



Why Do We Do That?

As we celebrate the arrival of the 2019 Book of Common Prayer, it seems an appropriate time to review the traditions that are part of our worship service. Here's one tradition.

Why do we have a Procession?

At its core, to get the Celebrant to the front of the room to start the service. It marks the beginning of the Mass whose practice can be traced back to the third century in Christendom and back to the Passover celebration in the Old Testament. The procession symbolizes the entrance of God's people into the presence of God through Christ.

The procession traditionally began with a thurifer (Latin: "incense bearer") swinging a censer, or a container with burning incense, symbolizing the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8). Then comes the crucifer (Latin: "cross-bearer") carrying the Cross of Christ as a triumphal demonstration of victory over death through Christ as St. Paul described in his second letter to the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:14). Next is the choir, then any additional servers, then the lay readers, then the deacon who carries the Gospel high for all to see with a "torchbearer" on either side symbolizing how the Word is a "light unto our paths" (Psalm 119:105) empowering us to go forth into the world (Matthew 28: 18–20). Last is the Celebrant unless the Bishop is present. The Bishop is always last reflecting the order of dignity as the "chief priest." It used to be that the entire congregation processed following the Cross into the sanctuary. Over time that tradition was retired.

Our actions during the procession will vary: if there is an opening hymn accompanying the procession we join with others in singing. If no music, we stand in silence. In both, we honor the Cross with a simple bow of the head as it passes beside us.



Sources:

- *The Server's Manual* (1917)
- *Anglican Services* (1953)
- *Welcome to Sunday* (2003)

