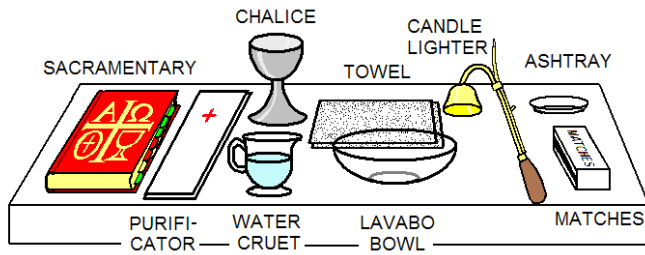


Altar Server Instructions



The Credence Table

PREPARATIONS BEFORE MASS

- ARRIVE 15 minutes before Mass. Inform the Sacristan.
- PUT ON ALB and cincture. (Know your size.)
- CHECK CREDENCE TABLE: Sacramentary book, chalice, bowl, purificator, hand towel, pitcher of water (lighter and matches).
- LIGHT CANDLES by cross stand & ambo
- SORT JOBS: Who will carry cross, hold book, set altar, etc. If needed, ask Sacristan for help finding a second server.

ENTRANCE PROCESSION

- LINE UP: cross-bearer, lector, server(s), (deacon), priest.
- WHEN MUSIC STARTS: step slowly, half the aisle length between each minister.
- At the altar, stop, bow and go (except cross/candles).
- Place the Cross (& candles?), move to stand at seat.
- Worship with the assembly when not performing duties.

OPENING PRAYER: hold prayer book

After the penitential rite (and usually the Gloria), a server holds the prayer book for the priest so he can read the Opening Prayer. Place the book on your palms with your thumbs holding it at a convenient height. After the prayer, set the book down and returns to your seat.

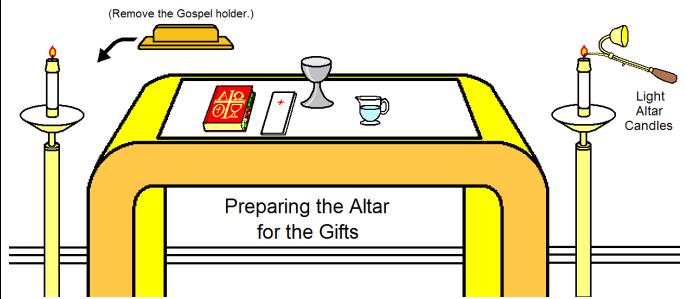
LITURGY OF THE WORD (Normally, no duties)

INTERCESSIONS:

- After the Homily (and Creed), be ready to hold the prayer book at the beginning and ending of the Prayers of the Faithful. When the closing prayer of the Intercessions is complete, set the book back down and begin the Preparation of the Gifts.

ATTITUDE

Altar service is an important ministry. It requires attention, flexibility and reverence. Remember that you help the Mass run smoothly and gracefully by moving with thought and care, and by keeping alert for cues or problems. You also inspire other worshippers by holding your hands in a prayerful posture, paying attention to the priest and reader, and otherwise showing your willing participation in the Mass. It's one of the harder ministries because it lasts for the entire Mass!



PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

- PREPARE ALTAR: Remove book holder, books or any other materials except the altar cloth. Bring up the Sacramentary book, priest's cup, purificator and water pitcher from the credence table. (Do not "stack". Carry only two items at a time. Don't look rushed.)
- LIGHT CANDLES beside the altar if needed. (Light from another candle, light the altar candles, extinguish the lighter, then extinguish the ambo candles, if practical.)
- RECEIVE GIFTS: When the priest stands, all altar servers stand and follow him to the foot of the altar. (Usually standing beside or behind him.) Accept whatever gift(s) the priest hands you. Once all are received, carry the gifts around the altar and place them on it (except the money basket).

WASHING OF HANDS

- BOWL & TOWEL: One server gets the lavabo bowl and towel, placing the towel over one arm.
- WATER: A server waits by the altar for the water pitcher.
- WASH: When the priest turns from the altar, pour the water slowly onto his hands over the bowl until he raises them. After he replaces the towel, the servers return to the credence table and their seats.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER (No duties. Kneel at top step.)

