

# We Smell Incense and See Icons

**Objective:** The students will be able to state that the priest incenses people and icons to honor them.

## *For the Catechist*

In Byzantine worship the bodily senses are engaged through the sound of singing, the taste of the Eucharist, the kissing of icons, the beauty of the church, and the smell of incense. While each of these has an explicit meaning and purpose, they combine to give Byzantine worship a sensuous nature. The engaging of the whole person, mind and senses, sets Byzantine worship in contrast to Western forms of Christianity that seek, at their extreme, to engage only the mind of the participant.

**Icons.** An icon is unlike any other form of art. Icons are purposely not natural looking. The figure or scene is presented in a "transfigured" state, as existing in eternity. Icons are an aid to meditation and prayer and have been termed "windows" through which we may glimpse the stillness and peace of heaven. They are valued as teaching tools in the same vein as the Gospel. (Thus, an iconographer does not paint, but rather "writes" an icon.)

**Icons of saints.** Icons of saints are not objects we worship or adore—a common misunderstanding. Rather, they are representations of the person who is *venerated or honored*.

**Communion of saints.** The Church as family has a dimension beyond time as well. Because we are all one body with Christ as our head, we are forever joined with those who have been and continue to be in the Body of Christ. We are one family both here on earth and in heaven.

**Incense.** Incense is seen to represent many ideas. First, the burning of incense, as also the burning of a candle, is considered a sacrifice. Incense also reminds the worshipper of prayers rising to God. Finally, incense honors those who receive it—the icons, the church building, and the people in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

## *Lesson Plan Overview*

**Opening:** "Our Father"

**Introduction:** Discussion of photographs and icons **Need:** Photos of a special deceased person and a special event; icons of a saint and of a feast day.

**Read Text Aloud:** Hold text up for students to see as you read each page aloud. After each page, use the questions in the shaded box at the bottom of that page to discuss the lesson with the students.

### *Activity Tracks:*

Choose a basic, group, or craft activity to reinforce the lesson (detailed on the pages that follow).

- *Basic:* "Icons and Incense"
- *Group:* "Incense Honors" Class Book
- *Craft:* Jesus and the Mother of God Diptych

**Closing:** Venerate the icon of Christ the Teacher.

### *Come Bless the Lord Icon:*

- Packet I: Christ the Teacher icon
- Packet II:

## **Background Reading**

*(Direct quotations from the sources noted)*

### **Icons**

“The writing of an icon becomes an apparition, an appearance of the holy person as he or she exists in glory, as transfigured. Hence there is no attempt to make them look “natural” by the standards of the flesh. The figures of the individuals, and even the buildings and scenery are stylized. Customarily, a lamp or candle is kept burning before the image, not only to express that an icon is a window into heaven and that a ‘real presence’ is effected by the icon, but also to emphasize that the light of Christ is reflected by the saint through the indwelling Spirit. Tradition has adopted the imagery of St. John’s Gospel to reflect this: the heads of the saints are enclosed in halos reflecting the light within them, and the figures stand on gold-leaf backgrounds showing the permeating light of the Spirit. This, in turn, is rooted in the doctrine of the Incarnation and that of the Transfiguration” (*A Stream of Living Water* 96).

### **Veneration of Icons**

“Perhaps the most common method for venerating icons is as follows: 1. Make a metany. 2. Kiss the principal figure(s) on the icon. Usually we kiss the hand, the foot or the hem of the garment of Christ or the saint represented. When venerating icons depicting several figures, such as the Theotokos carrying the child Jesus, many people kiss each principal figure on the icon. 3. Make another metany. 4. If candles are available, light one, place it in the proper receptacle and offer your prayer” (*DC* 44).

### **Icons in the Church Building**

“Icons derive from the mystery of the incarnation, in that Christ is ‘the icon of the invisible God’ (Col, 1: 15). In the incarnation God has become visible in human form, making it possible to depict Him in Christ. The style of icons reflects the transfiguration of our humanity by the divinity of Christ who is depicted as the perfect man, the model for all the other images of saints. The icons of the saints are painted according to the same principles as the icon of Christ to show deification by the Spirit into the image of God. The saints’ eyes, the mirrors of the soul, are open wide to represent wisdom and spiritual insight. Their posture and clothing are harmoniously arranged to represent integrity and wholeness of being. Icons de-emphasize physical features (physiognomy) in order to lead us to a perception of spiritual reality and beauty” (*LLII* 13).

