

TORCHBEARER DURING HIGH MASS or Solemn Mass¹

The torchbearers (Tbs) act as an honor guard for Our Eucharistic Lord by holding torches (or lights)² during the most sacred part of the Mass (from the *Sanctus* until Communion³), thereby adding solemnity to the moment.⁴ During processions of the Blessed Sacrament, the Tbs also accompany the Blessed Sacrament on either side of the canopy covering It.⁵

General Rules

- unity of action is very important and conducive in carrying out the various actions of Tbs' office smoothly. Great care should be taken by Tbs to work as a unified group and not as individuals, especially in processing, genuflecting, and kneeling.
- Tbs always turn inwards, that is, towards each other, when next to each other.
- Tbs usually walk in their proper pairs and shoulder to shoulder [unless there is a lack of room; then they do so in single file, with the highest ranking Tb always going first].
- whenever Tbs are processing, they should always be at least four pews away from each other [about ten feet]; this will prevent the Tbs from bunching up during processions, especially while genuflecting upon entering the sanctuary.

How to hold a torch⁶

- torches are always held in the outside hand *and away from the body*⁷ (otherwise, this will cause the torch to lean). This hand should also be positioned about six to eight inches *below* the candle socket in order to hold it steady.
- the unoccupied hand is place flat against one's sternum, with fingers extended and held together.
- when turning, the torch must be smoothly changed to the outside hand.
- one must take care to hold the torch *straight*.⁸
- whenever one is about to genuflect or kneel, the torch should be placed quietly and firmly on the floor first, then one may genuflect or kneel. Striking the floor with the bottom of the staff must be avoided.

When not holding torches

¹ The Tbs' position remains identical at Solemn Mass as at High Mass.

² The old Roman custom of the lighting the so-called Sanctus candle during Low Mass (now defunct in most places) is actually derived from the use of Tbs at Solemn Mass.

³ In almost all of the rubrical books, the authors make mention of the Tbs departing with their torches after the Consecration (except for Requiem and ferial Masses in violet vestments). This was due to the now extinct practice of distributing Communion to the faithful *after* Mass (or even not at all) and not during it. Later on it did become customary to distribute Communion during Mass itself, though this was not always practiced, hence the books speaking of this departure. The books often have as an end note, buried amongst other text in relation to Solemn Mass, that if Communion was to be distributed to the faithful, the Tbs would depart after Communion.

⁴ It can even be argued that the position of Tb, more so than any other position, give solemnity to the Mass, especially its rank as dictated by the *Cæremoniale Episcoporum* and rubricians who graduate the number of torchbearers depending on the degree of solemnity of the feast. For example, for first class feasts: no more than eight Tbs, for other festive occasions: four to six; and for Requiems and ferials: no more than four.

⁵ In some cases it is necessary to process down narrow sidewalks rather than the middle of a wide street. In such a situation, the Tbs would be compelled to process in pairs in front of the thurifers incensing Our Lord.

⁶ The original form of the torch was that of a long, tapering candle with a thick wick that burned with a high flame. In Rome (and elsewhere), the form of torch usually employed was of several thin, tapering candles bound together, whose combined wicks made for a large flame. It is more common in parishes for the torch to be of two lightweight and easy to carry types: a) a single candle (usually the 7/8's type) held in a socket mounted on a thin wooden staff (about four feet high) with a wax catching lip below the candle; b) an enclosed, lantern-style version of the same, with a glass cylinder (either of clear or of red-tinted glass) to act as a draft resistor (hence, it has a dual outdoor use), which is often mounted on a swiveling device to keep the candle level at all times. Another lesser seen lantern version of the torch is of very large proportion, is used only in conjunction with outdoor processions and must be carried by adult men in two hands.

⁷ About a foot away. Combined with the next instruction, the arms will naturally want to take this position, which is similar to a soldier holding a pike or halberd at attention (i.e., vertically upright).

⁸ This is especially true when they are kneeling *recta linea* (in a straight line). It is very visually distracting to see one torches held at one angle, another at a different one, etc.

