

# Signs and Symbols

Commentator's Copy - Week One: New Translation of the Roman Missal

Commentator is to read the Introduction and #1 through #5 right before Mass starts, before the opening Hymn is announced.

**Introduction:** The General Instruction of the Roman Missal encourages the use of frequent instruction at Mass:

“Lest Christ’s flock go hungry...the Holy Synod commands pastors and all others having the care of souls to give frequent instructions during the celebration of Mass...among other things, they should include some explanation of the mystery of this most holy sacrifice (11).”

This weekend we will focus on **Signs and Symbols**. “[Because churches]...should be truly worthy and beautiful and be *Signs and Symbols* of heavenly realities.”

## 1. Sacred Language

The New Translation of the Roman Missal will help bring us to a deeper encounter with heavenly realities because Sacred Language is itself symbolic. What is said during the Liturgy is more than mere words. It is an opportunity for the Lord to call us to a deeper encounter with Himself.

## 2. Sacred Images

The Catholic faith is a composition of the human and the divine. Sacred images function as a gateway to greater and higher realities, elevating the faithful from the secular to the sacred, from earth to heaven, from the visible to the invisible.

## 3. The Cross

The crucifix is the demonstration of our sinfulness, and God’s willingness to love us beyond our fallenness. It is the surest sign of our hope for life eternal. Carrying our cross strengthens our fidelity to Christ as we follow in a life of conversion and transformation from the way of sin to the beauty of the resurrection.

## 4. Candles

Having once possessed a very practical function, the presence of candles now serve to provide both reverence and festiveness, a sign of the light of Christ.

## **5. The Tabernacle**

Within this sacred vessel, the remnants of the Eucharistic feast are housed, thus becoming a temple of the Divine. As such, the tabernacle must be truly noble, readily visible and beautifully decorated. A candle remains lit nearby in a red lamp, reminding us of the divine made present.

Commentator reads #6 and #7 after the priest arrives at his chair and the opening hymn is finished, before the priest begins the sign of the cross.

## **6. The Chair**

In earlier times, a chair, or “throne,” denoted authority. In the Eucharistic liturgy, the chair upon which the bishop or priest sits signifies his office as the mediator between God and the People of God in directing prayer for the faithful.

## **7. Sacred Vestments**

The differing colors associated with the priest’s vestments and the altar cloth illustrate the seasons of the liturgical year. Furthermore, as the priest highlights his office within the liturgy by adorning clothing separate from his daily attire, the lay faithful, too, should ideally acknowledge their own participation in the sacred mystery by adorning themselves in clothing which is separate from their daily attire.

The commentator reads #8 after the opening prayer and before the lector begins the first reading.

## **8. The Ambo**

This piece of furniture is consecrated to the sole purpose of proclaiming the Word of God. It is from here that the Scriptures are read, the Homily is given and the yearnings of the Body of Christ—the intentions of the faithful—are offered. It is not to be used for lesser purposes such as announcements.

The commentator reads #9 after the lector is finished with the second reading and before the Alleluia is sung.

## **9. The Book of the Gospels**

Because the Book of the Gospels and the Lectionary contain God’s Word, they are deserving of special veneration and should be both dignified and beautiful. This is especially true of the Book of the Gospels and hence it is praiseworthy to place this Book upon the altar as a sign of reverence.

The commentator reads #10, #11, #12 and #13 after the prayers of the faithful and before the offertory hymn is announced and sung.

**10. The Altar**

The altar performs a double function: it acts as both an altar upon which the Sacrifice of Jesus' death on the Cross is offered to God our Father through the consecration of bread and wine, as well as the table upon which the people of God are fed through the banquet of the Eucharist.

**11. Sacred Vessels**

Sacred Vessels work in the offering of Christ's Body and Blood to God, and in the distribution of Christ's Body and Blood to the People of God. As such, Sacred Vessels are to be made from precious metal, for they function as a brief home of the divine.

**12. Bells**

At distinct moments within the Eucharistic liturgy, bells are rung to draw our attention to the miraculous transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary, of the bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of Christ.

**13. Incense**

Incense provides a visible symbol of our prayers rising to God. It is often used to reverence various objects and people within the liturgy.