

The Sacristan's Responsibilities

Any public event or celebration requires much behind-the-scenes activity. If the event is to have dignity and meaning, there must be care and preparation. Planned events which involve a great number of people do not just “happen.” They only become an event and give inspiration when they have been well prepared, when the setting and surrounding of the event have been carefully arranged, and when the people involved in the event are themselves aware of their responsibilities.

The Sacred Liturgy is the public event forming the very heart of the whole life of the Church. Everything that we do and are as Church leads to and flows from the liturgical celebrations in the chapel. The liturgy proclaims what we are as a community of believers and at the same time provides foundation and the impetus of our living together and growing as a community of Christian witness and service. Because of its crucial role in our journey of faith, the Sacred Liturgy is a *public celebration* requiring considerable behind-the-scenes preparation if it is to fulfill its function.

That is where you come in, because a large part of this preparation belong to the sacristan. In fact, you are responsible for everything that is used in the liturgy. Obviously, you are not responsible for the way liturgy is celebrated. That is the responsibility of the priest.

Because the liturgy is our communal worship of God our Father, and because this service of worship draws us closer together as a holy people, the environment and materials used in the liturgy must all be conducive toward divine worship. You as sacristan are generally in charge of this environment and these materials, and you must make sure your areas of responsibility in the liturgy fulfill these purposes and requirements.

Even though the externals of liturgy will be your primary concern, they are important because they express and promote our whole inner spirit and attitudes as a worshipping community. Your conduct, dress and manner should reflect your appreciation of what it is you are doing.

Enlightened prudence, not to mention a keen Catholic sensibility, will inform many of your intuitive responses and responsibilities.

Regular Sacristan Duties

Before we get into specifics, suppose we outline in a general way your routine duties, which will include the following:

1. For each day's Mass you will set up the vestments and the altar and prepare the Sacramentary (Roman Missal) and the Lectionary for the celebrant.
2. On a regular basis you will be maintaining the holy water fonts and the various candles used in the sanctuary. Also, you will make sure that you have on hand a sufficient supply of altar breads and wine, candles, matches and the like. Please submit all sacristy supply orders to the Rector or the head of the Pastoral Life Committee.
3. Change the altar cloths and celebrant's linens as necessary so that these items are always clean and in good repair. Place all dirty linens in the linen sack.
4. You are responsible for the arrangement of chairs *before* and *after* the celebration of Sunday Mass.
5. You may also be charged with supervising or executing the cleaning of the liturgical areas and the care and watering of plants and flowers displayed there.

More specific aspects of these duties will be discussed in the following pages.

The Sacristy

The sacristy is the room located to the right of the sanctuary where the sacred vestments, vessels and all else that is necessary for divine worship are kept.

The first rule of the sacristy is: *a place for everything, and everything in its place*. And the second rule is: *cleanliness is next to godliness*. Since everything in the sacristy pertains to the cult of Divine worship, every attention should be given to making the sacristy a place worthy of its use.

Our sacristy in Morrissey Manor is outfitted as follows:

1. The *Vesting Table*, where the vestments may be laid out and arranged in order as the priest puts them on.

2. The *Vestment/Vessel Case* is combined with the vesting table. It is a cabinet of drawers arranged for the storage of various altar linens such as amices, corporals, palls, purificators, cinctures and the like. In the large shallow drawers are stored the various altar cloths and antependiums arranged according to liturgical color.

3. The *sacrarium*, which is a special sink used to wash the chalice and other sacred vessels, as well as the used purificators and corporals. It has a drain to the ground so that the water used may flow directly into the earth. It is also used for the disposal of holy water, holy oils, baptismal water, or anything in liquid form that has been blessed.

4. *Cabinets* sufficient for the hanging storage of the larger vestments including albs, chasubles, copes, etc.

Books

Prominent among the items of equipment kept in the sacristy will be various books, which will include the following:

1. The *Sacramentary* or *Roman Missal*, the principal book used by celebrant. It is usually large and of ornamental design bespeaking its ceremonial use.

