INCENSE

Why incense? - Hallowed by thousands of years of use, the aromatic smoke wafting towards the heavens signifies our prayers rising to God. Imagine each grain of incense transformed into a whispering prayer, reaching up to heaven! From the Old Testament we know that the aromatic smoke of blessed incense also purifies and keeps evil spirits away.

How to use incense? - It can be burnt or simply kept in your home. You can burn some during your prayers, or in front of a sacred image (*especially on the feast day of the Saint the image represents*), or you can simply place a few grains in front of a cross or sacred image. If, at times, it feels like evil powers oppress your home, you can burn a few grains and incense your home.

The effects of incense? - As a powerful symbol, it can help you to focus your attention during prayer. As the smoke rises towards heaven, so should your words, feelings, affection, and thoughts as well. The sweet fragrance of incense will remind you how *your life* should become something pleasing to God through a Christian life of prayer and charity. Finally, as the prayer says, the smoke of blessed incense can *deliver from all perils to body and soul, and bestow all good things.* Keeping blessed incense with us, or in our home, can *protect us from every kind of illness, injury, and danger, so we can serve God joyously.*

It's not magic! - The spiritual power does not reside in the incense but comes from God who often uses material things (water, oil, salt, etc.) to give his grace. Incense is a simple, visible means that, if used with faith, can enrich our prayer life, remind us of the importance of a virtuous (holy) life, and bring about God's protection against spiritual evil.

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How to use incense in your everyday life:

Preparation - If you want to "connect spiritually", so to say, you can start with burning some incense to create a helpful atmosphere for your senses. Incense in itself will not "connect" you but it can facilitate it. Prayer and/or reading of the Bible must follow. You could pray: *Lord, the scent of your presence is as sweet and calming as gentle incense. Come and help me to pray with attention and devotion so that I can experience your sweet presence. Amen.*

Symbol - Incense is a powerful symbol of good prayer: it is sweet, delightful, and acceptable to God. You can burn some incense at the beginning and/or end of your prayers, saying: *Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight; the lifting up of my hands, as evening sacrifice. (*Psalm 141) Or: *As this blessed smoke rises towards you, O Lord, so may my words, feelings, affection, and thoughts rise to you this day and every day of my life. Amen. Or: May this incense, blessed by You, ascend to You, O Lord; and may Your mercy descend upon us/me.*

Reminder of - How God is a sweet fragrance of beauty, holiness, mercy, tenderness, goodness, generosity, etc: *Lord, may my words and life always spread your love, goodness and mercy in this world! May all experience your sweet presence!* — How you must become an acceptable offering to God: *Let my life be a sweet fragrance to you, dear Lord!*

Devotion - you can burn or place incense in front of the Cross, an image of Jesus or a Saint, with a few words of prayer, to express your devotion and affection in a visible way too.

Spiritual "warfare" - in times of temptation, distraction, evil influence, struggle, or sickness, burn some incense and say the Lord's Prayer or simply say: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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