

St. Paul's

What We Do & Why

What we do, and why we do it!

Why do the leaders of worship wear white robes?

Our white robes can look fancy today, but they are intended as a statement of simplicity. Back in Jesus' time everyone wore a simple white robe because it was easy to make. Only wealthy people could afford to wear a fancier garment over the top of their white robe. We wear white robes during worship today partly to avoid having attention go to the clothes of the worship leaders.

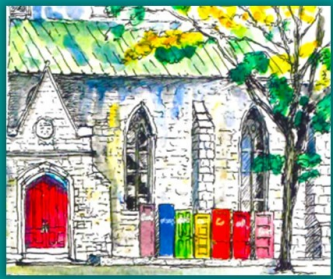
Why do we have a cross at the front of the procession, and at the very front of the worship space? Wasn't it a tool of torture used by the Roman empire?

This was a question people have been discussing and arguing about since the time of St. Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, *we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.* It was St. Paul who articulated the idea that Christ's crucifixion on a cross was the central image of God's activity in the world. God reconciles Godself with human kind by suffering the way we suffer, by dying the way we die. For us, the cross is an icon of God's self-giving, self-emptying love for humanity, a kind of love we strive to show in our own lives.

Why are the priest and other worship leaders always carrying that gold covered book in and out and around the worship space, over their heads?

The book we carry over our heads is the Gospel book. We give the Gospel a symbolic place of prominence in our processions because it is our mission to carry God's good news into the world. We do this through our actions, and occasionally through our words.

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A Tiny Dictionary of Episcopal Words

Continued

Why is the priest or bishop always the last person in the procession into the worship service?

The first person or symbol (the cross) in the procession is the place of honor. The last person in the procession, the priest or bishop, occupies the place of greatest humility. These understandings come from the ancient world, where the honored person would be the first in line, followed by an entourage of assistants, with the last person being the lowliest servant. This understanding is sometimes difficult to see today, since, although we assign the place of great humility to the priest or bishop, we also give them extra fancy clothes to wear for the worship service! We are reminded by our Sudanese members that the Dinka word for priest is *Abuna*, which means servant. The priest is to be a servant of all. This understanding comes from Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus says, *You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be servant of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.*

Why do some people bow when approaching the altar or before sitting down in the worship space?

Many people show a sign of reverence for the consecrated bread and wine which are kept on a side table, next to the altar. We understand these to be the most sacred elements in the worship space. In the words of a Eucharistic prayer, 'By your Holy Spirit, may they be for us the body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ'.

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