

Altar Server's Manual

Questions & Answers | Instruction & Guidelines

EXPECTATIONS:

The primary duty of a server is to assist the priest(s). Therefore, it is imperative that all servers do their assigned tasks in the prescribed form and manner.

Altar servers have three primary positions during the mass when they are not performing a specific duty. These are standing, sitting and kneeling. In any of these positions they should maintain a straight formal posture. When sitting, the hands should be held on the lap or at the sides. Please do not slouch. Remember, you are seen by all the parishioners and how you conduct yourself is important to their understanding of the Lamb's Supper.

- Demonstrate--knowledge of some important elements of the Mass, including common prayers (see below).
- Demonstrate--how to light and extinguish candles properly.
- Demonstrate--when to bring the cruet of water for wine intinction.
- Demonstrate--when to bring the finger bowl and towel for hand washing.
- Demonstrate--when to ring the bells at the consecration.
- Demonstrate--what posture and hand holding is proper while serving.
- Demonstrate--the appropriate responses said by the people during mass.

By accomplishing these responsibilities, a good Altar Server will anticipate what the priest does throughout the liturgy of the Mass.

Prayers During Mass

A candidate should attempt to know as many principal prayers of the Mass as he or she can: The Gloria, Our Father, Nicene Creed, Lamb of God, Lord, I am not worthy and Holy, Holy, Holy they have shown sufficient effort to prove their desire to serve is genuine. These have been selected because there is nothing more distraction as servers who do not know these prayers and just stand there in ignorance of what to do during these prayers.

Dress

What you wear underneath an alb or cassock will show through. For this reason, the server should be sure to avoid bold stripes and designs of any kind which may distract those predisposed to distraction. It is recommended that you wear solid colors, but white would be the most appropriate choice of shirts and blouses. Likewise pants, dresses and skirts should also be of some solid color.

Dress shoes should be worn whenever possible. Sneakers, no matter how expensive, are for casual dress and sporting events and have no place at the Altar of Our God.

Look Around St. Peter's – what do you find?

Ablution Cup - covered dish of water on the side of the tabernacle which is used by the priest, deacon or extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist to wash their fingers after distributing Communion.

Acolytes' Candles - These two candles are carried either side of the cross in the entrance procession. They are then used to flank the Gospel when it is proclaimed.

Alb - White robe worn over clothes, for adult servers, priests and deacons.

altars2Ambo - The platform, lectern or pulpit from which the reading and homily are given.

Aspergillum - The holy water sprinkler.

Bells - Rung during the consecration of the mass.

Cassock - A long tunic like garment (red, white, and black) which reaches from the neck to the heels which is worn by servers and clergy.

Chalice - A cup of precious metal that holds the wine which becomes the Blood of Jesus after the consecration. All chalices should be placed in their places after Mass. If the Chalices were left unpurified by the priest or deacon for some reason they should be left out on the presentation table for purification by the priest or deacon. Never put an unpurified chalice away.

altars303Chasuble - Colored vestment worn only by the priest.

Ciborium - A large cup or container of precious metal with a cover of the same material which will hold the Body of Jesus after the consecration for distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful.

Cincture - Cord used as a belt for the alb.

Corporal - A white linen cloth, usually with a cross in the center, used to protect any particles of the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus from falling to the altar cloth. It is always folded and unfolded as to protect any particles from being lost. The corporal is like the body winding sheet used to hold the crucified body or Our Lord in the tomb.

Credence Table - The table in the sanctuary where the cruets, chalices and ciborium are kept before and after the Consecration.

Cruets - Water and wine containers.

Finger Bowl & Towel - Used for the rite before Eucharistic prayer. The linen for drying was called a manuterge.

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IHS - the first three letters of Jesus's Name in Greek and often used to decorate the altar and other church facades.

Lectionary - The book of reading used for the liturgy of the word. It usually contains all the biblical reading used for the three year Sunday cycle of reading and the two year daily Mass readings.

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Monstrance - Osterorium - Container for the host in exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, commonly surmounted by a cross. The glass-sided, removable receptacle at its center, the luna (or lunette), actually holds the host.

Paschal Candle - The large ornate (decorated) candle used at funerals, baptisms, and the Easter season until Pentecost. Each year at the Easter Vigil Mass, this candle is specially blessed by the priest.

