

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS IN THE HOLY QURBANA



“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26: 26-28). Thus using bread and wine, the symbols of His body and blood, Jesus instituted the holy

Qurbana. To have an active participation in the holy Qurbana, we must comprehend the meaning of all the signs related with the holy Qurbana together with what they indicate and reveal.

Places

The Temple of God (church): The church is the place for worship of God. It is also the symbol of the salvific presence of God brimming across the universe. The church acquires greater meaning and aptness when the faithful, united in Christ, assemble there for

ACTIVITY - 1

Find out the signs and symbols used in the holy Qurbana. And ask them to write down also their meaning.



worship. This worshipping community represents the Church as a whole; hence, the temple of God is a symbol of the Church. According to the tradition of our Church, a church is built in an east-west direction, having three important portions: the **Sanctuary**, the **Questroma** and the **Hykla**.

The Sanctuary (Madbaha): The sanctuary's position in a church built in an east-west direction is at the extreme eastern end; this is the most holy place. The sanctuary is symbolic of heaven; it provides an experience of heaven suffused with the glorious presence of God and the praises of God continuously poured out by the heavenly hosts. The lowering height of the sanctuary as well as its roof reveals the supremacy of heaven over the earth. The sanctuary is, usually, built three steps higher than the questroma. The custom of protecting the sanctuary with a veil reveals the sanctity and supremacy of the place.

The Altar: The altar is the center of the sanctuary. The divine mysteries are celebrated on the altar. The altar symbolizes the divine throne of the Holy Trinity, the tomb of Christ, the sacrificial altar, the ladder leading to heaven, the table for banquet, etc.

The Tabernacle: The tabernacle is a receptacle for reserving the Holy Eucharist for holy communion outside the Qurbana, and for adoration.

The Bethgazzas: On either side of the altar, the bethgazzas are arranged for preparing the sacrificial offerings. The meaning of the word bethgazza is 'nikshepalayam' (treasury).



The Bethsahade: This is a place to treasure the relics of martyrs. Generally, this is arranged at the right side of the sanctuary.

The Bema: The bema is arranged either in the middle of the hykla or adjacent to the questroma. A table is kept at the center of it with a cross and candles. On either side of it, lecterns and chairs for the celebrant and deacons are arranged. The bema is a symbol of the earthly paradise.

The Questroma: Between the sanctuary and the hykla and a step higher than the hykla, the questroma is arranged. The questroma, where the choir stands, will be usually separated from the hykla with railings.

The Baptismal Font: This is specially arranged to baptize the candidates. Christians are supposed to be born in the font, receive food from the altar and grow into the community of saints.

The Hykla: This is the place where the faithful assemble; it is symbolic of the earth.

The Sacristy: This is the place where the celebrant and the deacons put on their sacred vestments and prepare for the celebrations.

Individuals

The individuals participating in the holy Qurbana are also considered as signs. They can be divided into three groups:



The Community: The community is the symbol of the Church participating in the holy Qurbana. All those who are redeemed by Jesus are included in this group.

The Celebrant: The celebrant is a representative of Christ and a mediator between God and man. He celebrates the Qurbana on behalf of the community.

The Deacons: The deacons and servers enjoy the position of angels. They impart timely instructions to the community so as to have an active participation in the Qurbana. They assist the celebrant in the ministry as well.

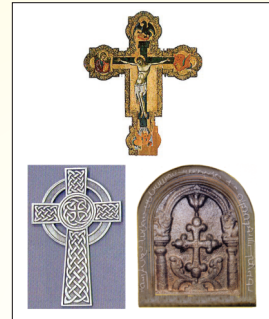
Objects

Cross (Sleeva): The cross placed in the sanctuary is both a sign of salvation and a symbol of the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus. It is a symbol of Jesus himself, a sign of glory and an emblem of success. The word 'Cross' comes from the Portuguese word 'Cruz'; in Syriac, we say 'Sleeva'.

Gospel Book: This, placed at the right side of the altar, symbolizes Jesus gloriously sitting at the right side of the heavenly Father.

Bread & Wine: Bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus.

Sacred Vessels: The important sacred vessels used in the holy Qurbana are the Chalice, Paten and Ciborium; The chalice and paten are for the sacred Blood and Body respectively. The sacred Body is reserved in the ciborium.



The Ever-glowing Lamp: This indicates the everlasting presence of Jesus, the light of the world (Jn 8: 12). The lamp is placed either in the sanctuary or at the entrance of the sanctuary.

Sacred Vestments

Every individual Church uses, for the celebration of the Sacraments, sacred vestments suiting their ancestral tradition. Donning them, they celebrate the Holy Qurbana.

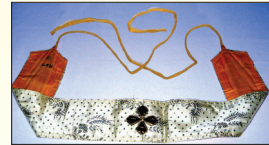
Kotina: Kotina is symbolic of Christ as well as man renewed in Christ. This sacred vestment reminds us of the need to discard the old self (of evil) and embrace the new self (of goodness).

Zunara: This is a symbol of chastity and service. Zunara used as a girdle over kotina reminds that we must refrain from worldly thoughts and serve God with alertness and purity of mind.

Urara: The urara worn on the neck is a sign of the sacred service entrusted upon the celebrant; this indicates priestly authority and purity.