COMMUNION and AFTER

- RECEIVE COMMUNION normally, usually about the same time as the choir.
- CLEAR ALTAR after the Eucharistic Ministers have removed any cups, bowls and trays.
- EXTINGUISH CANDLES around the altar.
- HOLD PRAYER BOOK for the Prayer after Communion and the Final Blessing.

RECESSION: "Thanks be to God"

Servers assemble at the foot of the altar with the priest (and deacon). The cross bearer should be either at one end of the lineup or behind the priest. All bow (except the cross bearer). The cross bearer leads them out at a moderate pace, followed by servers, deacon and priest.

AFTER MASS

Put the cross in the Sacristy. Extinguish the candles. Hang up albs and cinctures. You're done!

Altar Server Instructions

DUTIES

The primary duties of servers are to hold the prayer book (Opening Prayer, Intercessions, after Communion), prepare the altar for the gifts, receive the gifts, and wash the priest's hands. There are often processional duties as well.

ATTITUDE

This is another important server duty. Mass is so much better for everyone with the right attitude in posture and action.

Be attentive. Sing, pray, and listen with everyone else. When standing or moving, keeps your hands folded together (fingers pointed or interlaced upwards). Don't yawn or gaze around the room. These are hard things to do for an entire hour but the better you do them, the better everyone else will do them. Keep trying.

When you act, act deliberately, without looking rushed or uncertain. Mass should look dignified and peaceful. If you are making a mistake, the priest or deacon will find a way to correct it. They want things to go well too, so don't panic.

TIPS

Be flexible. Not all priests work the same way. If the Gospel book is still on the altar during the preparation of the gifts, remove it. If the priest skips the washing of hands, quietly put everything away. Stay attentive. Watch for signals from the priest or deacon.

Bowing - There are several kinds of bows, from the head-bow all the way to flat out prostration (at the Good Friday service). The standard bow usually involves tucking your chin in toward your neck and bending moderately at the hip. It should be done as you come in at the beginning of Mass and as you leave at the end. Some people bow every time they approach or cross in front of the altar. This is not necessary, but if you feel the need to do it, do it right. Stop, face the altar, bow, then continue. A sloppy bow conveys a worse attitude than a skipped bow.

Not bowing - Ministers who carry candles and crosses are EXEMPT from bowing. Why? Because people who bow tend to dip whatever they're carrying. The cross should never "bow". Candle wax is not fun to remove from carpeting. So if you are "carrying", don't bow. If you can't help yourself, do a head bow only.)

Genuflecting - In the days when the tabernacle was on the altar, tapping one knee on the floor was common. We seldom do it now. The important thing is knowing WHEN to do it. Genuflection is appropriate in front of the Blessed Sacrament (the CONSECRATED host). So if you are doing Benediction or you are in front of the tabernacle in the chapel, genuflection replaces bowing.

Albs, Cinctures and Stairs - People who've worn long skirts know that the alb length that "looks" right is just about perfect for tripping on stairs. The hem of the alb should end just above your ankles, if possible. If it's too short, you'll look funny. If it's too long, you'll be crashing at the altar. Find your right size and memorize it.

The cincture (SINK-tyur) helps keep the alb under control. If it is long enough, the rope should be doubled, wrapped around the waist, and the ends passed through the loop. The ends can then be tucked behind the belt and passed through the resulting loop to form a reasonably secure knot. The ends should then hang down at least six inches. If the rope is not long enough for this, simply wrap it around your waist and tie it with a knot you can undo later. Once the cincture is in place, pull up slightly on the alb above the belt to keep it from binding as you walk or move. (You can also adjust the length of a slightly-too-long alb this way.)

The cincture is worn to keep the alb from sliding over your raised knee and your shoe. Sometimes it needs a little help as you tug slightly at the knee area to make sure you get up the steps safely. In fact, a knee tug helps when you sit down too. You may have already figured this out but soon it will be natural.