### **The Icon Screen**

“The theological function of the icon screen is to be the ‘gate of paradise,’ proclaiming that, through Christ, ‘the reflection of the Father’s glory, the exact representation of the Father’s being’ (Heb 1:3), we have access to the Father and to the Kingdom of God. The icons of the Mother of God, the apostles, the gospel scenes on the screen are placed there because of their connection with the mystery of the incarnation. Likewise the Church, represented by the icons of the parish patrons, is there as the continuation of the incarnation, affording us spiritual and bodily unity with God” (*LLII* 14).

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### **Communion of Saints**

“We believe in the communion of all the faithful, all together forming one church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers (Paul VI, *CPG* sec. 30)” (*CCC* #962).

### **Incense**

“Incense reminds us through smell and sight that we are being offered to God as ‘a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God’ (Phil 4:18) and that the bright cloud of the Holy Spirit is filling the temple of our worship” (*LLII* 12).

# The Lesson Plan

## Opening

Let's gather around the icon and say the Lord's Prayer. Let's put our hands in prayer position and repeat after me: "Our Father—[Let them echo the phrase after you say it] Who art in heaven—hallowed be Thy name.—Thy kingdom come.—Thy will be done—on earth as it is in heaven.—Give us this day—our daily bread—and forgive us our trespasses—as we forgive those—who trespass against us.—Lead us not into temptation—but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom. . . [Check the "Liturgical Texts" pages in the introductory notes for the words to be used in your jurisdiction.]

## Introduction

We are learning about our church. Today we will learn about icons and incense. I brought two things from home to help me teach the lesson. [If possible have incense burner and begin to burn incense.] I also brought a censer to burn incense. This is a photograph of \_\_\_ who died. He/she was a very special person. Sometimes I pick up the photograph and kiss it. Why do you think I kiss the photo? (Because I miss the person and love them still.) Do you have photographs of those you love at home? [Allow responses.] The second photograph is of an event, \_\_\_\_\_. It was a very special time. Sometimes I pick up this photograph and hold it near my heart. Why do you think I do that? (The event was so special.) I treasure these photographs. Icons are like photographs. [Hold up icon of saint and of a feast day.] They remind us of people and events of long ago that have to do with God. [Explain the icons you have brought.] We kiss icons and bow before them as I kiss my treasured photographs. When we kiss the icon, our kiss is not meant for the wood, but for the person on the icon. An icon is a little different than a photo because it shows the person in heaven with God. Icons are precious to us. In church we see Father incense the icons. He incenses what is valuable and precious. Father also incenses us. We are made in God's image; we are valuable and precious. We use incense to show honor. Let's read our lesson.

## Reading of Text

Hold text so that children can see the page as you read it to them. Read slowly and draw their attention to the illustrations. After reading each page, use the questions below (given also on the bottom of the student text) to review what you have read.

### Page 1

- What do you see happening in the picture? (The priest is incensing the people.) We will learn about incense in today's lesson.
- Do you see any icons? [Allow responses.] We will learn about icons today.
- Whose house is the church? (God's house.)

- *I think our church is very beautiful, especially when I look at [share with the children the part of the church to which you are drawn.]*

### **Page 2**

- *Do you ever watch how the incense rises? It reminds us that our prayers rise to God. We offer incense to God.*
- *Let's look at the icon in our classroom. Do you know this icon?*  
[Review Christ the Teacher icon with students.]
- [Allow responses.] *Do you have any icons at home? Can you tell me about them?*

