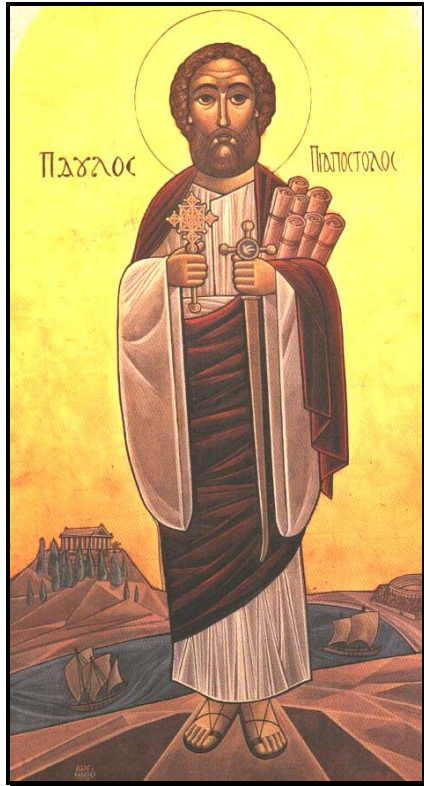


# HEAVEN ON EARTH



## The Pauline Procession of Incense

Saint George Coptic Orthodox Church  
San Jose, CA  
www.stgeorgechurch.org

### Introduction

The Pauline Procession of Incense is performed after the Absolution of the Ministers and before a reading from one of the fourteen epistles of Saint Paul. The Hymn of the Censer and the Hymn of Intercessions are also chanted by the congregation at this time.

### The Pauline Procession of Incense

At this time, the deacon presents the censer to the priest, who adds five spoons of incense. This represents the Old Testament sacrifices made by 1) Abel (*Gen. 4:4*), 2) Noah (*Gen. 8:20-21*), 3) Melchizedek (*Gen. 14:18*), 4) Aaron (*Lev. 9:24*), and 5) Zacharias (*Luke 1:8-22*).



They also represent: 1) the Father, 2) the Son, 3) the Holy Spirit, 4) Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and 5) Now and Forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

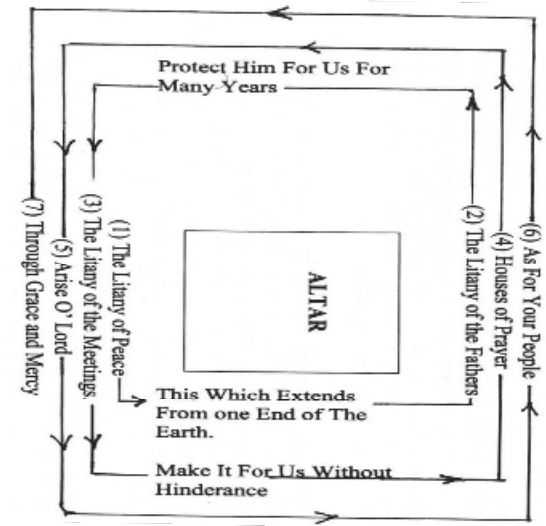
The priest then says, “Pray” (ϠΛΗΛ) and, “Peace be with all” (ΙΡΗΝΗ ΠΑΣΙ). He continues with the Prayer of Incense of the Pauline Epistle to the Father. The deacon responds saying, “Pray for our sacrifice and for those who have brought it.”

The priest faces east holding the censer. The deacon stands opposite the priest, facing west, and holding a cross. The priest and deacon go around the altar praying the Three Small Litanies for: 1) peace, 2) the fathers, and 3) the assemblies.

In the Old Testament, the Temple had an altar called the Incense Altar or the Golden Altar. The offering of Incense was considered a sacrifice. After a person offered the animal sacrifices on the Altar of Burnt Offering and was purified in the

Basin, he was made fit to pray to God who would accept his prayers as a sweet savor upon the Altar of Incense. Likewise, in the New Testament era, our prayers cannot be accepted before God apart from His sacrifice on the Cross, which saved us and purified us from our sins. For this reason, the deacon carries a cross during the procession of the incense.

