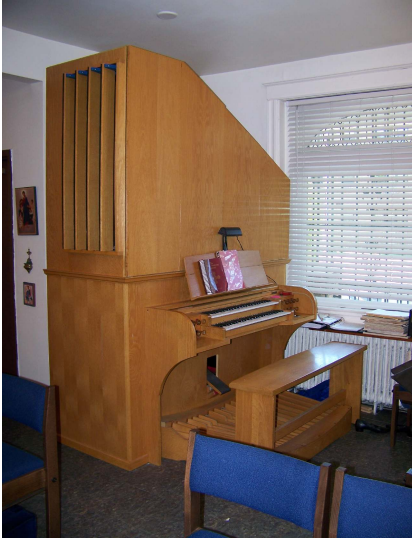


Instead of the housing cloth, many parishes use a *Patina*, which is simply a paten on the end of a stick or paten with handles. Again the point is to hold it under the communicants’ chin to catch crumbs, if any.

There are just a few things to comment on in closing. The place where the Priest, Deacon and Subdeacon sit has a name of its own. It is called the *Sedilia* which is the Latin plural for “seat.” While the Sedilia was commonly made of stone in ancient churches, most of us have sedilia of wood, even something as simple as three or four wooden chairs. A *lectern* is placed in front of our sedilia to hold the books needed to officiate at Matins and Vespers.



In the back of our church there is a small *pipe organ*. The early association of the organ and other instruments with the pagan circus led a number of the church fathers to forbid the use of such instruments in Christian worship, but nevertheless, an organ was placed in the Narthex of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople for use in processions of the Emperor's entourage. The organ was introduced to the



West when organs were presented as gifts from the Byzantine emperors to Western rulers and it was soon used in churches, as it was never associated with pagan use in the West. In the seventh century, Pope Vitalian is said to have introduced the use of the organ at Rome to help improve the singing of the congregations. St. Aldhelm (who died in 709) refers to the organ building of the Anglo-Saxons: "hearing the enormous organs with a thousand blasts, the ear is soothed by the windy bellows, while the other portions of the organ shine in golden cases." Today many Greek churches use the organ both to support the singing of the choir and for processions. Most of our Western Rite parishes use the organ in like manner, chiefly to support congregational singing, though it is also used to play music written for the organ, to the glory of God.

There are other items we could mention (common things such as hymnals and torches and flower vases, and uncommon things, such as *bugia* and *cere cloths* and *vimpas* and *piscinas*) but the objects we have looked at in this presentation are the primary things that we use in our worship and with the richness of our faith there is always more to learn.



We hope that knowing a bit more about these things will enrich your participation in worship, knowing that we offer the best we have, the most beautiful that we have, to God who is worthy of all praise and glory, now and forever.