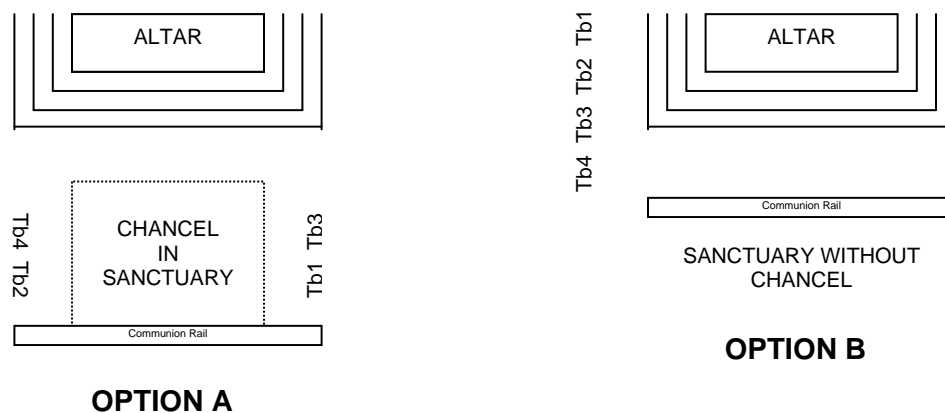
- Tbs act as the other servers in folding their hands, and in making the various bows and gestures.

When holding torches:

- Tbs do not make the sign of the cross, nor do they strike their breasts, since they are holding objects.
- the only type of bow that they make is a simple bow, even when the other servers are making a moderate bow, since it is unwieldy to make a moderate bow when holding a torch.

Positioning the Tbs' seating

The Tbs may have their stools situated either in front of the choir stalls in the chancel (centered and divided evenly on either side of the chancel) or on the Gospel side of the sanctuary.⁹ While placing the Tbs in the chancel certainly has some practical advantages,¹⁰ most small churches do not have a chancel. In some cases the sanctuary



may be so small, that one has to innovate a way of accommodating the Tbs either in the front pew or even by seating them against the Communion rail. On this sheet, the two most common options are given for the placement of the Tbs, which depends on the layout of the sanctuary; option “a” (sitting in the chancel) is the optimum choice when space allows for its use.

Tbs should arrive in the sacristy 15 minutes before Mass and complete these tasks within the first five minutes

- be vested having said the vesting prayers
- prepare the correct number of stools (or benches)¹¹ in the proper place of the sanctuary. There ought to be sufficient room between each stool, so that Tbs may sit without being pressed together.
- the torches must be checked to see if the candles are high enough to last from the *Sanctus* until the end of Communion;¹² they should be no lower than two inches high (but neither should the flame burn above the top of the open glass cylinder type torch). The candlewicks must also be checked to verify if they are long enough to burn correctly (they should be no lower than ¼” high); if not, they will have to be carefully excavated with a knife.
- if there are at least four Tbs, then Tb1 should delegate the various tasks amongst the other three Tbs. Tb1 must also ensure that Tbs’ stools are set up correctly, and that the torches are in good condition. When verified, Tb1 should report this to the MC.

In the sacristy

⁹ Cf. p 107 in *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* by Rev. Adrian Fortescue (1962 edition—reprinted St. Austin Press, 1996).

¹⁰ One of these advantages concerns the staging of the Tbs in front of the foot when entering or leaving the sanctuary. Staging at the foot often leads to a conflict of action with the acolytes, especially during the switching of the missal and the chalice veil after the ablutions. In this case, it is necessary for Th to time his arrival into the sanctuary, so as not to interfere with the acolytes’ movements. However, sitting and staging in the chancel eliminates this possible conflict and is thereby conducive to a smoother and more dignified ceremony.

¹¹ If choir stalls are present and these will not be needed for the schola or attending clergy, the Tbs can also sit here, which would save room in the sanctuary.

¹² If there is a procession with the Blessed Sacrament, they will need to be even taller; in this case, at least 4 inches is recommended.

-when these tasks are completed, Tbs then line up for the processional. Tb1 lines up the other Tbs shoulder to shoulder into their designated pairs and numbers, also ensuring that both Tbs match per pair in height. Tb1 should also designate the odd numbered Tbs on the right, and the even numbered on the left. Tb1 and 2 lead the formation of Tbs, then Tb 3 and 4 and so forth.

The procession

-when C has finished vesting, the MC will signal with a single clap, then Tbs turn and make a simple bow towards the processional cross,¹³ while the MC says, “*Procedamus in pace.*” Tbs then respond with the other servers: “*In nomine Christi, Amen.*”¹⁴

-each pair of Tbs follow after Cb and acolytes at a distance of four pews, walking shoulder to shoulder, solemnly and at a moderate pace.

