

Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

#5. What is the reason the priest or bishop is always the last person in the procession?

In the ancient world the most important person, such as the king, the governor, or the general of the army, was always the first person in any procession. The assistants walked in order of importance behind the king or governor. The last person in the procession would be the servant of the lowest rank.

As Christians we take inspiration from Jesus' instructions: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called by fancy titles, but not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the novice and the leader like one who serves." (Luke 22:25-26) We pay attention to the order of participants and symbols in our processions. The cross is always first in our processions because the cross is our most important symbol. The priest or bishop is always the last in the procession to indicate that, as leaders in the church, they have taken on the role of servant.