

C H U R C H R I T E S

Church Vessels , Instruments, and Clergy Vestments

First: Church Vessels and Instruments

The Church arranged since its inception that there be holy vessels and instruments for the altar service and conducting the Eucharist Sacraments.

+ These vessels are consecrated by the bishop through prayers, God's word and anointing them with the holy Chrism. Thus they become a property for God and should be used only for the service.

The vessels are usually made of silver or white copper which is silver plated.

+ There is an opinion that if the vessels become unusable, they should not be thrown away or sold. They rather should be melted and reformulated to be reused for the same purpose and nothing else.

+ Before arranging the altar for the service, the priest blesses the vessels (the paten, chalice, asterisk, spoon, and the mats with the usual blessings.

The Vessels

Apart from the holy tablet which we mentioned before, these are :

1. The Chalice

A golden or silver vessel wherein is put the holy wine mixed with water. In the Eucharist, through the action of the Holy Spirit, this is transformed to the Lord Jesus Christ's Blood.

Mixing the wine with water symbolizes the blood and water flowing from the side of the pierced Savior. It refers to the undissolvable unity between the Lord Christ (the wine) and His people (the water).

The Lord Jesus used a chalice when He established the Eucharist Sacrament (It is said that

it is kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York) Mt 26:27.

St. Paul called it the Chalice (cup) of blessing and the cup of the Lord (1 Cor 10:16-21). The Chalice use to be placed at the right of the paten referring to the blood which came out of the Lord's right side (Jn 19:34) or symbolizing the running water which was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar (Ezekiel 47:1). However, the Church Fathers arranged that it be put east of the paten. This makes it easier to raise the incense and make the sign of the cross, for the Chalice is higher than the paten. The east always indicates the Lord is shining with His Divinity on our humble nature to release our race which is imprisoned by sin (St. Dionysios Ibn El-Saleeby, Bishop of Amd).

The Chalice refers to the Lord Christ's suffering for the salvation of the human race (Tradition mentions that while the Lord Christ was praying in the garden of Gethsemane came to Him an angel to strengthen Him and was holding a chalice in his hand). Therefore, it was a custom to bury the Patriarchs while holding a chalice in the hand, symbolizing their struggles and sufferings.

The Chalice also refers to the vessel in which the Marys and holy women collected the Savior's blood which was flowing from Him while on the Cross.

The Chalice reminds us also of the rock which Moses hit and water flowed from it.

2. The Ark or Throne = Pi Totc = Al Korsy (The Throne)

A wooden cubical box which is put on the altar for holding the Chalice during the Divine Liturgy. Its sides are covered with icons of the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin St. Mary, St. John the Baptist, and other Saints. It is called:

- + The throne because it represents the presence of the Crucified,
- + The ark through which the creation was saved and we are saved through the Christ 's blood,
- + The Ark of God because the Ark of the Old Testament contained the two tablets of the covenant (symbolizing the Christ's blood which is the constitution of the New Testament), and
- + Aaron's Rod referring to the Virgin who gave birth to the Incarnate God, Whose blood is offered to us from this new Ark.

3. The Paten = Dickoc = in Arabic the Sineya

A round silver plate, where the Qurban (the oblation= the Lamb) is put) which becomes the Lord's body after consecration). It refers to the Lord Jesus Christ's manger and grave.

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4. The Asterisk = Acterickoc= The Kobba in Arabic

This consists of two half-hoops of metal crossed at right angles and riveted together. It is placed over the paten to prevent the veil (Al-lefafa in Arabic) from touching the oblation (the

Qurbana). It thus takes the shape of the tomb. It also reminds us of the star which appeared to the wise men.

5. The Spoon = Pi M/yt/r= Misteer = Al-Malaaka in Arabic

A silver spoon on top of which is a cross. It is used since the sixth century for receiving the Holy Blood. It is also used during St. Cyril's and the Gregorian liturgies to put the incense in the Censer before the blessings (the roushemat in Arabic). This may draw our attention to the coming of the Divinity, represented by the Christ's blood which we drink from the spoon.

The spoon also reminds us of the tongs which was in the hand of one of the seraphim who took with it a live coal from the altar and touched with it Isiah's mouth, saying : " Behold, this has touched your lips, your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged"

Is 6:6,7. This refers to the power and action of the Eucharist Sacrament (Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day, Jn 6:54.