### **Page 3**

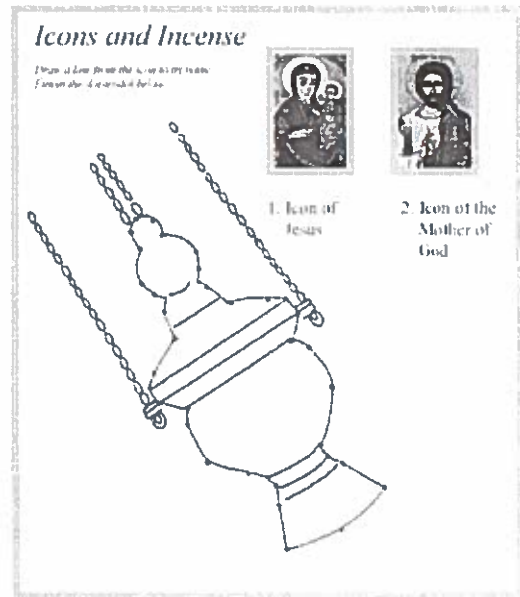
- *Incense shows that something is very valuable and special. You probably have a cross or an icon that was given to you at your baptism. They are very special or valuable. We think all icons are very special and valuable. We honor them with incense. We are very special and valuable to God. The priest incenses us to show that we are valuable and special to God. When the priest incenses us, we bow to the priest to show that we honor him, also.*

## Activity Tracks

### Basic: Icons and Incense

The basic activity is the fourth page of each student text. It is a matching activity and a dot-to-dot picture. Read the title to the children and say the following:

• *We learned today about incense and icons. We incense icons to show that we honor them. We also learned about two icons. Let's see if we can do the worksheet together. [Point as you describe.] Here we have words and pictures. We will match the word and the picture. [Read each icon name and have them draw a line to the picture. Then, if necessary, help them complete the dot-to dot.]*



### Group: "Incense Honors" Class Book

**Materials:** "Incense Honors" worksheets (5), markers, construction paper, stapler.

*Today we learned that the priest uses incense to show honor to God, the icons, and all of us. We'll work together today to make a class book about incense. Each of you will get two pages to color. We'll paste a small amount of cotton on each to look like incense. Then we'll put the pages together and read our book. [Read the pages. Give the children the page "And incense honors me, \_\_\_\_\_" for them to fill in their name and draw themselves. Let them color another page of their choice. Use construction paper to make a cover, and paste the cover page onto it. Compile the pages so that every second page has a child's name on it. The following is an example:*

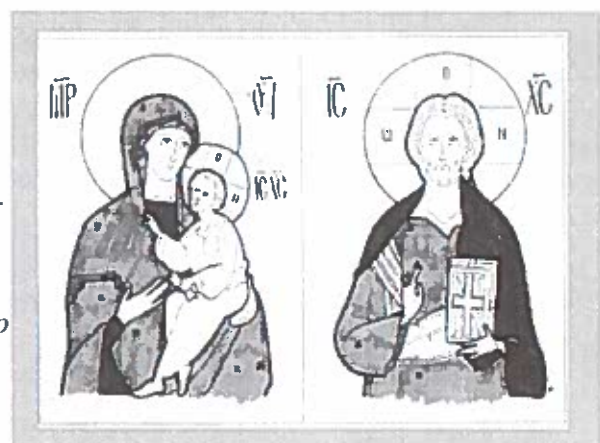
Incense honors the saints.  
 And incense honors me, Elias.  
 Incense honors God.  
 And incense honors me, Sophia.]



### Craft: Jesus and the Mother of God Diptych

**Materials:** Jesus and the Mother of God Icons worksheet, markers (extra blue and red if possible), construction paper cut in half horizontally, glue

*Today we learned about the icons we see in church. Two that you should know are those of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God. For our project today we'll*