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Paten - A small saucer shaped plate of precious metal that holds the Host.

Procession – Term of the event of beginning Mass by having the cross bearer, two acolyte bearers, the lector, and the priest – all processing through the main aisle of the church up to the sanctuary.

Processional Cross - The cross carried in and out of the mass.

Purificator - A linen cloth used by the priest or deacon to dry the chalice after washing and purifying it. Used Purificators must always be placed in the proper container for sacred cloths.

Pall - A square piece of cardboard or plastic which is covered by linen and used to cover the chalice.

Pyx – Usually a round container just large enough to carry a host. For conveying the communion host outside of church and Mass to those who could not attend.

Recession – Term of the event of the end of Mass by having the cross bearer, two acolyte bearers, the lector, and the priest – all processing together as you leave the sanctuary and return to the vestibule or sacristy of the church.

Sacramentary - The book containing the prayers said by the priest during the Mass.

Sanctuary - The sacred space elevated before the congregation. (The altar is within the sanctuary.)

Sacristy - The room where priests vest before mass.

Sepulchrum - The cavity on the altar in which the relic(s) of the patron saints of that church or chapel are incased.

Stock - The metal containers used to hold the oil of the catechumen, the oil of chrism and the oil for anointing the sick.

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Stoup - The holy water fountains or bowels at the entrances of the church.

Surplice - A wide sleeved, linen worn over a cassock by clergy and altar servers in some parishes.

Tabernacle - The elaborate (ornate) receptacle used to repose (place) the Body of Christ.

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Thurible - Container for burning incense. [Boat--the container for incense.]

Thurifer - The altar server responsible for the thurible.

Other Definitions (items found in other Catholic churches):

- Burse - A square container for holding the corporal. It is selected for the liturgical color of the day.

- Chalice Veil (peplum) - A cloth covering used to hide the chalice and paten up to the offertory and after Communion. It is selected by the liturgical color for the service.
- Sacarium (piscina) - A sink with its drain going directly into the ground usually fitted with a cover and lock which is used for the disposal of the following: The sacred linen wash and rinse water, used holy water, used baptismal water and blessed ashes. No other use is allowed. St. Peter Celestine does not have a sacarium.
- Thaborstand - The ornate stand used to support the Monstrance during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Questions & Answers:

Q: Why does the priest wash his hands before the consecration?

A: The washing of the hands is done in the celebration of mass out of reverence. In addition, there are also two reasons: First, because the priest is handling precious objects of bread and wine that will become the Body and Blood of Jesus our Saviour. The other reason is that by washing the priests' hands, he is humbly asking God to cleanse him from even the smallest sins, according to John 13:10: "He that is washed needeth not but to wash his feet."

Gestures & Postures

Q: What is Genuflection? or How to Genuflect?

A: Bending the right knee to touch the floor as an act of worship.

Catholics only kneel or genuflect to Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ. In the Roman Rite, genuflecting to the tabernacle, whenever Jesus is reserved in the tabernacle, is required. Everyone, Altar Servers included, should genuflect whenever crossing in front of the tabernacle, or entering a pew when coming into church. Within the tabernacle is really Jesus, present to us in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the form of the Eucharist. His presence in the tabernacle is usually signified by the special candle called the sanctuary light. When it is not lit, the tabernacle is empty as on Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

When should a server genuflect? Whenever entering a church pew, the sanctuary or crosses in front of the tabernacle, they should face the tabernacle and genuflect. "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!" and "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend." Servers should remember that there is an exception to this. Whenever they are carrying things like crosses, sacred vessels, books or candles do not genuflect. So what should you do? You can show your reverence by giving a slow bow of the head towards Christ in the tabernacle.

Altar Servers crossing past the front of the tabernacle should consider you are passing in front of Jesus, so stop momentarily, look to the tabernacle and genuflect. If you are carrying anything, simply bow slowly with your head with reverence.

Remember, as Catholics, we genuflect towards the direction of where the tabernacle is. We never genuflect to the altar or to a cross.

Q: How do I bow?

A: Profound bow forward (from the waist), or a slow, reverent nod forward of your head.

Duties of a Server Before Mass:

- At home the server should dress in the proper clothes and footwear for Mass as described above. If not properly dressed the server should not be allowed to serve at that Mass.
- Upon arrival for Mass you are scheduled to serve at, the server should dress in the cassock and cincture.