2. The *Lectionary*, containing the scriptural readings and responsories used during the Liturgy of the Word. It is available in several sizes and formats, but should always be of a design and condition appropriate to its great dignity as containing the written Word of God.

3. The *Ordo*, a small book providing detailed instructions for each day's liturgy.

Altar Breads

A host box is provided for the storage of unconsecrated altar breads. A container for the celebrant hosts and communicant hosts are located in the cabinet on the far-left side.

The Sacred Vestments

One of your major responsibilities will be the care and arrangement of the vestments, or ceremonial garments, worn by the priest during liturgical functions.

The *alb* is a long-sleeved ankle-length white garment tied at the waist with a cincture, unless it is designed to fit without a cincture.

If the alb does not completely cover the ordinary clothing at the neck, an *amice* should be worn under it. The amice is a square or oblong piece of white linen or other material to which two long tapes are sewn to the top corners.

The *cincture* is a long cord, often tipped with tassels or heavy knots, which may be white or the color of the outer vestments.

The *chasuble*, worn over the alb and with the stole, is the proper vestment of the priest who celebrates Mass or other rites connected with Mass, unless otherwise indicated in the ritual instructions (called the *rubrics*).

The priest wears the *stole* draped over his shoulders and hanging down in front. It usually is knee-length or longer.

The priest may wear a *cope* in certain processions and other services, as indicated in the rubrics of the particular rites. A cope usually comes with a matching *humeral veil*, which is like a scarf, worn over the shoulders by a priest in certain situations when handling the Blessed Sacrament. It may be worn without the cope in some cases.

The *chalice veil* usually matches the colored vestments. It should be large enough to cover the chalice front and back. Although the chalice veil should match the color of the day, white may be used at any time.

The Liturgical Colors

Various colors are used in vestments, especially the chasuble, stole, and certain other accessories, including the altar drapery, to give an effective expression to the celebration of the mysteries of faith and, in the course of the year, a sense of progress in the Christian life.

The colors traditionally used are as follows:

1. *White* is used in liturgies of the Easter and Christmas seasons; on feasts and commemorations of the Lord, other than of His Passion; on feasts and memorials of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels, saints who were not martyrs, All Saints (November 1), the Birth of St. John the Baptist (June 24), St. John the Evangelist (December 27), the Chair of St. Peter (February 22), and the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25).

2. *Red* is used on Passion (Palm) Sunday and Good Friday, Pentecost, celebrations of the Lord's Passion, birthday feasts of the apostles and evangelists (except St. John), and feasts of the martyrs.

3. *Green* is used in the liturgies of Ordinary Time.

4. *Violet* is used in Lent and Advent. It may be— but rarely is—used in liturgies for the dead.

5. *Black* may be worn in liturgies for the dead.

6. *Rose* may be used on the Third Sunday of Advent ("Gaudete" Sunday) and the Fourth Sunday of Lent ("Laetare" Sunday).

7. *Gold* vestments are intended for use on special occasions and may be worn on Christmas and Easter.

Votive Masses are celebrated in the color suited to the Mass itself (such as red in liturgies of the Holy Spirit).

When Vestments Are Required

At a *regular Mass* the celebrant wears the amice (optional), alb, cincture (optional), stole and chasuble.

For all other sacramental and paraliturgical rites celebrated in church, the usual garb for a priest is the alb and stole or cassock, surplice, and stole. For Benediction, a cope is worn.

The Sacred Vessels

Certain utensils or 'sacred vessels' serve special functions in the liturgy and because of these functions are consecrated or blessed and treated with dignity and care. They are usually made of a metal, though this is not required, but they should be of artistic worth even if not of great material value. They must always be handled with appropriate respect.

The principal sacred vessels are used in the celebration of the Eucharist. These are the *chalice*, or cup which holds the wine for consecration and communion, and the *paten*, or plate which holds the hosts or altar breads. Only one chalice should be on the altar and used for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Additional smaller *communion cups* may be brought to the altar at communion time if they will be required for giving communion under both species to a large number of people than can be accommodated using the principal chalice alone.