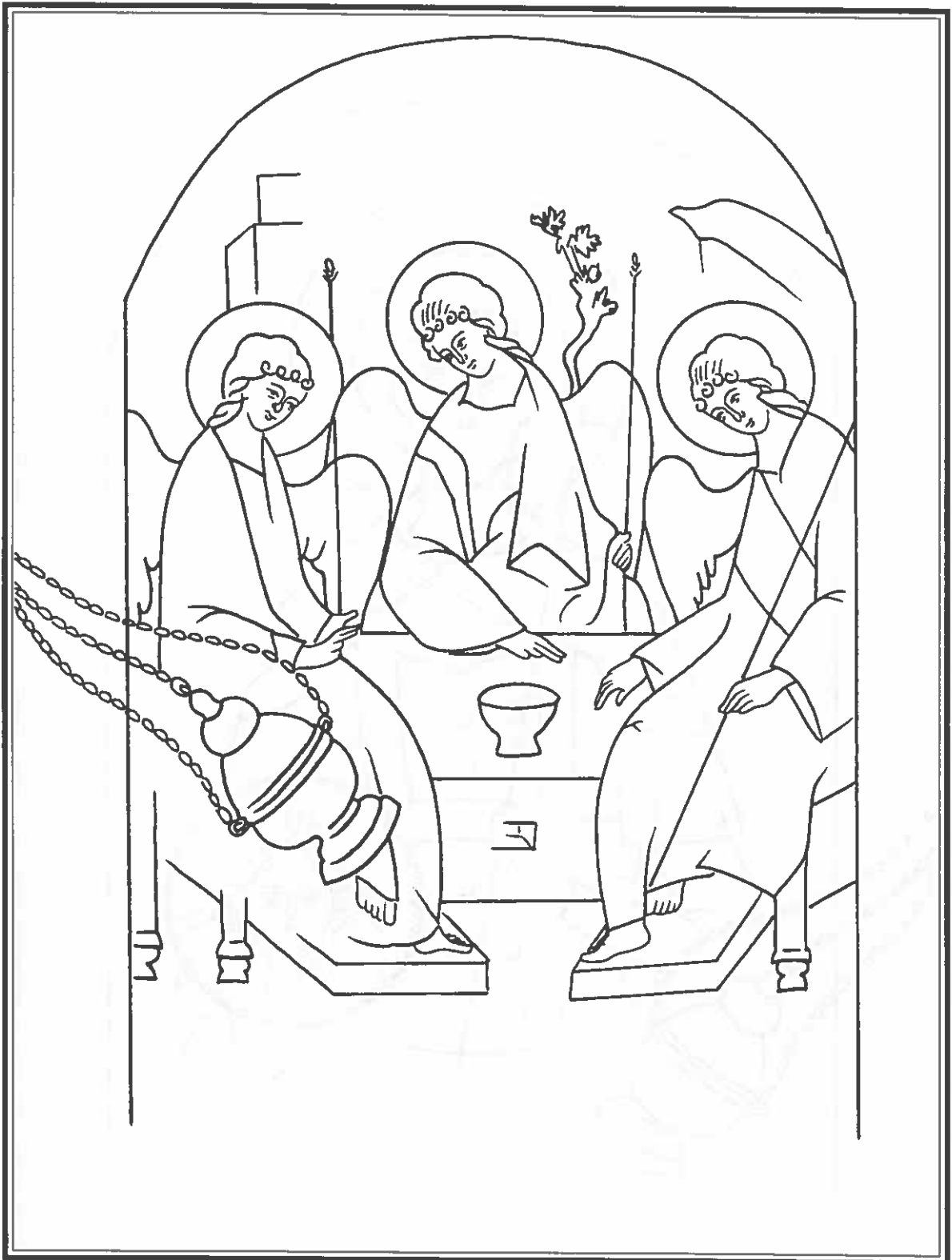
make what is called a diptych. It is a way of presenting icons. [Show sample.] We'll color our icons and then paste them into the frame to make the diptych. It can stand up as a card when we fold it in half. We'll try to use the same colors as the iconographers use. For Jesus, the robe underneath is red and the outside robe is blue. For the Mother of God, the robe underneath is blue, and the one on the outside is red. The infant Jesus may be in a white or gold robe, and yellow or gold may be used for the sashes. Follow my example, and the letters on the icons, "R" for red and "B" for blue. You can take your diptych home for your dresser or icon corner.

### **Closing**

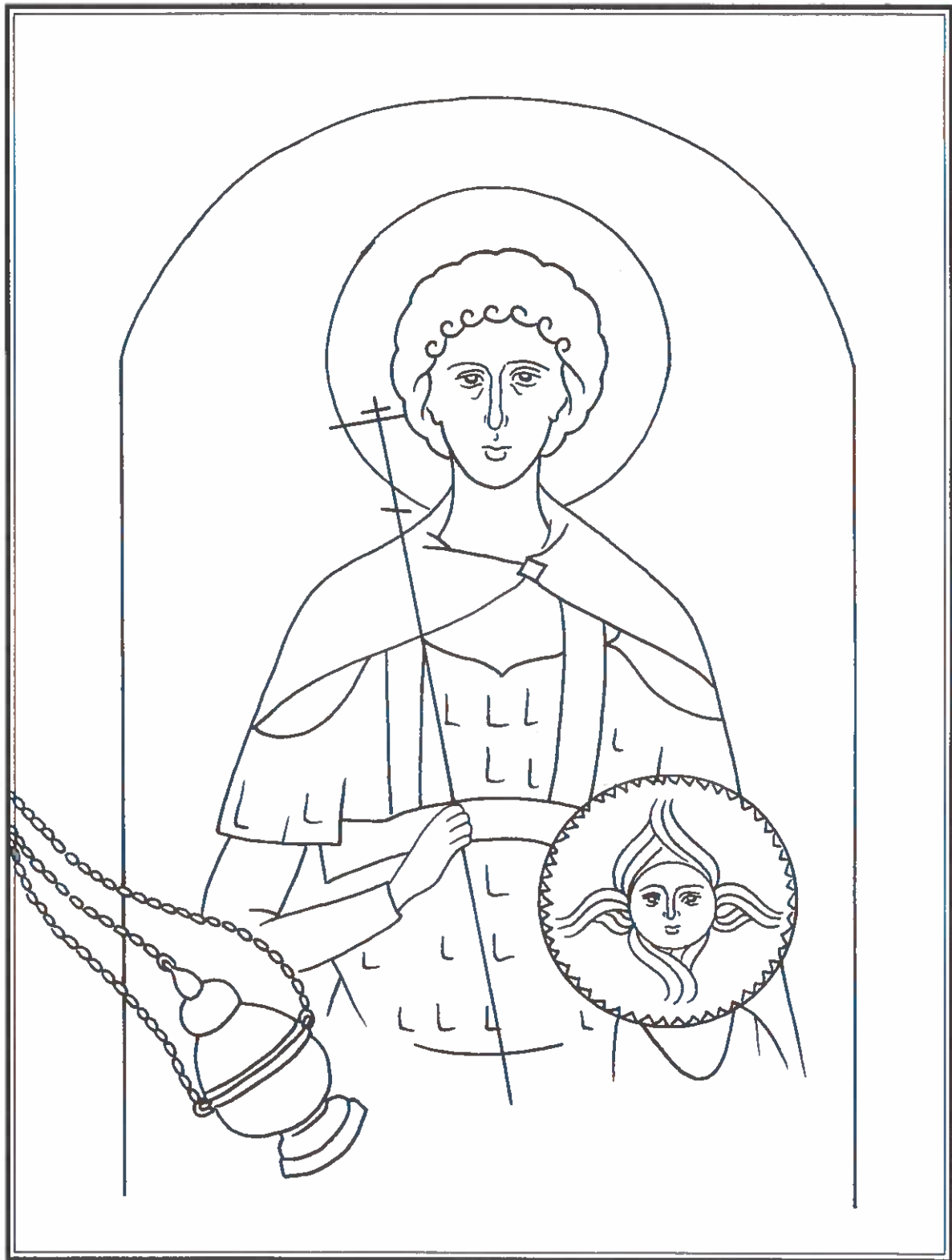
Another way to pray is by kissing an icon. When we kiss icons, we honor and pray to the person they represent. Let's kiss the icon of Christ the Teacher for our closing prayer today. [Have the students one by one walk to the icon on the table, bow, and kiss the icon.] Now that everyone has kissed the icon, let's stand quietly for a moment to look at Jesus. We honor Jesus by looking at an icon and thinking Him.

