

DUTIES OF INSTITUTED ACOLYTES WITHIN THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

The acolyte is appointed in order to aid the deacon and to minister to the priest. It is his duty therefore to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass; he is also to distribute communion as a special minister when the ministers spoken of in *the Codex Iuris Canonici* can. 845¹ are not available or are prevented by ill health, age, or another pastoral ministry from performing this function, or when the number of communicants is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged. In the same extraordinary circumstances an acolyte may be entrusted with publicly exposing the blessed sacrament for adoration by the faithful and afterward replacing it, but not with blessing the people. He may also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing other faithful who on a temporary basis are appointed to assist the priest or deacon in liturgical celebrations by carrying the missal, cross, candles, etc., or by performing other such duties. He will perform these functions more worthily if he participates in the holy eucharist with increasingly fervent devotion, receives nourishment from it, and deepens his knowledge about it.

As one set aside in a special way for the service of the altar, the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning: in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his gravity and reverence in church, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the people of God, especially for the weak and the sick.

In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, institution to the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men.²

187. The duties that the acolyte may carry out are of various kinds and several may coincide. Hence, it is desirable that these duties be suitably distributed among several acolytes. If, however, only one acolyte is present, he should perform the more important duties *while the rest are to be distributed among several ministers*. (emphasis added)

The Introductory Rites

188. In the procession to the altar, the acolyte may carry the cross, walking between two ministers with lighted candles. Upon reaching the altar, the acolyte places the cross upright near the altar so that it may serve as the altar cross; otherwise, he puts it in a worthy place. Then he takes his place in the sanctuary.

189. Through the entire celebration, the acolyte is to approach the priest or the deacon, whenever necessary, in order to present the book to them and to assist them in any other way required. Thus it is appropriate, insofar as possible, that the acolyte occupy a place from which he can conveniently carry out his ministry either at the chair or at the altar.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

190. If no deacon is present, after the Prayer of the Faithful is concluded and while the priest remains at the chair, the acolyte places the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Missal on the altar. Then, if necessary, the acolyte assists the priest in receiving the gifts of the

¹ This refers to the 1917 Code. See Canon 910 of the 1983 Code.

² Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter given "Motu Proprio: On first tonsure, minor orders, and the subdiaconate" (*Ministeria Quaedam*), August 15, 1972, nos. 6-7.

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people and, if appropriate, brings the bread and wine to the altar and hands them to the priest. If incense is used, the acolyte presents the thurible to the priest and assists him while he incenses the gifts, the cross, and the altar. Then the acolyte incenses the priest and the people.

With A Deacon

178. After the Prayer of the Faithful, while the priest remains at the chair, the deacon prepares the altar, assisted by the acolyte, but it is the deacon's place to take care of the sacred vessels himself. He also assists the priest in receiving the people's gifts....

Without a Deacon

139. When the Prayer of the Faithful is completed, all sit.... An acolyte or other lay minister arranges the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Missal upon the altar.

140. It is appropriate for the faithful's participation to be expressed by an offering, whether of the bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist or of other gifts for the relief of the needs of the Church and of the poor. The offerings of the faithful are received by the priest, assisted by the acolyte or other minister. The bread and wine for the Eucharist are carried to the celebrant, who places them upon the altar, while other gifts are put in another appropriate place.

141. At the altar the priest accepts the paten with the bread. With both hands he holds it slightly raised above the altar and says quietly, *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed are you, Lord). Then he places the paten with the bread on the corporal.

142. After this, as the minister presents the cruets, the priest stands at the side of the altar and pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly, *Per huius aquae* (By the mystery of this water). He returns to the middle of the altar, takes the chalice with both hands, raises it a little, and says quietly, *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed are you, Lord). Then he places the chalice on the corporal and covers it with a pall, as appropriate. If, however, there is no Offertory chant and the organ is not played, in the presentation of the bread and wine the priest may say the formulas of blessing aloud, to which the people make the acclamation, *Benedictus Deus in saecula* (Blessed be God for ever).

143. After placing the chalice upon the altar, the priest bows profoundly and says quietly, *In spiritu humilitatis* (Lord God, we ask you to receive us).

144. If incense is used, the priest then puts some in the thurible, blesses it without saying anything, and incenses the offerings, the cross, and the altar. A minister, while standing at the side of the altar, incenses the priest and then the people.

145. After the prayer *In spiritu humilitatis* (Lord God, we ask you to receive us) or after the incensation, the priest washes his hands standing at the side of the altar and, as the minister pours the water, says quietly, *Lava me, Domine* (Lord, wash away my iniquity).

191. A duly instituted acolyte, as an extraordinary minister, may, if necessary, assist the priest in giving Communion to the people.³ If Communion is given under both kinds, when no deacon is

³ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Ministeria quaedam*, 15 August 1972: AAS 64 (1972), p. 532.

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present, the acolyte administers the chalice to the communicants or holds the chalice if Communion is given by intinction.

192. Likewise, when the distribution of Communion is completed, a duly instituted acolyte helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels. When no deacon is present, a duly instituted acolyte carries the sacred vessels to the credence table and there purifies, wipes, and arranges them in the usual way.

193. After the celebration of Mass, the acolyte and other ministers return in procession to the sacristy, together with the deacon and the priest in the same way and order in which they entered.⁴

In the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston the instituted acolyte assists as a sacristan before and after the liturgy. The vesture for an acolyte is either suit (slacks, suit and tie) or an alb.

⁴ Numbers 187-193 are excerpts from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*.