6. The Astrophorion = Box of the Holy Communion (in Arabic= Hoq Al-Zakhira

This is a vessel made usually of silver, circular in shape and having a cover which measures about six centimeters in diameter. Its height is about 6 cm. It is called "Ciborium" or Box of the Holy Communion. It is used for conveying the Precious Body moistened with a few drops of the Precious Blood to the sick , to prisoners, and to all who cannot attend the Divine Liturgy and wish to communicate.

7. The Incense Box

A box for incense which is usually of silver or carved wood. It is put on the altar at the right hand of the celebrant bishop or priest. A small spoon is usually place in the incense box and is used for putting the incense in the censer.

The Apostles' laws do not allow using incense of animal origin (e.g. amber, Law no.30). The kinds which are allowed include sandalwood, another kind of wood, Gowan gum, and course gum of Gawy. The latter two have a very nice fragrance.

The incense refers to the prayers of the Saints (Rev 8:3,4).

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8. The Censer = In Coptic: Tsouri , and in Arabic: El Shouria or El Magmara

A silver or copper container where embers are put and incense is burnt to be presented to God. Its parts refer to some theological and spiritual meanings:

a) It has three chains of the same metal referring to the Holy Trinity of one essence.

- b) It has a semi-circular dome symbolizing the heaven.
- c) It has a hook hanging down, referring to the Son the Logos coming to the world.
- d) Is bow in which is put the ember and incense refers to the womb of the Virgin Mary in which dwelt the Divine Ember.
- e) The coal which is put in it refers to the heavy body taken from our nature.
- f) The fire which is used to ignite the coal refers to the divinity of Christ united with humanity.
- g) The incense which rises from the censer refers to the prayers of the Saints and completion of the salvation for the world and cleansing it from sin...
- h) The burning of incense refers to the passions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

9. The Gospel Book = In Arabic: El Bishara (The Good News)

The four gospels or the New Testament enclosed in a metal textus case, sometimes of silver. This textus case is embossed on both sides, on one side with the icon of crucifixion or resurrection and on the other side the Virgin carrying the Child Jesus or the icon of the Patron Saint of the church. Sometimes the four evangelists with their symbols are on the corners.

10. The Holy Cross= in Coptic: Pise eyouab, in Arabic: El-Salib Almokaddas

This is used for giving blessings during the services by the Patriarch, Bishops, and Priests. When not in use it rests always upon the altar.

The cross in the priest's hand refers to his proxy on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. When he offers it to people for kissing, they are actually kissing the Crucified.

When the priest ascends to the sanctuary carrying the cross, he reminds us of our Lord's ascension to the Golgotha carrying His Cross to offer His Body an acceptable oblation to God, His Father.

By receiving the cross the priest accepts the authority given to him from God to perform signs... Sometimes the cross is raised upon the altar during the Liturgy to remind us of raising the Lord Christ upon the cross on the Golgotha.

11. The Liturgical Fans = in Arabic: Al-Maraweh

These are carried by two deacons, one on the right and the other on the left side of the altar. They represent the Cherubim who are present during the service. Therefore, they used to emboss the six-winged Cherubim on these fans (Didaskalia, Chapter 38).

They used to be made of metal, silver, ostrich or peacock's feathers, or of cloth material. A mat is often used in place of the fans to prevent flies or other insects from coming near the

Chalice (Law no. 52 of the 1st. Book of Didaskalia).

They are also used in the church processions, e.g. the procession for the Holy Chrism, Pope's procession after ordination, processions from Resurrection to Pentecost, etc. In these cases they follow the cross during the procession and are put on wooden stands.

12. The Cruets = in Arabic: El-Karoora

Two cruets are for the Eucharist: one for holding the wine and the other for the water. The church also uses three other cruets:

- a) Cruet for Chrism: This is carried only by the priest or bishop and is normally kept in the sanctuary or altar.
- b) Cruet for Kallilaion Oil which is used during baptism.
- c) Cruet for the Oil for the sick and is taken from the oil used during the Liturgy for Anointing the Sick (on the Last Friday of Lent) and the oil used during the Apocalypses Ceremony (reading of the Book of Revelation, early morning on Good Saturday).

13. The Basin and Ewer= in Arabic the Tasht and Abrik

These are for washing the priest's hands during the Divine Liturgy. They generally rest on a wooden stand at the north side of the altar. Tradition mentions that the deacon, on his day of ordination, receives the basin, ewer, and towel.

