



COLUMN CATECHESIS

The Maniple

“Father, what is that little vestment you wear on your left arm during Mass?” That, my friends, is called a maniple. It had been worn by priests while offering the Mass for centuries, but was no longer required after the changes that took place after the second Vatican Council.

Every vestment the priest puts on has a prayer to go with it. The prayer said while putting on the maniple says, “May I deserve, O Lord, to bear the maniple of weeping and sorrow in order that I may joyfully reap the reward of my labors.” The maniple is a symbol of the labor of the priest, everything from his daily prayers to his pastoral ministry among his flock; but especially his labor of prayer in offering the most holy Sacrifice of the Altar.

The ancient Romans used to wear something like the maniple when they worked in the fields, using it to wipe the sweat off their brow. So the priest wears the maniple as a symbol of his hard and strenuous labor of sanctifying souls and leading them to the promise land of heaven. In the liturgy, the left symbolizes the world, and the right heaven. The maniple is worn on the left arm because it signifies the labor of the priest in the world, while the right arm is used to invoke heavenly blessing on things and people.

The priest only wears the maniple for Mass. In the traditional Latin Mass, the priest is instructed to take off the maniple when he preaches the homily. The homily was always considered separate from the sacrifice of the Mass, and was often preached after Mass was over. Now that the homily is commonly preached after the Gospel is read, the priest takes off the maniple as a way of saying that the Mass is being temporarily suspended for the homily. After the homily the maniple is put back on and the holy Sacrifice resumes.

The word maniple is in the Latin translation of the Bible, in Psalm 125, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seed; but coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves [manipulos suos]. The maniple signifies the labor of the priest in the field of the Lord. It’s hard work and one that is full of sorrow, but done with great hope for a bountiful harvest of souls!

Pax.

Fr Bart