The location of Tbs’ genuflection upon entering the sanctuary

- a. If Tbs sit on either side of the chancel, each pair genuflects at the front portion of the chancel, and then pair off outwardly (Tb1 turns right, Tb2 turns left) to their stools, with the first pair proceeding to stools furthest from the altar, the second pair to the middle stools, and etc.
- b. If Tbs sit against the Gospel sanctuary wall or against the Communion rail on the Gospel side, they proceed to the foot, genuflect in pairs, turn inwards (Tb1 to his *left*, Tb2 to his *right*¹⁵), and then continue to their stools shoulder to shoulder. Tb1 takes the stool closest to the altar, Tb2 the next one and etc.

During Mass

Tbs respond, stand, kneel, genuflect, turn and bow with the other servers. Tb1 should lead Tbs in turning and bowing towards the altar at the proper times, otherwise, Tbs face across the sanctuary.

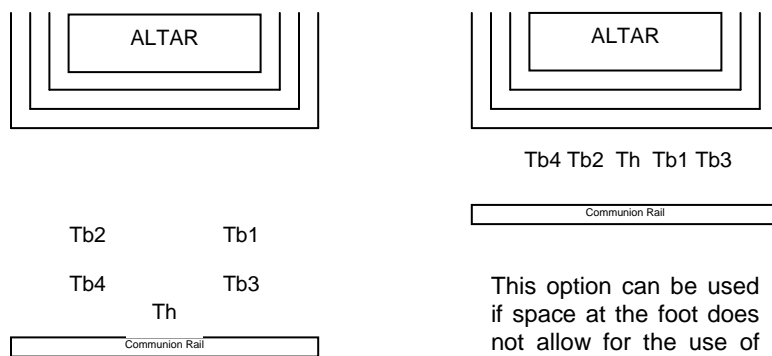
During the Gospel

-when C moves to the missal to sing the Gospel, Tbs turn towards the missal for the reading. When the reading is completed, they turn to face across the sanctuary again.

During the Offertory

-after Th incenses the servers on the Epistle side of the sanctuary,¹⁶ Th will bow to Tbs, who make a simple bow back to him, then Th will incense them, and Tbs will bow to Th again.

- a. Tbs then immediately step forward from each side, as two converging lines, to the center of the chancel and form their respective pairs into two parallel lines, standing in line with the edges of the altar and facing it.
- b. Tbs then immediately proceed shoulder to shoulder to the center of the sanctuary, in front of the foot, form their respective pairs into two parallel lines, standing in line with the edges of the altar, and facing it.



OPTION A & B

This option can be used if space at the foot does not allow for the use of options A or B

¹³ Or sacristy cross if there is not a crossbearer.

¹⁴ Pronounced as: een noh-meh-nee chree-steh, ah-mehn.

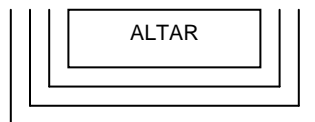
¹⁵ This should be practiced until the Tbs do this instinctively, as it is in the *opposite* direction in which they are accustomed to turn while serving Low Mass.

¹⁶ He will incense those on the Gospel side first.

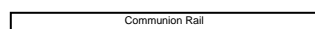
-Th signals, all Tbs genuflect in unison with Th, then all Tbs turn inwards, and follow Th to the sacristy in pairs, shoulder to shoulder, keeping a distance of four pews between Th and each pair of Tbs.
 -upon reaching the sacristy, Tbs retrieve their torches, and Tb1 lights them while each Tb holds his own torch. Tbs then resume their former formation with Th at the head.

At the Sanctus

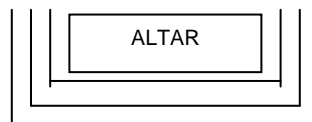
-when the *Sanctus* begins, Th leads Tbs into the sanctuary, who are walking shoulder to shoulder, each pair at a distance of four pews, holding their torches straight and in their outside hands.
 -upon reaching the sanctuary, Th goes to the center of the sanctuary, while Tb1 and Tb2 go to his sides (Tb1 to his right, Tb2 to his left), each about three feet from him. The other Tbs line up *recta linea*¹⁷ next to Tb1 and Tb2 accordingly, with an equal space between each Tb.¹⁸



Tb4 Tb2 Tb1 Tb3



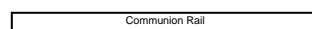
Usual positioning



Tb4
Tb2

Tb1
Tb3

Or Tbs may be positioned like this on each side of the altar if space allows



Another option

-Tbs then genuflect on Th's signal, and then kneel on the floor at his signal. Tbs should hold their torches at their sides, not directly in front of them, with the bottom of the staff resting against the floor.¹⁹ Tbs must also ensure torches are being held straight.