14. Other Vessels Utensils

There are other vessels and utensils which are used outside the sanctuary, e.g.:

- a) The Qurban Basket which is made of palm leaves, ornamented with crosses, in which are put the Eucharist loaves, one of which is chosen by the celebrant for the Divine Liturgy. It used to be made of threads covered with gold or silver. No wonder, since in it is offered the Divine Lamb.
- b) Musical Instruments: The Coptic Hymns rely on the vocal music and use some elementary instruments such as the cymbals and the triangle (used by the ancient Egyptians).

Second: Clergy Vestments

God Himself commanded making the clergy vestments. He ordered Moses to make holy garments for his brother Aaron, the Archpriest, and for the priests and levites to use them during ministering to the Lord (EX 28:2,3). He did not leave for Moses the freedom to choose the kinds, colors, and numbers, but specified them. He chose by Himself the gifted artisans who have woven them from the specified material and threads (Ex 28:4,5).

These were precious garments made of fine linen, gold, scarlet, purple, and onyx stones. They were used to stand before God, and therefore said to Moses that these are garments for

glory and beauty (to befit the greatness of the worshipped God and His glory).

The Jewish clergy vestments are: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a tunic, a turban, and a sash (Ex 28:4). The early Christians chose from these the most suitable according to the preference of the Christian priesthood over the levitical (Median) priesthood (and this is glorification for the redeeming Savior and increase in the honor of the priesthood (Ps 32:9,11).

The Church Laws indicate that the clergy vestments be white (Law no. 37 of the Apolides, Patriarch of Rome and Law no. 96 of St. Basil the Great), and should reach down to the priest's feet as mentioned in the Church Tradition (12th. Chapter on the Liturgy, Book of Safawi Ibn El-Assal).

+ Why did the Church choose the white color for the Clergy Vestments?

1. For this befits God's greatness and beauty, since He dwells in unapproachable light, wears light as a garment, pure and holy (Ps 104:2; Daniel 10:9; Rev 1:14) and sits on a white cloud (Rev 14:14).
2. It reminds us of the transfiguration of our Lord the Christ (Mt 17:2; Mk 9:3).
3. It is the dress of angels during their appearance or transfiguration to human beings (Lk 24:4; Jn 20:12).
4. It is the dress of the twenty four priests, The Priests of the Truth, (Rev 4:4), the dress of the redeemed in heaven (Rev 7:9), and the dress of the victorious (Rev 3:4,5).
5. It symbolizes the chastity and holiness of the internal heart which must adorn God's servants and the stewards of His mysteries, particularly when they appear before God in His house (Mt 5:24,25; Eccles 9:8) and they must be adorned with the Christian virtues (Eph 4:22,23; Col 3:9,10).

+ The Signing (in Arabic: Rashm) and Use of Clergy Vestments

As mentioned before, God Himself commended the clergy vestments to use them during the Priestly Services, General Rites and Liturgical Prayers. Therefore, the priests and deacons must wear them during the prayers as this befits God's Greatness and Glory. Moreover, this makes the priest or deacon attentive to the importance of the occasion and conduct the service in awe, reverence, and humility.

It is hope that our fathers the priests get back to the tradition of wearing at least the epitachelion during all the priestly services (e.g. vesper and matins raising of incense, service of the prayer of the basin which is done 8 days after child's birth, prayer for blessing of new houses, engagement, wedding, baptism, confession, sacrament for anointing the sick, etc.). This signifies the act of carrying the cross and reminds the priest of assuming the yoke of responsibility on behalf of God's people (the congregation).

Before wearing the clergy vestments, they must be signed three times with the sign of the cross, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The sign of the cross is symbol of our salvation (Col 1:20). The vestments become holy for the service according to God's order to Moses. Everything becomes holy with the sign of the cross and prayer. Moreover, when the priest makes the sign of the cross over the deacons' vestments, he blesses them and

declares his acceptance for their participation in the service and share in the communion (the Eucharist Liturgy)...

It is not permitted for those who wear the service vestments to take them off before the end of the Divine Liturgy, departure of the angel of the sacrifice, and giving the dismissal.

Otherwise, the person resembles Judas who went out at night (Jn 13:2) and did not continue during the Lord's assembly with His disciples for celebrating the Last Supper, and thus he became disobedient!

The following table outlines the clergy vestments and the corresponding clergy ranks that use them:

