

How to make a Triple Candle.

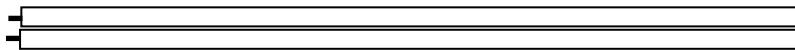
The traditional Roman rite for Holy Saturday, one of the most interesting and inspiring in the whole liturgical year requires the use of a three-branched candle surmounted on a reed for the ceremonies of the *Lucernarium*, an ancient feature of Vespers, at the beginning of the service.

What follows below are some practical notes on how to make a triple candle that were developed after discussion with a valued customer.

Take three beeswax candles. Apart from any prescription about relative content of beeswax the important thing about beeswax is that it has a low melting point. The candles should be no shorter than 18" in length (if they are too short they will not bend but break), 24" ideal. The best thickness is somewhere between $\frac{3}{4}$ " and 1". Ideally these will have been blessed at Candlemass.

The best place to make the triple candle is outside. The candles are best softened over a gas flame like a barbecue or picnic stove. With the potential of molten wax and a fire hazard I would strongly advise not to do this in the kitchen. Two pairs of hands are better than one too, both for ease of making the candle and from a safety perspective.

Place the three candles together, as below. Do not tie or tape them together

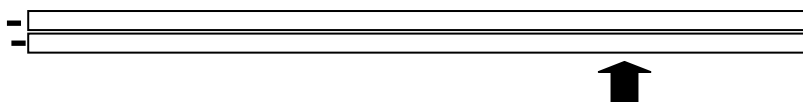


End view:



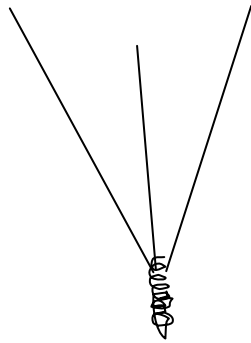
Gently warm the candles over the flame. There is no need for the candles to become uncomfortably hot. Keep moving the candles over the flame so the lower third of them becomes warm. Beeswax becomes malleable at low temperatures. Do not melt the candles but allow them to become warmed through and flexible.

When one can feel that the candles have become soft, remove from the flame and place both hands where indicated by the arrow. Gently twist in different directions with both hands. Do not try to twist too much. As the wax hardens (it does this quickly) stop and re-warm the candles. Again, do not try to twist too much between each warming. When soft gently twist again, repeating the warming and twisting until the lower third of the candles is twisted and holding the three together. As part of this process the 'long' arms will naturally separate out. Do not try to modify these yet.

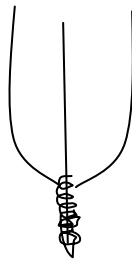


Allow the structure to cool. As the wax is still soft it is best if someone holds the structure while it cools. If it is placed on a surface make sure the weight of the candles does not cause any branch to become distorted. Warm a small quantity of wax in a container – the best thing is a *bain marie* or water bath. Turn the triple candle upside-down and fill any gaps with the molten wax, again best done in several steps so the heat does not cause the bonded candles to separate. Allow the triple candle to cool before the next stage.

The triple candle should now look something like below. The bottom has been twisted together and made solid with wax. The next stage is to form the branches into the required shape.



Carefully warm one of the branches over the flame until it becomes softened and flexible. Carefully bend it so that the most part of it becomes vertical. Again, do not try to bend it too much. Patience is the order of the day. If it starts to harden, re-warm and bend a little further. At this stage a disaster is frustrating! Work through this procedure with the other two branches. The end result should look something like the image below.



The next stage is to fix the triple candle on to the reed. The easiest thing to use is a bamboo cane about six feet long. (*Arundo* and *Arundinaria* used to be the botanical Genera for Bamboos – *Arundo* – a reed. *Phyllostachys* doesn't quite have the etymology!) The top of the cane needs to be about a third the thickness of the base of the candle. If the cane is too narrow then it can be cut, from the top. Make sure the cane does not split.

Now find a wood drill bit which is the same diameter as the top of the cane. Carefully (DO NOT use an electric drill as the vibrations could split the candle) twist the drill bit into the base of the candle – this is easily done by hand. Ideally the hole needs to be about 3"-4" depending on the size of candles used. An old screwdriver heated in the flame works well too.

When the hole has been made gently try fitting the cane/reed into the candle. This is where two pairs of hands come in useful. If the hole is tight gently drill some more or use a hot screwdriver. When the fit is good invert the structure and pour in a little molten wax to secure.

All that remains is to decorate the reed with flower etc. on Holy Saturday morning.