During the Consecration

-during the Consecration, Tbs make only a simple bow for each time C genuflects before and after each Elevation.

If Communion were not to be distributed to the faithful

-this rarely happens now, however if for some reason Communion were not to be distributed to the faithful, Th would lead Tbs out of and back into the sanctuary after the consecration of the chalice as described below for **After the distribution of Communion**, with a single knee genuflection.²⁰

At C's Communion and during the faithful's Communion

-when C consumes the Sacred Host, Tbs make a simple bow.

The Tbs may then:

- A¹. Remain in their present position of *recta linea* (or of parallel lines) in the sanctuary and receive there.
- A². Following Tb 1 & 2's lead, stand, turn towards the altar and in single file return to their stools in the chancel, kneel and receive there.
- B. Go to kneel on each side of the predella and receive there.²¹

¹⁷ A *straight line*. In this case, a horizontal line across the width of the sanctuary. The rubricians give two different arrangements for Tbs for the Canon, both of which are diagramed above. The one that is most practical due to space limitations within the sanctuary should be employed.

¹⁸ Prearranged landmarks (e.g., tile cracks, alignment with altar items, etc.) should be used for the placement of Tbs, especially Tb1 and Tb2, as they are the anchors for the others. In some sanctuaries, it may be necessary for Tbs to kneel shoulder to shoulder, on the first altar step, or even on the first altar steps on the sides of the altar.

¹⁹ If Tbs are kneeling on a step, it may be easier for them to hold their torches by placing their torches on the step above.

²⁰ SRC 4135³: The Blessed Sacrament is not considered to be exposed to the inferior ministers, who are *in plano* and not on the predella.

- when C consumes the Precious Blood, all Tbs make a simple bow, and then remained bowed for the second *Confiteor*, though they do not strike their breasts for each *mea culpa* nor for each *Domine non sum dignus*.
- the MC (or Th if they kneel on the predella) holds the plate for the Tbs; the Tbs do not hold it for themselves as they are holding the torches.
- in all cases, the outside Tbs (which should be Tb1 & 2), after receiving Communion, immediately rise and without any genuflection, follow C with Blessed Sacrament to the Communion rail (inside the sanctuary), where they stand at each end, holding their torches in their outside hand (towards the rail). These Tbs should keep their eyes downcast in reverence of the Blessed Sacrament that they accompany.
- when C has distributed Communion to the last communicant, both Tbs go in unison with C back to their positions with the other Tbs. Tb 1 & 2 do not genuflect at all while performing this action,²² they simply return to their positions and kneel immediately.

During the ablutions

- when C has closed the tabernacle and the MC has signaled all to rise, the Tbs stand, and then take position in the same manner as at the Offertory either according to option A or B.
- when all are ready, Th signals all the Tbs to genuflect, then all turn inwards and process out behind Th as usual.
- upon reaching the sacristy, the Tbs extinguish their torches and put them away.
- Th then leads them back into the sanctuary, where the Tbs line up again as at the Offertory, then Th signals a genuflection and the Tbs return to their stools in the same manner as upon entering the sanctuary during the processional.

During the remainder of the Mass

- the Tbs act as usual.

During the Last Blessing

- when the MC signals all to kneel during the Last Blessing, the Tbs kneel facing each other across the sanctuary.

During the Last Gospel

- after the Tbs have signed themselves for the Last Gospel (having made the proper responses), they line up as for the Offertory according to option “a” or “b.”
- the Tbs genuflect in unison when “*Et Verbum caro factum est*” is said.

Recessional

- the Tbs genuflect on the MC’s signal and then turn inwards to face the nave, but first allow the crossbearer and acolytes to pass through the pews.
- when the crossbearer and acolytes have pass through completely, the pairs of Tbs each follow at a distance of four pews, walking shoulder to shoulder.
- when the Tbs reach the sacristy, they line up as before the processional.
- at the MC’s signal, the Tbs bow to the processional cross, then to C and then kneel to receive C’s blessing.

After Mass Duties

- when the Guild prayers have been said, the Tbs then put away their stools and do whatever other duties the MC assigns to them.

²¹ If this option is used, the Tbs approach the sides while the other servers line up at the foot. They genuflect on the MC’s signal²¹, kneel, recite the *Confiteor*, then stand and genuflect on MC’s signal again, ascend to the predella, kneel and receive Communion there.

²² This is because they are accompanying the Blessed Sacrament and so the rule applies for Tb 1 & 2 as it would for Ac1 & 2 with the crossbearer.