The communion hosts for the congregation are contained in a separate covered vessel called a *ciborium*, or sometimes on a separate larger paten also sometimes referred to as a ciborium or a *ciborium-paten*. The covered ciborium is used to store unused consecrated hosts in the tabernacle.

The *flagon* is an ornamental pitcher-like container in which a supplemental quantity of wine may be consecrated at Masses where a large number of people will be receiving the Eucharist under both forms. It normally has a close-fitting stopper.

The *monstrance* (or ostensorium) is a vessel designed to hold and display the consecrated host when it is exposed for adoration upon the altar or carried in procession. The host itself is fitted into a smaller vessel, the *lunette*, circular in form and faced with a glass crystal which holds the host upright. The lunette containing the host is inserted into the monstrance for exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The *ablution cup* is a small, covered glass or metal vessel containing water in which the priest and other ministers of Holy Communion may purify their fingers. It may be placed by the tabernacle with a small cloth or on the credence table.

Sacred Linens

For the celebration of the Eucharist the altar is to be covered with at least one *altar cloth*. Although former directives specified that altar cloths be white, this no longer seems to be required by the general norms. Indeed it is becoming a common practice to use cloths of a color related to the liturgical season or occasion. Such cloths would be draped appropriately down the front and sides of the altar so as to be visible to the congregation. A proportionately smaller white cloth or “runner” may but need not be placed over the colored one. However, it is required that a corporal (see below) be used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

It is important that the dignified appearance of the altar cloth be diligently maintained by cleaning it and keeping it in good repair. If candles are placed directly upon the altar, it may be wise to set them on some kind of unobtrusive protective cover placed over the altar cloth itself to prevent melted wax from spilling on it.

The *corporal* is a small cloth spread upon the altar at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist upon which the chalice, the paten and ciboria are placed. It is made of white linen. It is usually square in shape and should be large enough to hold whatever vessels are to be placed upon it in a particular celebration. Its usual size is about 18 to 22 inches square.

It has been customary that the corporal be starched to make it easier for the priest to scrape up particles of the host with the paten. The corporal is folded four times, always inwards so that any fragments of the Host may remain enclosed in it.

The *pall* is a square piece of cloth, about 7 or 8 inches, which may be used during Mass to cover the chalice.

The *purificator*, as the name implies, is a cloth used to purify or dry the sacred vessels as well as the priest's fingers during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Traditionally, it has been a white linen cloth about 20 by 12 inches, folded twice lengthwise, giving it a triple thickness. Materials other than linen may be used, but permanent press fabrics may lack desirable absorbency.

The *hand towel* is used by the celebrant to dry his hands during the Preparation of the Gifts. It should be large enough to enable him to dry his hands and not just his fingers. No material is prescribed. Terry cloth hand towels do not seem to require laundering as frequently as linen and other materials.

Care of Sacred Linens

To preserve the dignified appearance of the liturgical linens, especially of purificators, they all should be laundered frequently and kept in good repair. It is required that purificators and corporals be rinsed out in the sacarium before being laundered. This task must be entrusted to a qualified person.

Candles

Liturgical law requires candles during liturgical services to express devotion or the degree of solemnity. They should be placed either on the altar or around it, in harmony with the construction of the altar and the sanctuary. The candles should not block the view of what is happening at the altar or what is placed on it.

The material of candles is no longer prescribed but is selected on the basis of aesthetic and economic considerations.

Candles that are allowed to burn down too far detract from the appearance of the altar and may be difficult to remove from their holders.

The *sanctuary lamp*, according to traditional usage, is an oil lamp or lamp with a wax candle, which burns constantly near the tabernacle as both a sign of the Real Presence and as a symbol of honor. The globe of the sanctuary lamp is usually red, although no color is prescribed.

Cruets and Basin

The *cruets* are bottles or pitcher-like containers for the wine, and for the water used in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Both cruets, but especially the one for the wine, should be equipped with tightly fitting stoppers.

It is a good practice to wash and dry the cruets, especially the wine cruet, after each Mass.

