

The New Liturgy of the Revised Roman Missal
Liturgical Minutes No. 15
Candles in the Mass

Today's Liturgical Minute examines the use of candles in prayer and worship. At least two candles are to be used at every celebration of the Eucharist, as a sign of "reverence," and also as a sign of "festiveness." According to St. Jerome, candles are symbols of joy. Traditionally, to be worthy of use on or near the altar, candles must contain more than 50 percent pure beeswax. Altar candles must provide a living flame without being noxious or smoky.

Candles used in worship or prayers are known as "sacramentals." They are objects blessed or set aside by the Church as special symbols to encourage attitudes and actions of reverence that prepare us to petition for and receive grace, such as the grace received from the Eucharist. From scripture we learn that the oil used in oil lamps at the time of Christ represented the Holy Spirit. The flame of candles has also come to represent Christ, the Light of the World. Because Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father are inseparable, it follows that sacramental candles also represent the presence of the Trinity among us.

Candles are also used during occasions of prayer. Such candles, called votive candles, can symbolize the quiet acknowledgement of a thanksgiving heart, praising God, or a distress signal, petitioning God for a gift of healing grace for ourselves or others. As a visible symbol of prayer, such candles can also serve as a signal to our prayerful sisters and brothers in Christ, to pray for the intentions that the candle's flame represents, thus joining in the communion of saints and Jesus, who has heard the prayer behind the candle's flame before it was spoken.