



SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

ALTAR SERVER GUIDE

JULY 18, 2016

SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC CHURCH
Seneca, South Carolina

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I. Introduction

The ministry which you have chosen to take part in is an important and wonderful way to more fully participate in the Mass. In August of 2015, Pope Francis, speaking to a large gathering of altar servers at the Vatican, was quoted saying:

Serving at the altar ... is a privileged way to draw closer to Jesus, which in turn "enables you to open yourselves to others, to journey together, to set demanding goals and to find the strength to achieve them."

"The closer you are to the altar," he told them, "the more you will remember to speak with Jesus in daily prayer; the more you will be nourished by the word and the body of the Lord, the better able you will be to go out to others, bringing them the gift that you have received, giving in turn with enthusiasm the joy you have received.

Excerpt from the *National Catholic Reporter*, Aug 6 2015, Cindy Wooden

The purpose of these procedures is to help you understand your role as an altar server so that you can do your part to make the Mass a more joyful and worshipful experience for the congregation and for yourself.

Thank you for serving our Lord Jesus!

II. Glossary

Alb

The long sleeved white garment that is worn over your clothing. It has straps inside the waist that tie like shoe laces. There are snaps inside and across the shoulder that hold the collar closed. The alb is then held closed at your waist by the cincture. You should choose an alb that goes to your ankles but does not drag on the floor as you walk. You don't want to trip!



Bookbearer

The altar server who is assigned to hold the Roman Missal for the priest during the Mass.

Chalice

The cups that hold the wine that will become the Blood of Christ.



Ciborium

The dish that holds the hosts that will become the Eucharist, the Body of Christ.



Cincture

A white rope belt that is tied at the waist around the alb. The cincture should be tied with a simple knot and the ends allowed to hang down. The cinctures also come in different sizes so you should choose one that wraps around your waist once only and then the ends are just above your right knee.



Collect

The opening prayer after the Gloria. This is when the Bookbearer first brings the Missal to the priest.

Corporal

The white cloth that is placed on the altar for the sacred vessels. You will recognize the corporal as the cloth folded in a square on the credence table.



Credence Table

The table near the tabernacle where the sacred vessels, corporals, purificators, and other items are arranged before Mass.



Crossbearer

The altar server who is assigned to carry the Processional Cross.

Cruet

The small pitcher of water used for adding to the wine and washing the priest's hands.



Flagon

The large pitcher that contains the gift of wine. Sometimes this is called a decanter.



**Lavabo
Bowl**

The bowl that the priest holds his hands over for washing. Lavabo is the act of washing that he does.



Nave

The area of the church that contains the pews where the congregation sits.



Paten

A small flat dish that is sometimes used for the large host that will be consecrated.



Purificator

The white cloth that is used to wipe the chalices after each time the priest or a member of the congregation receives the Precious Blood. You will recognize the purificator as the cloth folded in a long rectangle on the credence table.



Pyx

A small container with a cover that can hold the Eucharist for giving to the sick or homebound.



Roman Missal

The book that the priest reads from for the Collect, Eucharistic Prayer, and the Prayer after Communion.



Sacristy

The room at the back of the nave where the albs and priest's vestments are kept. This is where you will find and put on the albs and cinctures for Mass. The Eucharistic ministers, lectors, and priest will also meet here before Mass.



Sanctuary

The raised area around the altar and the tabernacle.



Sanctuary Candle

The candle near the tabernacle that shows whether or not the Eucharist is present in the tabernacle. If it is lit, then the Eucharist is present in the tabernacle.



Tabernacle

The gold box where the Eucharist is kept.



III. Appearance and Bearing

Appearance and bearing describe the way you look and act. Why does it matter how you look and act at Mass? The Mass is a very special meal with Jesus Christ, our King, so you should look clean, neat, and modest and you should act reverently and prayerfully as you go about your duties. Just as importantly, you don't want to distract others from their focus on Jesus in the Word and in the Eucharist.

A. Clothing

The alb that you wear is made of lightweight material. Yes, you can see some clothing through it! Shirts that have pictures, words, or some stripes are visible. Also, some colors are visible, especially bright neon colors. Choose your clothing to make sure that you don't draw attention by what you are wearing under your alb.

Boys should wear long pants and shirts with collars. Girls may wear dresses, knee-length skirts or pants.

B. Shoes

Both boys and girls should wear all black shoes. They may be lace-up, loafers, or slip-on. Simple shoes are best.

C. What not to wear

Jeans, shorts, sandals, flip-flops, athletic or tennis shoes, high heels, distracting jewelry, or t-shirts are not permitted.

D. Bearing

i. Your posture

When standing, sitting, or kneeling your back should be straight but comfortable. When standing, don't stand with your knees bent, but don't lock your knees – you might faint!

ii. Your hands and carrying items

Your hands should be together in “prayer hands” when you aren't holding something. When you are carrying or holding anything it should be at mid-chest level.

iii. Your eyes

Don't look around too much. You should be looking at the priest to see if there is anything that he needs and for cues that it is time for you to be doing something.

iv. Prayers

You should take part in the prayers and responses the same as the rest of the congregation. You're taking part in the Mass, too!

v. Standing, sitting, and kneeling

Except when you are actually doing something such as holding the Missal or setting the altar, you should stand, sit, or kneel when everybody else is.