# Incense Honors

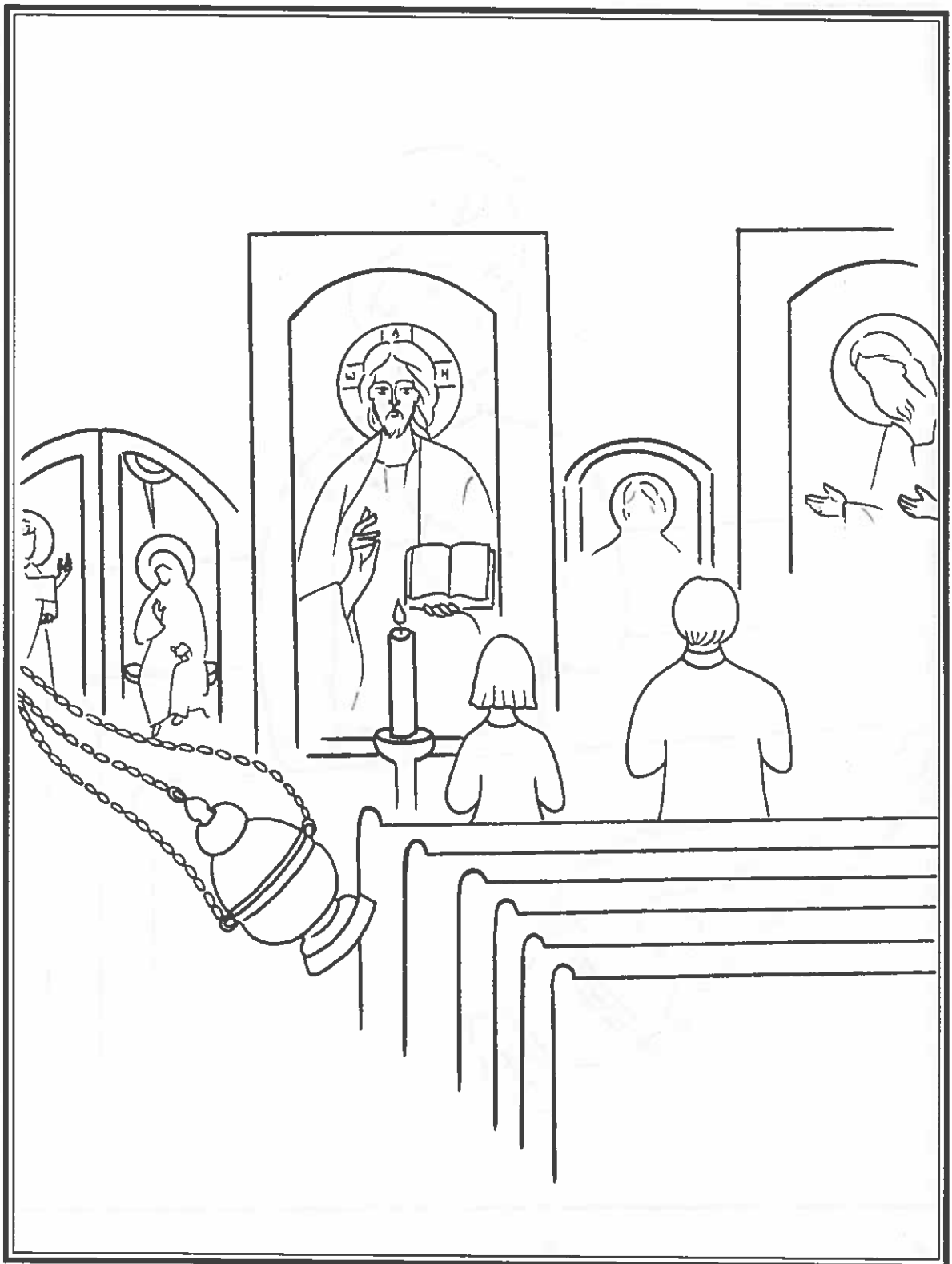




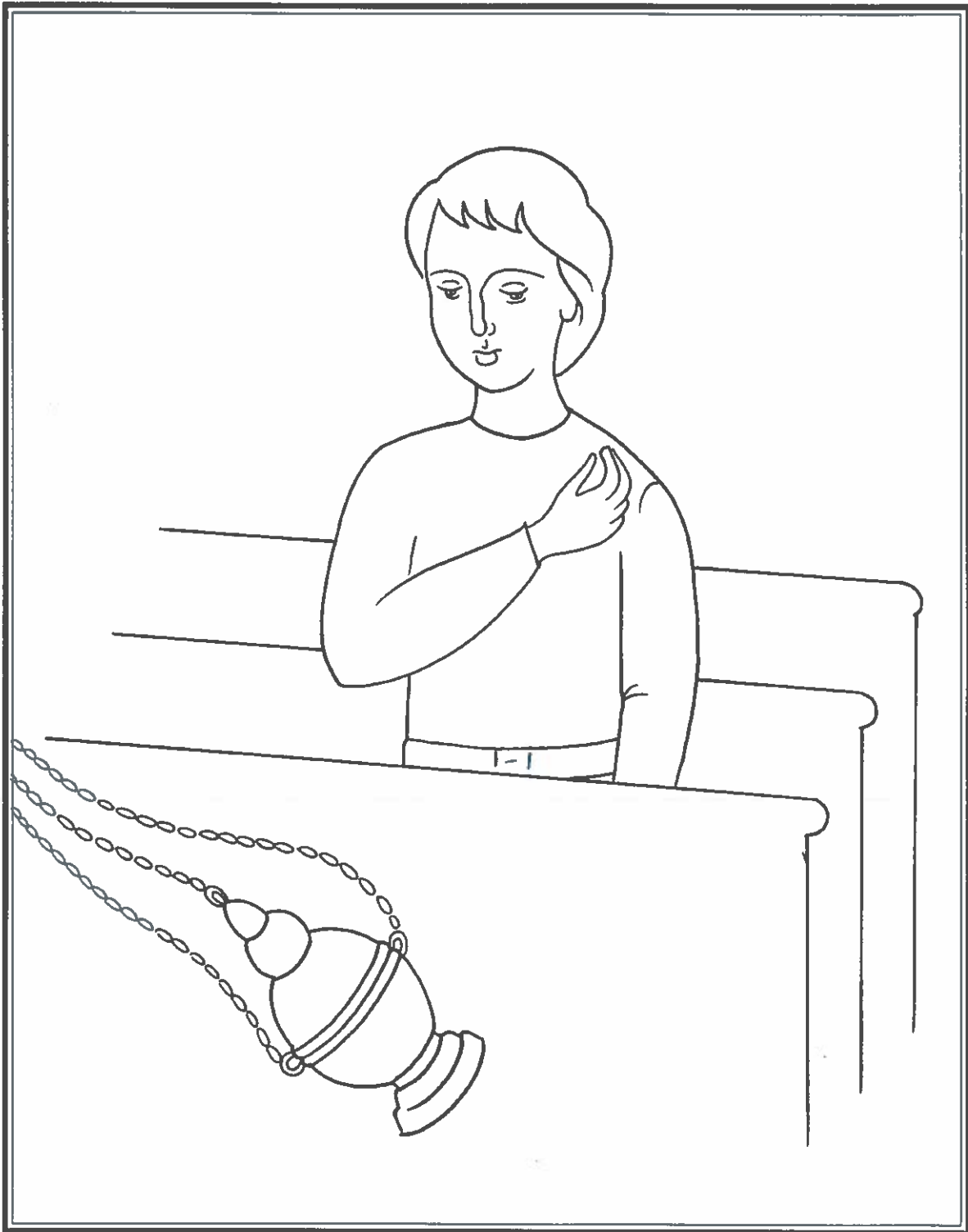
Incense honors God.



Incense honors the saints.



Incense honors the church.



And incense honors me,

\_\_\_\_\_.