A *basin* or *lavabo bowl*, a pitcher of water and a towel are to be provided for washing the priest's hands at the Preparation of the Gifts. The regular water cruet may be used in place of a separate pitcher.

Thurible and Accessories

The *thurible*, or censer, is an ornamental container, suspended on a small chain or set of chains, in which incense is burned on a small piece of charcoal. It is paired with a covered container of incense called the *incense boat*, which the sacristan should keep filled and ready for use. Metal tongs should be provided to hold the charcoal pieces while they are being ignited.

The thurible cup should be cleaned out regularly and the chains cleaned and kept in good repair.

Other Items

A container for the *holy water* is kept in the entrance to the chapel. Because the mineral content of the water is high, it is necessary to clean the implements regularly. Soaking them in white vinegar is effective.

A *missal stand*, which is a wooden or metal rack, may be used to hold the Sacramentary (Roman Missal) open on the altar for the celebrant.

The Liturgical Areas

The Sanctuary

The focus of attention for the worshipping community is upon the area called the *sanctuary*.

Within the sanctuary, there are three specific focal points: the *celebrant's chair*, the *ambo*, and the *altar*. These are the sites and represent three distinct areas of activity for the priest presiding over the assembly, proclaiming the Word of God and breaking the Bread of the Holy Eucharist.

The Altar

Discussion has already been devoted to altar cloths, candles, and adornment. As a sacristan you should make it your concern to have everything in readiness for the liturgical celebration, that the sanctuary area is uncluttered with its furnishings and adornments neatly arranged. And, obviously, it will be your duty to keep the entire area clean, dusting and vacuuming as appropriate.

The Tabernacle

The central focus of the chapel is the *tabernacle*, the ornamental safe where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.

The principal duties of the sacristan in the care of the area of the tabernacle will be to maintain the sanctuary lamp, to keep the area clean, and to see to it that the corporal used for the tabernacle is laundered.

The key to the tabernacle must be safeguarded. It is to be kept locked in the sacristy.

The Ambo

The *ambo* is the pulpit or lectern where the Word of God is proclaimed by the priest, deacon, and lector through the scriptural readings and the homily. It does not merely serve as a piece of furniture to hold books and notes and the priest or lector to lean on. It also serves as a symbol of the

Word of God and should therefore be of stately and dignified design and adornment, and prominently situated, in keeping with its sacred function.

The concern of the sacristan is to keep the ambo dusted, installing occasional small banners or other dignified adornment in keeping with its purpose.

Other Furnishings

The sanctuary should be equipped with a *credence table* to hold the cruets, basin, pitcher or ewer, and hand towels during the celebration of the Mass.

General Preparations

The Sunday Eucharist

1. In the sacristy: Generally you will first determine, usually from the Ordo, what will be the color of the vestments to be used, then lay out the vestments and linens on the vestment table, and set out the chalice and Sacramentary for the celebrant. You will set out the Lectionary and materials for the lector. You will then prepare the gifts.

Each priest will use his own purificator. You should regularly replace this item with a clean one as needed, especially for the offering of Sunday Mass.

2. In the sanctuary: The altar should be spread with a clean cloth, with the candles in place, lighted by you.

On the credence table you will place the basin (lavabo bowl), the cruets, and the towel for the drying of the priest's hands.

The Sacramentary may be set out either by the celebrant's chair or on the altar as the priest directs.

The Lectionary is to be set upon the ambo opened to the readings for the day.

Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament includes a period of time devoted to prayer, meditation, song and reading of Sacred Scripture.

The sacristan should set out the cope and humeral veil. You should set out the thurible and have it ready to light, and have the appropriate ritual and participation aids ready for the celebrant.

The altar must be specially arranged, with a cloth and at least four to six lighted candles, and perhaps flowers and altar drapery bearing Eucharistic symbols. If exposition with a monstrance is to extend over a long period, special throne in the elevated position may be used, but it should not be too lofty or distant. The monstrance, if it is to be used, may be set out ahead of time, normally on the altar of exposition.