IV. The Mass

In this part we will describe what you are to do to prepare for Mass, what to do during Mass, and what to do at the end of Mass. It might seem like a lot to remember and think about and you might be nervous at first. Being nervous is okay – it means that you care! The more you participate and pay attention the easier it will be. After you've done it for a while, it will become very natural and you'll find that you're no longer nervous and that you can really begin to enjoy serving!

A. Before Mass

- i. You should arrive at the Sacristy at least 15 minutes before Mass. The Mass coordinator may be able to use your help. You will be able to prepare your spirit for the celebration of the Mass and having a little extra time will also make it easier to select your alb and cincture.
- ii. It is important that the Mass coordinator knows that you have arrived. Check in with them as soon as you arrive. Otherwise they will start looking for someone else to serve.
- iii. Ask the Mass coordinator who the celebrant is. It makes a difference which Missal you use. Also ask which side the bells are on, or check for yourself.
- iv. Select an alb and cincture that fits and looks neat on you. Your alb should come to your ankles and not touch the floor. Your cincture should wrap comfortably once around your waist. When the cincture is knotted, it should hang just above your right knee.
- v. Wait quietly in the sacristy. You can ask the Mass coordinator if they need any help. It's okay to respond and converse with other liturgical ministers if they start talking with you; however, conversations in the sacristy should be kept low.
- vi. If there will be a Crossbearer, then that altar server should get the Processional Cross about 5 to 10 minutes before Mass starts. The Crossbearer then stands near the gift table. The other altar servers should then stand near the Crossbearer along the back of the nave.
- vii. If there is only one altar server then he or she may be the Crossbearer for the Processional if able.

B. During Mass

- i. Processional

When the cantor begins the greeting, the altar servers should line up. The order of the processional is Crossbearer first, followed by the Bookbearer, then the lector with the Book of the Gospels, and last the priest.

The priest will give a signal to the Crossbearer that it is time to begin processing forward. The Crossbearer will raise the Cross and begin walking toward the altar in a steady even pace. After the Crossbearer gets about two pews ahead, the Bookbearer will start forward keeping the same distance from the Crossbearer and at the same pace.

When the Crossbearer is halfway between the front pew and the altar, they should pause momentarily, make a brief simple head bow, then continue to the Cross stand. After placing the Cross in the stand, the Crossbearer goes to their seat in the sanctuary and remains standing.

When the Bookbearer is halfway between the front pew and the altar, they stop and genuflect toward the tabernacle, then proceed up the sanctuary steps to the left of the altar and stand beside their seat.

ii. Collect (Opening Prayer)

This Collect comes immediately after the Gloria is said or sung. During Lent and Advent, the Gloria is not done so the Collect will come after the Penitential Act. The cue for the Bookbearer is the words “Let us pray” or “Oremus”.

The Bookbearer should get the Roman Missal immediately after the Penitential Act or as soon as the priest begins to say “Let us pray” or “Oremus”.

The Bookbearer will then carry the Missal to the priest. Stand directly in front of the priest with the binding of the Missal against your chest and your hands on the front and back cover. The priest will open the Missal to the prayer. Stand still and keep the book still until he is finished. The priest will then close the Missal, you will return it to the shelf, and then take your seat.

iii. Liturgy of the Eucharist

There is a lot to do during this part of the Mass and this is where altar servers can really see how important their role is. BB means Bookbearer and CB means Crossbearer.

a. Preparation of the Gifts

After the Universal Prayer and while the offertory song is being sung, both altar servers will prepare the altar.

BB - Place the two corporals on the altar on the right side. Take one and place it in the center and toward you slightly, then unfold it and gently pull until the edge closest to you is very nearly at the edge of the altar. Place the second corporal to the right of the first, unfolding it so that it is in line with the first.

BB – Go to the shelf, getting the Missal and bookstand together if it will be used. Place it on the far left of the altar angled toward you.

CB – Get the chalices from the credence table. Only carry two at a time. Place them on the right corporal.

BB & CB – Continue bringing the chalices, small ciborium, purificators, and any pyx(es) until the altar is set. The small ciborium and pyx(es) are placed on the left corporal on the left side near the Missal. Any pyx(es) should be opened to make it easier for the priest to place the Eucharist in them. The priest's chalice is placed on the left corporal at the top center, furthest away from you. The purificators are placed on the right corporal near you.

CB – When the ushers are nearly finished taking up the collection, go to the Cross-stand and take the Cross back to the rear of the nave walking along the choir area to get there.

BB – Finish setting the altar if not done already.

b. Presentation of the Gifts

CB – As the priest comes down the steps of the sanctuary, you will lead the offertory procession. Carry the Cross the same way you did for the Processional. Give a slight head bow in the same place, return the Cross to the stand and then stand by the credence table with the cruet.