Zande: With this, the borders of kotina are designed. It means that the hands are ready for the sacred service.

Paina (Kappa): Paina is worn over the other sacred vestments by the priest. This is called 'vestment of justice' proving the dictum 'a priest must adorn himself with justice', the priest's duty of a shepherd is also indicated here.



Sosappa: Sosappa is a square-shaped sacred veil of the same colour as that of paina. The act of covering the holy mysteries with the sosappa signifies the burial of Jesus and the sosappa being arranged around the sacred mysteries refers to the resurrection of Jesus. The sosappa is qualified as the lid of the coffin of Jesus, the shroud covering his sacred body and also as his head-dress.

Gestures and Body Postures

We come across different types of gestures and body postures in the holy Qurbana; they have meanings pertaining to the symbols and redemptive values.

Standing: The general characteristic of our liturgy is to stand. Standing signifies resurrection. We are children of resurrection with heavenly hope. Through our faith in Jesus and baptism, we are liberated from death and all sorts of slavery.

Sitting: We can sit during all the readings except the gospel, and homily. This indicates careful listening.

Kneeling: This is a posture of the one pleading for exemption from debts and that of a repentant sinner. This reveals the attitude of man requesting for divine help, it signifies penance as well.

Bowing: Submission, respect, worship, gratitude etc. are expressed through bowing.

Stretching out Hands: This signifies request and interceding for others.



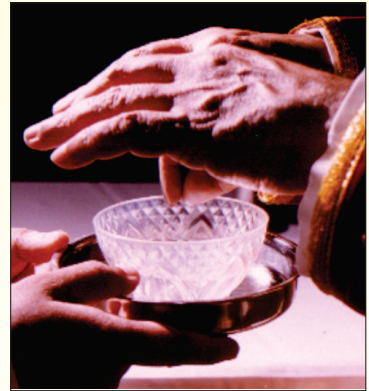
Exchange of Peace: The deacon receives peace from the priest and gives it to others; this indicates mutual love and unity. This is a sign of reconciling with each other. This, further, signifies that we are all one body in Christ.

Kissing: Kissing the altar, the Holy Bible, Cross etc. denotes the love and respect for them as well as staunch hope in them.

The Sign of the Cross: Making the sign of the cross and blessing with the sign of the cross are there in the holy Qurbana. The priest, with an open palm of the hand or with the thumb makes the sign of the cross on himself; with the right hand blesses the deacon, the faithful, the sacred offerings and the incense; blesses the people with the gospel book, puts a cross on the altar with the thumb, the sacred body and blood are sealed with mutual signs of the cross. The cross is a sign of salvation of mankind; it represents Jesus himself.

Incense: Besides being a symbol of forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, respect, penance and sanctification it symbolizes the prayer raised heavenward and the praises dedicated to God.

Washing of the Hands: As the prayer during this washing of the hands indicates may the Lord wipe away the sins this ritual signifies the wiping out of the stains of sins, and purification of the heart.



ACTIVITY - 2

Prepare a chart presenting the pictures of the signs and symbols used in the holy Qurbana and explain their meaning to the students of your class.

Processions: There are many processions in the holy Qurbana. The introductory procession, procession with the gospel book, the procession to the altar carrying the sacred body and blood refer to the incarnation, public life, the entry into Jerusalem, the journey to Calvary etc.

Lighting of Lamp: Amidst the sacred mysteries a lamp is being lit in memory of Jesus, the light of the world. When we participate in the holy Qurbana comprehending the meaning of all these rituals and sacred mysteries, our oblation will be blessed.

The Church Arts

The arrangements within the church, architectural beauty, icons, wall-pictures, sacred statues, decorations, music, the excellence in presentation of rituals and rites all these go into the making of worship of God an act of devotion.

Sacred Music

The role of songs in the liturgy is very great. The worshipping community sings and worships God joining with the angels who adore God perpetually. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the sacred music should be appropriate so that the community may have an active involvement in the liturgy (Sacred Liturgy 114).

The Church Bells

The Church bells are used to remind the people of the timings of liturgy and the important contexts in the course of the liturgical services.

**LET US
READ AND
MEDITATE THE
WORD OF GOD**

(Rev. 15 : 2 - 4)

A Verse to Remember

“...the smoke of the incense, with the prayers
of the saints rose before God from the
hand of the angel.”

(Rev. 8:4)

Let us Pray

O' Loving Jesus, bless us to offer the holy Qurbana after understanding fully the meaning of all the signs and symbols used in the Qurbana.

My Resolution

I will try to acquire a thorough knowledge about all the signs and symbols used in the holy Qurbana.

Teachings of the Fathers of the Church

Mankind has become weak, sad and exhausted. You have empowered it with your holy bread. With your sweet wine, you have comforted it, With your anointing oil, you have lent it satisfaction. (Mar Ephrem)

QUESTIONS

1. Which are the three important areas within a church? Explain their symbolic meanings.
2. Who all are represented by the celebrant, deacons and the community of the faithful?
3. What all are symbolized by the cross?
4. List out the different sacred vestments worn by the celebrant? Explain the significance of each item?
5. Write a short note: The gestures and body postures in the holy Qurbana.