The following diagram presents the seven stops and three full rounds that the priest and deacon make around the altar:



At each stop around the altar, the priest swings the censer to the right of the Ark (the Throne; where the chalice is kept), then to the left, then to the middle, and finally in a circular motion that connects the three swings into one. This movement represents the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Who is One in Essence.

Stopping seven times around the altar reminds the Church of the triumph of the Israelites at the large city of Jericho (*Joshua 6*). God told them to march around the walls



of the city for six days. On the seventh day, he commanded the Israelites to walk around the city seven times. On the seventh time, the seven priests blew their trumpets and the walls collapsed.

Jericho represents the altar and the large walls represent our sins. When the deacon and priest go around the altar, they pray that the walls of our sins may come down and that we may be worthy to partake of the Holy Mysteries (the Body and Blood of our Lord), which are presented on the altar.

At the completion of the procession of incense around the altar, the priest faces east and offers incense above the altar three times saying:

1. *We worship You, O Christ, with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit for You (have come) and saved us.*
2. *But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; I will worship toward Your holy temple.*
3. *Before the angels, I will sing praises to You and worship towards Your holy temple.*

The priest exits the sanctuary and offers incense to the North, toward the Icon of Saint Mary, saying, “We give you greeting with Gabriel the angel saying, ‘Hail to you, O full of grace; the Lord is with you.’”

Then he offers incense to the West, toward the congregation, who stand in rows and in order, like the heavenly ranks, saying, “Hail to the hosts of angels, hail to my fathers the apostles, the martyrs, and all the saints.”

Then he offers incense to the South, toward the Icon of Saint John the Baptist saying, “Hail to John, the son of Zacharias.

Hail to the priest, the son of the chief priest.”

The priest offers incense once more toward the altar, facing east saying, “Let us worship our Savior, the Good and Lover of Mankind, for He had compassion on us; He has come and saved us.”

The priest offers incense in these four directions to remind us that God is omnipresent and can hear our prayers. Also, God, like a circle, is without beginning or end; He is the alpha and omega, the first and the last (*Rev. 22:3*).

The priest offers incense around the entire Church. He censes:

- ❖ **The Lectionary**, which contains the readings of the day; the Word of God
- ❖ **The Relics of the Saints**
- ❖ **The Icons of the Saints**
- ❖ **The whole congregation**, starting from the left side of the Church, collecting their prayers and bringing them back to the altar

As the priest offers incense throughout the Church, he says, “A blessing of Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. May his holy blessing be with us. Amen.”

Upon returning to the sanctuary, the priest recites the Prayer of Confession of the People, encircles the altar once, steps down from the sanctuary, and offers incense a second time before the door of the sanctuary.

We mainly learn three lessons from the priests’ rounds throughout the Church. First, the priest goes around the *whole* Church just as Saint Paul labored more than all the Apostles at that time, traveling extensively throughout the known world,

preaching the Gospel of God (*1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 11:23-28; Rom. 15:19*).

Second, as the priest proceeds from the left side of the church to the right, we are reminded that through the faith preached by Saint Paul, we were taken from the darkness of sin to God’s great light.

Third, the offering of incense toward the congregation reminds us that we, as members of the Body of Christ, are living icons. The image of God that exists in every person is thus honored and respected.

### ***Summary: Lessons Learned***

How do we strengthen our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ through the rite of the Pauline Procession of Incense?

We pray that God:

1. Accepts our prayers in the rising up of sweet-smelling incense and through His sacrifice on the Cross.
2. Tears down the walls of our sins and accepts our repentance, so that we become fit to partake of His holy body and honored blood.
3. Gives us the holy zeal to preach with the same fiery spirit as Saint Paul.
4. Brings us out of the darkness of our sins into His true light.
5. Gives us the power to live according to the image in which we were created; that is, as living icons in God’s image and temples of the Holy Spirit.

