

THE MAGDALENE



**From the Desk of Fr.
Neil...**

THE PRIEST, THE OFFERING AND GOD **PART 1**

In a liturgical setting such as ours, the direction the priest is facing is significant. When the priest is facing the people, he is usually declaring something to them from God. Sometimes he is pronouncing a blessing from God. Our own Prayer Book reminds us that God has, "...given power, and commandment, to his ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins." Whereby, God then "pardons and absolves all those who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel."

The priest facing this direction tells us that we are to understand that in a very real way, he is speaking for God or representing God. He is not just turning to the people so he can be heard. In a very real way, he is speaking for God to the people. He is giving the people God's blessing. He is pronouncing God's forgiveness. At Holy Communion he is presenting the Body and Blood of Christ to the people.

On the other hand, when the priest is turned toward the altar and away from the people, he is leading the people. Leaders lead from the front. The people follow. That is why we are all situated where we are in the Church building. When the people pray, the priest is praying with them and facing "toward God." He is leading the people in prayer. He is symbolically offering the prayers of the people to God...even though he

himself is also praying. Of course, God hears our prayers, no matter what direction we are facing, and He knows our very thoughts, so we can even pray to Him in silence facing any direction. Yet the use of this two-direction model helps us understand what is happening when we come to worship God in a formal setting. If a group of people were to attempt to worship without someone leading, there would eventually be chaos. Our style of worship is based on how the early Church worshiped.

Christ made His Apostles to be the first leaders of His people. St. Paul planted Churches and always set men up as "presbyters" (where our word *priest* is derived from) or pastors to lead the people in that Church. He intended the people to be led in organized worship, not freewheeling, anything-goes, say what you want, when you want worship. Just read St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to see what happens when the people are left to do what they want when they think the Holy Spirit is moving them.

We might even consider Moses, who led God's people out of Egypt, out of slavery and almost into the Promised Land. Joshua finished that job. Moses was called out by God to lead God's people. This concept is very much what we are trying to simulate when we come together to worship God in our Church. The priest or pastor is leading the people, weekly, in an "exodus" of sorts out of the slavery of sin and the filth of the world and the people's own sins of the past week and figuratively, "toward the Promised Land." The people's eyes are all turned forward, toward God, and away from what is behind them. The altar, and the crucifix and the tabernacle are all things that we are to fix our gaze upon, as we strive forward in worship.

There is another dimension to the direction the priest faces. The priest also has the function of making an offering to God. There is a time in our own service, which we call the Offertory, where the priest turns to the people, receives the financial offerings or gifts of the people in the offertory plate. He then turns toward the altar... "toward God" and elevates them, symbolically presenting the people's gifts back to God. In some churches you might even see the people bring forward the bread box and the water and wine cruets from the back of the Church, symbolically bringing the offerings of the people toward the front, "toward God."

When the priest is praying over the bread and wine (The Consecration Prayer) he is asking God to bless and sanctify what we have offered to Him. These "Holy gifts" which we offer to God are then blessed and hallowed by God and then given to the people to eat and drink. Sometimes you will see the offertory plates left on the altar at this point so as to ask God to bless what we are sacrificially offering back to Him. The Church is, in turn, to gather the financial offerings of the people, and distribute them in ways that help others.

In Psalm 96:8 we read words like "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts!" This action, in a sense, is what we continue to do in our Church.

We bring our offerings of bread, wine and our financial contributions into God's court, into His presence, and offer them back to Him...since all things come from Him in the first place. We are bringing back to God what He has given us in the first place to use for our enjoyment and even our survival. Bread is the ultimate symbol of the basics of nutrition. The money that is in our pockets, which we have worked hard to earn in most cases, is also to be seen as given to us by God to be used rightly. It is to be used for our enjoyment, survival and daily needs and it is even to be given freely to others when those opportunities arise. So, on a Sunday, when we come into God's "court" we bring back a small portion to show Him our gratitude for what He has given us, and we are show that we are willing to part with it as well, therefore, trusting God at all times for His provisions. Some of it is used right there in the service at Communion for example. The bread, wine and water are consumed. Other portions of it are used for sustaining the daily needs of the Church or those in need in the community.

So the direction the priest and the people face has meaning. The priest functions on behalf of both God and the people depending on which direction he is facing. He offers a word or a blessing from God AND he offers the sacrifices of prayers, thanksgivings, alms and oblations to God. Next month in part 2, we will discuss more the concept of offering to God.

St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church
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Rev. Fr. Neil Edlin, Rector

Sunday Services:
8am Mass
10am Choral Mass &
Children's Sunday School

**Wednesday Service &
Anointing of the Sick: 9am**

Acquiring Truth

Can You Discuss The Use Of Incense In A Worship Service?