- At five minutes to mass time a server should light all appropriate candles. The two altar candles (if not lit), and the two Acolytes' Candles.

If a small prayer book is used for the opening prayer, a server should prepare the book containing the opening and closing prayers and check with the priest or deacon to make sure that the place marker is in the pages for the days Mass. Return the prayer book to its place.

Duties of a Server During Mass:

Procession and Recession: The cross bearer leads, followed by the two acolyte candles, then follows the lector and then the priest. Note: The cross and candles lead the procession/recession unless incense is used. If incense is used, the incense bearer (thurifer) leads.

When you are processing to the altar, it is not a race. Walk slowly. Continue to the first step in front of the altar and wait until all Altar Servers, the lector and the priest are in a line together facing the tabernacle. The priest will genuflect, but the Altar Servers bow reverently with your head before the altar (because you are each carrying something). Now you can move together to place your candles and cross. The cross is placed in the stand by the altar. The acolyte candles are placed on the bottom step, one at either side of the tabernacle area. The cross bearer sits on the pew behind the priest. The acolyte candle bearers sit on either side of the credence table.

The cross bearer will be responsible for:

1. Holding the prayer book for the priest during the 'opening prayer', which comes after the GLORIA.
2. Taking the cross, during the Offertory, to the back of the church and process with the ushers as you return to the sanctuary. Remember as you cross over to the middle of the sanctuary, you are crossing in front of the tabernacle, so please stop, look to the tabernacle and slowly and reverently bow your head. Bow your head again after returning with the ushers in procession.
3. Holding the prayer book for the priest after communion for the 'final blessing'.

The acolyte candle bearers will be responsible for:

1. During the Gospel reading, the priest processes from his seat to the pulpit to read the gospel. Please go and take the acolyte candles to either side of the pulpit. Stand and hold them there until the end of the reading, where you can then return them back in front of the tabernacle. Please remember that one of the servers will cross before the tabernacle while getting the acolyte candle. If you are holding the candle, then bow slowly with your head – otherwise, please genuflect to the tabernacle in reverence to Jesus.
2. Bringing the CIBORIUM, CHALICE/PATEN from the credence table to the altar where the priest will be waiting for you there.
3. When the cross bearer and the ushers process to the sanctuary, please go with the priest to the front of the sanctuary to help receive the gifts – the gifts that the priest will give you are a CIBORIUM and the CRUETS. Please return them to the credence table.
4. The water and wine cruets are to be given one by one to the priest as he asks you; the priest will fill the chalice(s) with the wine and water. When finished, please BOW to the priest. Return to the credence table.
5. Next, the priest will be needing to wash his hands; so bring the water cruet, and the finger bowl and towel. Ensure that the priest can access the towel easily after you wash his fingers. When finished, please BOW to the priest. Return to the credence table.
6. During the consecration, one of the acolyte candle bearers can ring the bell at the correct time (3 rings), to let everyone in the church know that this moment is very Holy – that is where the changing of the bread and wine becomes the precious body and blood of Jesus.

7. After everyone in church have received communion, the priest may ask the server(s) for the water cruet so that he can purify the chalice and paten and ciborium. If the priest does not do this, it can be done later after Mass is over. The priest will also need you to return the chalice, paten, and ciborium back to the credence table.

Bell Ringing

- The bell should be rung at the specific times during the Mass:
- Ring the bell when the priest elevates the Consecrated Host.
- Ring the bell when the priest elevates the chalice of the Consecrated Blood.
- When ringing the bell, ring it so that there are ***THREE distinct rings*** in honor of the Trinity; bells rung three distinct times for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Because the elevation of the Body and Blood of Jesus are solemn times, (the bread and wine we offered just before has now become the real BODY and BLOOD of our God, Jesus Christ) we should ring the bells reverently. At these times it is proper to look at the elevated Jesus and say to yourself "My Lord and my God." following the example of Thomas the Apostle.

If you should ever start to feel strange or faint, please go immediately to the sacristy and sit down until you feel better. It's OK. Also, please try to use the washroom before Mass, as needed. THANK YOU.

Duties After Mass:

Wait for the priest at the back of the church after the procession – he may want to thank you and even give you a special blessing.

Return the cross and acolyte candles to the sacristy.

Extinguish the candles carefully without splashing any wax.

Remove your liturgical clothing and hang it neatly in its proper place.