

Carrying the Book

It may seem a bit strange. You're asked to hold this large book *up over your head* as you walk in procession. Maybe you're even a bit self-conscious about it, wondering if your suit coat is creeping up your backside or your skirt is bunching up too far. (Try this: Stand in front of a full-length mirror before you leave for church, and hold a telephone book up over your head. Make sure everything is okay.) Why do we do carry the book this way?

Because the book is the tangible sign of the word of God that you proclaim. In the liturgy, we use material things like this book to make spiritual realities present. What we feel in our hearts, we express with our bodies. And what we do with our bodies moves our hearts. So if we love the word of God, we show reverence to the book. And when we show reverence to the book, our love for the word of God grows.

Carrying the book up high as we walk in procession is a way of showing and growing in our love for this word that created and redeemed us. We carry the book into our liturgy because one of the reasons we gather is so that we can open this book and proclaim its wonderful words. By carrying it into the assembly, we are inviting all who are gathered to turn to the book and to listen to it. We carry the book out at the end of Mass as a sign of what we are all now to do: to

carry this word out of our assembly and into the world, to proclaim it by the way we live our lives.

Hold the book straight up at a comfortable height above your head. Grasp it solidly by the two lower corners. If you know the hymn, sing along from memory. But never carry the song sheet on the back of the book; it's inelegant.

When you approach the altar, continue to hold the book high, and don't bow. Instead, stop for a moment and look at the altar. Then proceed. If you can do so gracefully, you may bow your head and then proceed, but don't tip the book. (If you carry the book of the gospels and place it on the altar, you can bow *after* you have set it down.) Lower the book to chest height in order to safely climb steps. Set the book down gently, carefully and reverently.

There is no rule about this, but it may be better not to open the book at this time. It may be better to wait until it is time for the first reading. Then the reader ascends into the ambo, takes up the book and reverently opens it for all to see (although the reader need not hold it while reading).

Ah! Here is why we have gathered, why we have carried in this book with such ceremony: to open it, proclaim it, learn from it, delight in it, acclaim it, heed it, love it, live it.