Lighting candles - The candle lighter is like a long-life match, only prettier. It has a feed tube and a wick, so that you can control the size of the flame and not worry about finger burns or the flame going out. Lighters are usually stored in the sacristy and at the credence table. To operate one, slide the wick so that about 3/4 of an inch is ticking out of the tube. If there are no candles already burning, light the wick with a match. Adjust the wick so that it's not smoking and flaring, but it's not in danger of going out either. If you are carrying it a long way, you may need to shield it with your hand. Light candles as needed. If you are transferring light between candles, light the new candles before extinguishing the old. Once the last new candle is lit, extinguish the lighter before continuing. Blowing is allowable but it looks bad and occasionally embers blow off. Preferably, you will retract the wick to put the flame out, then extend and retract it a couple of times as the wax cools solid. (This prevents "wick-lock", a nasty condition that is hard to fix.)

Extinguishing candles - The bell-shaped side of the candle lighter puts candles out by depriving them of air. Place the bell over the candle for a few seconds so that it goes out. (If you have an unusually large or messy candle, be careful not to let the bell get stuck in cooling wax.) Do not blow candles out if it can be avoided. This prevents wax splashes and bad form.

One-Server Hand Washing - When you are working alone, place the towel on the arm with the bowl, then accept the pitcher with your other hand. That way, you can do both jobs at once.

Incense - This is an occasional thing that involves burning charcoal and smoke. Servers who carry incense (thurifers) need special training for safety and effect. They also need to be tall enough to handle the censor or thurible. In brief, a charcoal brick is lit and placed in the censor. At various times (processions, Gospel reading, Preparation of the Gifts), incense is added to produce fragrant smoke. The censor is carefully swung to distribute the smoke as a sign of respect. Later, the ashes and embers must be disposed of carefully. Incense should be used rarely enough to keep it special, but often enough that we don't forget it.

Altar Server Instructions

SOME LITURGICAL TERMINOLOGY

Alb - A white robe worn by servers and some other ministers.

Ambo - The stand where scripture readings and homilies are proclaimed. (Sometimes called a pulpit.)

Cincture (SINK-tyur) - The rope belt tied around an alb.

Credence table - A small table near the altar that holds the Sacramentary, water pitcher, lavabo bowl, towel and other items.

Gospel Book - The book of Gospel-only readings. Not normally your responsibility.

Nave - The main body of the church, where the assembly gathers for worship.

Narthex - The area outside the nave where people and ministers gather before liturgy.

Lavabo bowl (lah-VAH-boh) - A bowl used for the washing of the priest's hands. (Lavabo means "wash".)

Lectionary - The book of readings. You usually have nothing to do with this.

Liturgy - The rite of the people's worship, specifically the Mass.

Prayer book - Actually a binder of prayers and announcements by the priest's chair for the day's Mass

Purificator - A small linen towel used as a napkin for the cup.

Rite - A prepared set of prayers and actions intended for worship.

Sacramentary - The book of prayers for the Mass, usually red with index tabs. It is found on the Credence Table. Not to be confused with the Lectionary or the prayer book by the priest's chair.

Sacristan - The person responsible for setting up and monitoring the Mass to make sure it goes well.

Sacristy - The room where vestments, cups, bowls, towels and other materials for worship are stored and prepared.

Sanctuary - The part of the church Mass normally takes place, including the Nave but more specifically the area around the altar and the ambo.

Altar servers have been around for a thousand years, ever since the Church realized that there were some duties that could be performed by children as well as adults. That doesn't mean the tasks are not important. The primary duties of an altar server are to help the liturgy run smoothly so as to enhance its prayerful quality, and to serve as models of attention to the assembly.

The smooth-running part involves moving and holding things, such as candles, books, dishes, censers, and the like. Knowing when and how to do these things are important technical skills to learn.

The example part is often overlooked but just as important. This involves posture, attention and attitude, which helps to inspire not only the people around us, but our own prayer as well.