The humeral veil should be draped over a chair in such a way that the server may easily and neatly pick it up and place it across the shoulders of the celebrant.

The Liturgical Calendar

There is a definite calendar or system for determining how a given day is to be celebrated liturgically. This determination may be specific (e.g., on December 25 we observe Christmas, with no exceptions), or it may provide for two or more options (e.g., on summer weekdays you may have several choices: one or more memorials of saints, the seasonal weekday, one of the Masses for “various needs and occasions,” a votive Mass, or a Mass for the Dead).

Ordinarily, the celebrant will make the determination of what observance will be used, if there is a choice. So, on a day when there is more than one possible observance, you will have to check with him.

The simplest rule for you as sacristan is to check the *Ordo*, which is a liturgical calendar issued each year which indicates the liturgical observance(s) for each day and provides detailed information including the proper color of vestments, citations for the Lectionary readings, etc.

An *Ordo* usually will have a system of abbreviations which will render it unintelligible unless you learn the key given at the front of the volume.

It may be helpful for you to have a general understanding of how the liturgical year is set up. The basic outline of the year is called the *proper of seasons*, the general framework of which is the Sundays of the year. Seasonal observances are scheduled either on or in relation to Sundays (e.g., Holy Thursday occurs during the week after Passion Sunday, but the specific date varies from year to year).

The secondary outline of the liturgical year is called the *proper of saints*, the framework of which is the specific dates of the month (e.g., August 15th is the Solemnity of the Assumption regardless of what day of the week it falls on a given year).

The distinction between the proper of seasons and the proper of saints is deceptively simple, because there is some overlapping between the two. For example, Christmas is a seasonal observance, but it is always observed on the fixed date of December 25th. Some observances have an assigned date (such as Epiphany on January 6th) but may be transferred to the nearest Sunday.

The liturgical seasons are as follows: *Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter*. The two segments of the year (i.e., the Sundays between the Christmas season and Lent, and the Sundays from the end of the Easter season until the end of the year) which do not fall into one of these seasons are simply termed *Ordinary Time*.

Appendix A: The Sacristan Checklist

- Key in Tabernacle;
- Chalice;
- Purificator is placed over cup of chalice;
- Paten is put on top of purificator;
- Host is placed on paten;
- Pall is placed over paten;
- Chalice veil (for Fr. Vierling only) is to drape over pall/chalice;
- One cruet is to be filled with wine, one cruet is to be filled with water and both are set on the credence table;
- Daily Mass requires an average of 30 Communion Hosts; Sunday Mass requires an average of 100. When in doubt, ask the celebrant to check the ciboria in the tabernacle.
- With Masses with Fr. Bullene as celebrant, a flagon of wine and communion cups with purificators are to be prepared.
- Lavabo bowl and finger towel are to be placed on credence table. On Sundays, the ablution cup/purificator near the Tabernacle is to be relocated to the credence table.
- Appropriate lights are to be turned on in church ten minutes before Mass begins.
- Candles are to be lit five minutes before Mass begins. On Sundays and Feast days, the candles at the Tabernacle are also to be lit.

Appendix B: Schedule of Masses on Ferial Days

- Mondays:** The Mass of the Holy Spirit (page 940 / preface, p. 480); *Red*;
- Tuesdays:** Mass for the Sick (page 916 / preface of weekday, p. 447-458); *Green*;
- Wednesdays:** Any Mass from the Collection of Masses of the BVM; *White*
or Mass of St. Joseph (page 944 / preface, p. 496); *White*;
- Thursdays:** Mass of the Holy Eucharist (page 934 / preface, p. 466); *White*;
- Fridays:** *Red vestments*
First Friday: Mass of the Sacred Heart (page 939 / preface, p. 462);
Second Friday: Mass of Precious Blood (page 938 / preface, p. 406);
Third Friday: Mass of the Holy Cross (page 702 / preface, p. 464);
Fourth/Fifth Fridays: Any of the above Friday selections
- Saturdays:** Any Mass from the Collection of Masses of the BVM; *White*