Incense occurs in the Bible over 130 times spanning from Exodus to Revelation. It is defined as a "burning perfume" or a "fragrant smoke" which demonstrates honor, worship, and has a strong connection to prayer. Some

scholars also connect it to God's presence and His glory cloud.

It may sound a little strange to us, but incense, aromas, and "sweet savours" are things that God tells us He enjoys. We read in Exodus and beyond, of God commanding the use of incense in worship at the tabernacle and temple. Interestingly, the book of Hebrews tells us that these were "copies of the things in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1-5, 9:23-24). Malachi prophesizes about the New Covenant stating, "My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name" (Mal. 1:11). Paul continues this aromatic theme telling us that Christ's sacrifice was "a sweet smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2), that "we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15), and that gifts given to Paul and his ministry were "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 4: 18).

The Bible in multiple places associates incense with prayer. In Psalm 141 (one of the opening Scriptures read in Evening Prayer) we hear, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; And the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." At the announcement of John the Baptist's birth Luke records "And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense" (Luke 1:10). The connection between incense and prayer is also strongly seen in the book of Revelation. We read of the twenty-four elders falling down before the Lamb "each having ... golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8). Similarly, Revelation 8 states that the angel was given "much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints... and the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God."

As we have seen, incense, with its use in worship and its connection to prayer, is a significant scriptural idea and is part of our biblical heritage. It is also documented that the

church used incense in her worship as early as the fourth century onward. Although modern people may not be very aromatically inclined, it seems beneficial and fitting to utilize this biblical and historical practice.

CURRENT EVENTS

COME TO SHROVE TUESDAY "SOUTHERN STYLE"

Get your cowboy hat and boots on, and come eat our delicious home made waffles with a plate full of sweet potato casserole or macaroni and cheese. Missing your pancakes? You can still drown them with whipped cream and fruit, maple syrup or chocolate.



Feast on southern style roasted chicken, Louisiana dirty rice, or good old mashed potatoes and gravy.

Don't miss having a little fun with our parish kids playing games!

Tuesday, March 5th, 6:30pm until the last chicken wing is eaten before lent.

\$7.00 - Adults, \$5.00 - Kids (9 -18yrs old), Children under 9yrs old are free.



THE SEASON OF LENT

LENTEN PROGRAM

Father Neil will be conducting a bible-based **Lenten Program on Tuesday evenings at 6:30pm** from March 12th through April 9th before our Meatless Supper.

Deacon Sean will be kicking off our Program on **March 12th** with “Learning the SHEMA” and finishing on **March 26th**.

WE WILL WALK WITH HIM

Stations of the Cross or the Way of the Cross designate a stretch of road between the Antonia fortress and Golgotha at Jerusalem, along which Jesus Christ walked while carrying the Cross. Icons are used to mark halting-places in the Via Sacra, each corresponding to a particular event during Jesus’ walk to his crucifixion. Christians since the time of Emperor Constantine have been walking in the footsteps of Jesus in memoriam of that day.

Stations of the Cross will be held in the church on March 19th and April 9th at 6:30pm.

LENTEN SUPPERS ON TUESDAYS

Looking for a little fellowship during Lent? Come to our simple Meatless Suppers. It’s free.

If you would like to volunteer to cook, please sign-up on the Volunteer Sheet in the Lobby or contact Karen Carlson. These suppers are not “potlucks”. No desserts will be served.

Suppers begin on March 12th after the Lenten Program.

ASH WEDNESDAY HOW WILL YOU BEGIN?

The first day of Lent is Ash Wednesday. This name came from the ceremonial use of ashes as a symbol of sorrow and repentance. This day marks the beginning of our 40 day Lenten Season. It is a time for us to reflect on our

behavior, our life style and draw near to God by turning away from ourselves. **It is our time to ask ourselves, “How will I prepare myself for the coming of our Lord?”**

“Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?”

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” Isaiah 58:5-7

Ash Wednesday masses will be held on March 6th at 9am and 7pm.

LENTEN OUTREACH STARTS OFF WITH A BANG

Praise God, the Lenten Project, “Diaper Collection for Living Well Pregnancy Center” has been funded!

In the meantime, we have made a wonderful connection with the **VFW Orange Chapter** thanks to Jim Strate, Army veteran and parishioner. The club has asked if we could support them in collecting men’s underwear for the Veteran’s Hospital in Long Beach.

Mark your calendar for **March 10th through April 14th** to **shop for men’s underwear**, preferably larger sizes and place your donations in the receptacle in the Narthex.