BB – Follow the priest down the steps standing on his right side. He will take the flagon and hand it to you, then he will take the large ciborium and hand it to you. Go up the steps and stand near the altar, leaving enough room for the priest to walk past you to the altar. He will then take the flagon and ciborium from you and place them on the altar. Go back to the credence table and place the towel over your left forearm. Pick up the lavabo bowl and hold it with both hands.

CB – As the priest is pouring the wine into the chalices, bring the cruet to the altar and stand to the right of and just behind him. Hold the cruet with the handle out toward the priest to make it easy for him to take it from you. After he pours a small amount of water into the wine, he will hand the cruet back to you. Go back to the credence table and keep the cruet in your hands.

BB & CB – The priest will say a short prayer and lift the chalice. As he is doing this, both of you walk together to the priest's right side and slightly behind him. The priest will put his hands over the bowl and say a short prayer. CB pours water over the priest's fingertips as he is doing this. When he has finished, he will take the towel from BB, dry his hands and then place the towel back on BB's arm. At this point he will make a head bow to both of you, which you both will return. Return the cruet and the bowl to the credence table and neatly place the towel in or near the linen basket.

BB & CB – Stand in front of the tabernacle and give a slight bow from the waist.

CB – Go to the seat on the other side of the tabernacle and remain standing. You will be the bell ringer.

BB – Go to your seat and remain standing.

c. Eucharistic Prayer

BB & CB - After the Sanctus you will kneel along with the congregation.

CB – For the Epiclesis, the priest will hold his hands over the bread and wine and say the words, “Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall.” At that point rings the bells in one gentle or soft ringing. Not too loud because the priest is speaking! Imagine dew or snow coming down softly and what it would sound like.

CB – At the consecration of the Eucharist, the priest will say, “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.” He will then lift the Eucharist and hold it. Ring the bells in three separate and fairly quick motions. This can be louder. Imagine saying to yourself, “Father, Son, Spirit” as you ring the bells.

CB – In a similar way, the priest will consecrate the wine into Blood. He will end with the words, “... do this in memory of Me.” Ring the bells three times again in the same way.

iv. Communion Rite

At the Sign of Peace both altar servers should approach the priest. Remain on either side of the tabernacle and form a semicircle with the Eucharistic ministers who are coming up to serve. When the priest and the ministers step down from the sanctuary for communion, return to your seats and kneel.

CB – When the priest has finished offering communion, he will begin cleansing the vessels. Take the cruet from the credence table and stand near him if he chooses to add it to the remainder of the Blood in his chalice.

ALL – When the priest takes the ciborium with the Eucharist back to the tabernacle, EVERYONE at the sanctuary will stop what they are doing, face the tabernacle, and bow their heads until he closes the tabernacle and completes his genuflection.

CB – Clear the altar of the remaining vessels, carrying no more than two dishes at a time.

BB – Return the Missal and bookstand if it was used back to the shelf.

CB – Fold the corporals in the reverse order of the way they were placed and place them neatly in the linen basket on the credence table.

BB & CB – Return to your seats at the choir side of the sanctuary and sit down.

v. Prayer after Communion

BB – When the priest stands or says, “Let us pray” or “Oremus” get the Missal without the bookstand and take it to him the same way you did at the beginning of Mass. When he has finished, return the Missal to its place and stand by your seat.

vi. Recessional

CB – After the Dismissal, get the Cross from the stand and carry it in front of the altar and down the center aisle until you are about two pews from the altar. Turn to your right and face the altar.

BB – Proceed from your seat and stand about one pew away from the Crossbearer. Turn to your right and face the altar.

BB – The priest will stand between you and the altar. When he genuflects, you genuflect also, and turn to the right facing the Crossbearer. Follow the Crossbearer the same way that you did coming in at the beginning of Mass.

CB – When the priest genuflects, you make a head bow and turn toward the narthex. Immediately begin walking toward the narthex in the same way you did coming in.

BB – Once you enter the narthex, go directly to the sacristy.

C. After Mass

The Crossbearer should take the Cross to its stand walking along the choir area then return to the sacristy. Both Bookbearer and Crossbearer may remove their cinctures and albs. Place the alb neatly on its hanger and the cincture on a hanger in the closet.

You're done now – Great job!

V. Special Situations

There are many special situations that will come up throughout the year. These include:

- Special Masses such as Christmas, Easter, and Funeral Masses
- Sprinkling of holy water
- Using incense
- Visiting or concelebrating priests
- Mass with the Bishop

For these special occasions, there will be extra duties for altar servers. The priest will have extra instruction with the altar servers before Mass. In some instances, practices may be scheduled for the altar servers before the day of the Mass to go over these extra duties and to answer any questions that altar servers may have.

VI. Picture of the altar after it has been properly set



VII. Patron of Alter Servers - Saint John Berchman



ST. JOHN BERCHMAN

(Patron of Altar Servers)

Feast Day: November 26

TO AN ALTAR SERVER

To assist Christ at the altar,
To serve Him freely there,
Where even the angels falter
Bowed low in reverent prayer.

May God bless you forever,
And keep you in His care,
And guard you, that you never
Belle the robes you wear.

Throughout life, then, endeavor
God's graces to employ,
For your most deserving reward
Will be eternal joy.

God Bless You For Your Service

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